

## Book Reviews

*Bourbon Democracy of the Middle West, 1865-1896.* By Horace Samuel Merrill. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953, pp. 300. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$4.50.)

Here is the lively and comprehensive story of the Bourbon Democratic leaders of the Middle West from 1865 to 1896, shorn of the glamour enjoyed by the Southern "Redeemers" of the same period, and pictured as the paladins of plutocracy, always in alliance with Eastern Bourbon Democrats and often with conservative Republicans to suppress the harassed farmers and to keep the Middle West in colonial subjection to the East.

From 1865 to 1880 the story emphasizes the politics of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, particularly Ohio, and the struggle of the Bourbons to suppress Greenback sentiment in the Democratic party. The villains of the piece are such hardy perennials as William Allen and Allen G. Thurman. (It is too bad that more space is not devoted to Indiana, for from 1874 through 1878 Greenbackers and Democrats in that state were in rather close alliance and won some notable victories.)

From 1880 to 1896 the story emphasizes the politics of Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska, particularly that of Wisconsin, where the author is most at home, and the struggle of the Bourbons to suppress the anti-monopolists, the Farmers' Alliance, the Populists, and the silverites. By this time the villains are William F. Vilas, J. Sterling Morton, and Melville W. Fuller, and the heroes are John P. Altgeld, William J. Bryan, Ignatius Donnelly, and Horace Boies.

One of the main themes of the book is how the Bourbon Democrats "stumbled" into national power in 1884 and in 1892 on such "diversionary" issues as the tariff and clean government, and how they received retributive justice in 1896, when they were "damnable mauled" and lost control of the Democratic party to those who epitomized the "real" issues—labor and farm relief, trust busting, and monetary reform.

Who were the rank-and-file Democrats of the Middle West during this period? For the most part they were people

of Southern backgrounds tinged with varying degrees of Copperheadism; non-nativists bent on retaining their language newspapers, their parochial schools, and their beer; and poor farmers in the poor counties. However, the author tells us all this by inference and assertion; his method is that of the literary and narrative historian, not that of the quantitative historian correlating, county by county, the election statistics with social and economic factors. (Alas, most contemporary American historians have abandoned the Frederick J. Turner methods, only to see those methods appropriated by the political scientists and the sociologists and expanded by them to win new scientific victories for their disciplines!)

The period covered by this book saw the transformation of the old Middle West from an agrarian to a semi-industrial society with the consequent decline of agrarian radicalism in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and the advance of agrarian radicalism to the newer Middle West of Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska. Again, this revolutionary shift is treated largely by declaration and assertion rather than by quantitative analysis of election returns and social and economic statistics.

The general impression left by the book is that of a political conflict between white and black, between good and evil. The intermediate gradations, the various shades of gray, so numerous in the ambiguous, inclusive, and non-ideological politics of the United States in all periods and in all sections, are rare in this book, but they were numerous in real life. For instance, on the vital monetary issues which divided the Indiana Democracy of the 1870's, there were inflationists like Franklin Landers and "Blue Jeans" Williams; and there were orthodox hard money men like Joseph E. McDonald, William H. English, and Michael Kerr. But there were also many political leaders in intermediate positions: David Turpie, rather consistently left of center; Daniel Voorhees, usually left of center; Isaac P. Gray, somewhat left of center; and Thomas A. Hendricks, just about at dead center. For the most part, Merrill's narrative is too sketchy and too sectarian to capture the truly amorphous nature of the political contest.

It is a mistake to think that the Bourbons were without a popular following. Industrial capitalism was a cause that

enlisted the hopes and the imaginations of the masses, just as Jeffersonian and Jacksonian agrarian democracy once did, just as Roosevelt's New Deal was later to do. Henry W. Brady and James J. Hill were symbols of mass aspirations just as much as were Tom Watson and William J. Bryan. It is the failure to recognize this fact that gives the period from 1865 to 1896 so hideous an aspect to our historians of agrarian and of socialist points of view.

Whenever the money question was not raised, Merrill seems to think middle western voter reaction was apathetic. He says that voters might have entitled the election of 1876 *Much Ado About Nothing*. This simply is not true. Partisan feeling was at fever pitch in the 1870's and 1880's, especially in 1876, although admittedly it is paradoxical that the period in which there was the least substantive difference between the major parties was the very period of American history in which party attitudes and feelings approximated the ritualism and fervor of religion. It is the duty of the historian—even of the economic determinist—to describe political behavior as it was and not as it "ought" to have been.

The author is not quite at home in Indiana politics. Hendricks was much more of a trimmer on the money issue than Merrill makes him. Benjamin Harrison was not a Senator at the time of his nomination for President in 1888. And, of course, William H. English was never "governor of doubtful Indiana," in spite of the author's assertion, on page 136, that he was. Instead, English was a wealthy banker and Indiana's "Great Forecloser," a fact which Merrill would have exploited had he been aware of it.

*The University of Florida*

William G. Carleton

*James Longstreet. I. Soldier.* By Donald Bridgman Sanger.

*II. Politician, Officeholder, and Writer.* By Thomas Robson Hay. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952, pp. xi, 460. Illustrations and index. \$6.50.)

One of the major Civil War controversies has centered around General James Longstreet. Did he unnecessarily delay his attack on the second day at Gettysburg and thus lose the battle for Lee? Since he admitted that he advised another course of action it was not strange that it was charged that