

*The Nickel Plate Road, The History of a Great Railroad.* By Taylor Hampton. (Cleveland, Ohio, The World Publishing Company, 1947, pp. 366. Illustrations, maps, appendixes, bibliography, and index. \$3.75.)

Interest in *The Nickel Plate Road* will not be confined to residents of the five states through which that famous line runs. For the Nickel Plate (whose official title is the New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad) has in recent years been one of the roads controlled by Robert R. Young, whom many persons consider America's most progressive businessman.

Nine of the twenty chapters in the book deal at length with the financing and construction of the road by the Seney Syndicate, a process begun in 1881 and completed in 1882. Toward the original builders Mr. Hampton is favorably inclined; typical of his evaluation of them is the following (pages 17-18): "The Nickel Plate Road was no unsound, highly speculative scheme conceived by inexperienced promoters in a moment of flighty desire. It was a sound, legitimate enterprise organized by men of position, influence, and means, who had successfully built and operated other railroads." Nor does he find, as some writers have suggested, that the Nickel Plate was built to blackmail William H. Vanderbilt or Jay Gould. Instead, he sides with the Seney Syndicate as against Vanderbilt (who purchased the road from the Syndicate in 1882) and concedes only "that the road was built to sell" (page 150). Thus he dissents in part from the opinion of such previous authorities as John Moody, who states flatly (in *The Railroad Builders*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1920, page 35): "This road . . . had been constructed with the hope of ultimately selling out to its competitor."

The remaining half of the book is divided into three parts, built around the New York Central, Van Sweringen, and Young regimes. Toward William H. Vanderbilt the author is inclined to accept the somewhat unfriendly attitude of the former's contemporaries rather than the revisionist attitude of John Moody, Matthew Josephson, and others. Concluding that the Nickel Plate "did not prosper under New York Central control" (page 203), he buttresses his statement with statistical detail. Even more detail goes into his evaluation of the Van Sweringen brothers of Cleveland,

whose control of the Nickel Plate (1916-1936) he regards highly. This family added two important lines to the system: the Toledo, St. Louis and Western (Clover Leaf) and the Lake Erie and Western, whose involved histories are traced with great care.

After this very full account of the railroad to 1937, the "Young Era" receives only one chapter of nine pages. It is true, of course, that the Nickel Plate has been only one of the Young roads; probably some of the recent records are still in active use and not available for historical research; no doubt a writer so close to the controversial events in which Mr. Young has been involved is limited to tentative conclusions. Nevertheless, Mr. Hampton's book appears to be an approximation of a semi-official history of the railroad; for example, the introduction is written by its president, Mr. John W. Davin. Then why should the author be so modest about Mr. Young's achievement? Mr. Hampton's clientele will probably wish to learn more of such omitted or abbreviated developments as Mr. Young's efforts to free his railroads from the control of Eastern investment banks; of his concern for the rights of small investors and of his workers; of the many conveniences he installed for passengers and shippers; of his bolt from the Association of American Railroads and his formation of the Federation for Railway Progress; and of his famous campaign for through train service at Chicago and St. Louis, popularized by the slogan "A Hog Can Cross the Country Without Changing Trains—But You Can't."

Mr. Hampton lists in his bibliography twenty-five libraries, more than three-score newspapers and periodicals, and private records of the railroad. He has documented and indexed his work well. Railroad fans will enjoy the numerous illustrations.

West Virginia University

William D. Barns

*The Dixie Frontier, A Social History of the Southern Frontier from the First Transmontane Beginnings to the Civil War.* By Everett Dick. (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1948, pp. xx, 374, xxv. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$4.50.)

This work is the third volume of the author which treats frontier history. The two earlier ones are *The Sod-House*