Book Reviews

_Pontiac and the Indian Uprising._ By Howard H. Peckham.

The victory of the British over the French, the unwillingness of the conquered to accept the result as final, the unrealistic Indian policy of the victors, and the dissatisfaction of the aborigines produced a general uprising and not a conspiracy inspired by one leader. Thus may be briefly summarized the contribution of this new biography of Pontiac, which rejects or at least seriously modifies the idea of conspiracy which Francis Parkman popularized in _The Conspiracy of Pontiac_. The author in support of his conclusion describes briefly the preaching of the Delaware Prophet, the efforts of the Seneca Indians to instigate a revolt, and the slowness with which Pontiac arose to a position of general leadership. Additional material has come to light since Parkman wrote. Minor details are also corrected. Peckham points out that his predecessor accepted a story written by Major Robert Rogers which appears to have been a fabrication (p. 59); that the story of the betrayal which Parkman related, even to the supposed conversation, was in reality one of several traditions, none of which can be established as true (pp. 122-125); and that the place of the assassination of the leader was incorrect (p. 311). The volume is not, however, a rewriting of Parkman's work.

The author frankly admits that there are gaps in our information about Pontiac and that several of the accepted stories are unsupported by documentary evidence. An illustration of the latter is the story of Pontiac's supposed participation in the defeat of General Edward Braddock. He may have been there, but there is no evidence. Almost nothing is known of his early life, his birth, parents, and place of nativity. The author describes what might have happened to a normal Ottawa youth, which is interesting background material for a better understanding of the Indians. Pontiac was a leader in the Detroit area during the beginning stage of the uprising, but he was not the head of a widespread conspiracy. Failing in his efforts to capture the fort at Detroit, he appealed to other tribes to attack the English. Fort after fort fell before the attacks of the aborigines, but
Detroit, Niagara, and Fort Pitt were not taken. The losses inflicted upon the British were heavy. His leadership attracted much support and admiration but was not universally accepted. Forced to give up the siege of Detroit, Pontiac retired to the Maumee. He sought help from the French in the Illinois Country in order to renew the war the following summer. Failing to secure assistance from this source, he continued to plan an attack with the support of the Shawnee and the Delaware. When this also failed, he made peace with the English. During the negotiations the English gave him much attention, and he assumed a commanding position. This may have been intended to arouse the jealousy of other chiefs. If this were true, it worked only too well. The Peoria Indians resolved to kill him and, without much delay, the deed was perpetrated by a Peoria who pretended friendship. The failure of the Indians to join in unified support of Pontiac doomed their way of life to disappear before the English speaking peoples. He possessed many elements of greatness and his failure was in reality the failure of his people. He should not, however, be idealized for he was cruel and untruthful.

The volume is neatly printed on good paper and attractively bound. It includes several excellent maps and illustrations, an adequate index, and a classified but not an annotated bibliography. No typographical errors were noted. It is a pleasure to read a book that is free from the limitations imposed during the war years.

Errors seem to be very few and of an insignificant character. A small slip (pp. 38-39) has George Washington sent to retake Fort Duquesne rather than to protect the men building the original fort for the Ohio Company. Some of the footnotes, as the one on page 225, are very inadequate as references. An instance of overstatement seems to have occurred on page 276 where Pontiac even in his submission “was for the moment more powerful than Johnson or Gage.” West Newton, Pennsylvania, is southeast of and not “below” Pittsburgh.

There need be no hesitancy in recommending this book to friends and students. It is good reading and good history. 

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