

Book Reviews

John C. Calhoun, Sectionalist, 1840-1850. By Charles M. Wiltse. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1951, pp. 592. End maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$6.00.)

The publication of the *Sectionalist* volume of Charles M. Wiltse's *John C. Calhoun* completes a monumental task which the author began a decade ago. It is a worthy companion to Calhoun the *Nationalist* (1944) and Calhoun the *Nullifier* (1949). Separately the segments are unified treatments of well-defined periods of the South Carolinian's career; collectively they are a continuous narrative of a significant era and a full-length portrait of one of its dominant personalities. They are biography in the term's expansive sense, for they successfully combine an excellent political history of the forty years from 1810 to 1850 with the subject's contributions unobtrusively mirrored against events and movements. There are many pages in which the chief actor remains off-stage, but the reader is constantly aware that he will soon reappear, sometimes alone, sometimes in company with other giants of the period, sometimes with lesser folk whose local interests are necessary in building the whole structure. The result is a happy balance between biography and history.

The Calhoun that emerges from Wiltse's sympathetic presentation of the last decade of his career is a noble figure, whether as senator, presidential candidate, secretary of state, plantation master, or southern sentinel. Political skill, resolute purpose, and amazing intellect combined to provide the Carolinian with impressive leadership throughout the 1840's. His "clearly reasoned" speech on the tariff of 1842 was "so dispassionate and devoid of partisan bias that he might have been a visitor from the other side of the globe demonstrating the solution of a problem in mathematics." His Oregon address elicited "messages of praise," especially from the North. The speech against the acquisition of Mexico, delivered to a full house and crowded galleries, forced the administration to disclaim any purpose of annexing the whole country.

The author is convinced that Calhoun was the favorite presidential candidate as the campaign of 1844 got under way. Ever since the publication of Robert Barnwell Rhett's 1854

letter to Richard Crallé, biographers and historians have accepted Rhett's statement that Calhoun wrote the campaign *Life* which appeared early in 1843. Wiltse challenges this view and presents a plausible case for other authorship. His "personal guess" is that Joseph A. Scoville expanded the sketch published by Virgil Maxcy in 1831, that Calhoun's daughter Anna Clemson drafted the 1831-1843 portion, and that Robert M. T. Hunter revised the whole manuscript and thus actually became its author.

Calhoun's role in the great debate of 1850 becomes more understandable under Wiltse's careful analysis. He prefaces a discussion on Henry Clay's measures with an evaluation of Calhoun's *Disquisition on Government* and the *Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States*. The Carolinian's sincerity and genuine hope for a continuation of the Union are apparent in his conferences with Daniel Webster before either addressed the Senate. Each knew what the other would say, and Calhoun believed that his speech would leave the door open to compromise. His address, read by Senator James M. Mason, was predicated upon the *Disquisition's* philosophy and the *Discourse's* premises, and demanded of the North a constitutional amendment to guarantee southern rights. But Calhoun did not indicate what guarantee he would insist upon; it has been wrongly assumed, Wiltse asserts, that only a dual executive, elaborated in the *Disquisition*, would satisfy him. He was merely opening the southern side of the debate, and withheld a specific demand until Webster replied, after which an agreement might emanate from "general discussion." True, Calhoun had issued an ultimatum, but according to himself, and to Wiltse, the alternative was not disunion.

Perhaps it is inappropriate to label any work as definitive, but certainly Mr. Wiltse's volumes approach that stature. The 1,500 pages of distinguished prose are based upon a significant array of manuscript collections, a fair sampling of newspapers, and all but a few of the pertinent books and articles. No one will need to rewrite Calhoun on so large a scale in this generation.

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Origins of the New South, 1877-1913. By C. Vann Woodward.
A History of the South, IX, edited by Wendell H.