

indeed, of Sellers' skill. Doughty "Old Hickory" Jackson, too, tubercular and toothless but forceful as ever, lingers on at the Hermitage. And from all that has been revealed about Polk in this first part of the story—his tenacity, self-discipline, courage, and adroitness—it will scarcely be a surprise when triumph follows on the heels of failure.

It would be a mistake, however, to exaggerate national overtones. Here the principal setting is Tennessee, and in his depiction of that state's involved politics Mr. Sellers is at his best. The book is based principally on primary sources, and from letters and contemporary newspapers the historian has distilled freshness and truth. The Erwin-Carroll-Williams-Cannon political group and the Overton-Eaton-Lewis clique are among the combinations clarified. The reader meets men he expects to meet—Polk himself, Jackson, Hugh Lawson White, Colonel Davy Crockett, and "Lean Jimmy" Jones. The roles and personalities of Alfred Balch, James Walker, Judge John Catron, and the obscure Edmund Rucker are also presented. Though the scholar has dug deeply, there is nothing obtrusive in his product. Humorous comments enliven the narrative. Early American raciness returns, as when Hoosiers visit Nashville in 1840 to give their southern Whig brethren an Indian canoe, a caged coon, and other William Henry Harrison emblems.

Adverse comment? None occurs to this reviewer. With diligence Mr. Sellers has traversed difficult historical terrain, where many a predecessor has faltered. The result is a book fit to be ranked with Bemis' work on John Quincy Adams. No biography is definitive, but, if the Princeton professor maintains his standards in the sequel, he will have made a major contribution in areas of discovery and interpretation.

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*Background to Glory, The Life of George Rogers Clark.* By John Bakeless. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1957. Pp. 386. Frontispiece, notes, index. \$6.00.)

"It is probably true that he [George Rogers Clark] added three—perhaps five—states to the Union. He is one of the few soldiers in American military history—or any other history—who were never once defeated and never once surprised. . . . It is arguable that his rear-guard operations in

the 'back country' saved the American Revolution from collapse." These statements from the preface and others in the text of this volume indicate that the author believes that Clark had not yet received his proper recognition. He offers no criticism of the more moderate judgments in James A. James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark* (Chicago, c. 1928). But he rejects the views of Randolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio* (Pittsburgh, 1940), and Samuel F. Bemis, "The Rayneval Memorandum of 1782 and Some Comments on the French Historian Doniol," in *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, XLVII (1937), 15-92, when he wrote: "The British were never able to resume possession [of the Illinois Country and Vincennes]. Had they been able to do so, it is as nearly certain as any 'if' of history that the American boundary would today be the Ohio River. It was George Rogers Clark and the Illinois Regiment who destroyed the control without which Britain could not claim the country" (p. 340).

The present volume is the result of extensive research and study, possibly wider research than the author's predecessors. In places it is heavily documented. It is interesting to read as a life of Clark should be. The author has been trained in history, has had experience in magazine editing, in military and foreign service. He is also the author of seven previous books, a majority of which were in the field of history. Two of them are concerned with the frontier.

Unusual and inadequate documentation in places, however, characterize the volume. The fault is not only the unusual form of the footnotes, but the lack of information found in them. The critical reader cannot tell in many instances whether the manuscript referred to was a writing of Clark's or something produced by somebody's grandmother some eighty years after the fact about something told her when she was a child. At places one also finds a lack of supporting references.

The work is furthermore characterized by an emphasis on legendary information. The Teresa de Leyba story of Clark's supposed love affair is not only told but brought up again and again. When the British attacked St. Louis in 1780, the author inserts in his narrative: "Romantic legend has grown up around this swift visit [of Clark] to St. Louis. It was the last time Clark would ever see Teresa de Leyba.

There is no proof that he really did see her in this crisis. . . . But of their last meeting—which must have taken place at this time—there is no record that he ever said a word” (pp. 248-249). Actually even Clark’s presence in St. Louis is disputed, not to mention a tête-à-tête at the time of battle. Another piece of legend appears on page 252: “This time, he escaped by a dazzling piece of bluff. The story is familiar and well attested, but time and place are not clear. It seems to have happened at this very time.” How is a story well attested without time and place? The author’s enthusiasm for the dramatic statement also entrapped him in a contradiction. “It is of record that, in all his [Clark] warring years, his reconnaissance was always perfect. No enemy ever caught him unawares” (p. 70). But on page 252 he wrote: “Only twice in his life did the cunning red men lure him into ambush.”

The book will make a stronger appeal for the reader interested in the story than for the critical historian.

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*Orville H. Browning: Lincoln’s Friend and Critic.* By Maurice Baxter. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957. Pp. vii, 351. Notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$4.50.)

Any of us who ventures upon a biography of a figure who lacked outstanding importance, or a very interesting personality, or the flexibility to acknowledge the imperium of change, is confronted by a far more difficult task than the biographers of strong leaders, or of warm personalities, or of adaptable individuals who rode the crest of the wave on the rising tide of events. Where a figure is more important for the persons with whom he associated than for himself, his biographer must squeeze every possible drop of juice that he can from the fruits of greater acquaintances; and the chronicle—if honest—cannot be highly flavorful.

Baxter’s is an honest chronicle of a not-very-attractive lawyer-politician of less than first rank who, probably unwittingly, greatly handicapped his biographer. This Browning in the challenging year of 1861, in the prime of life at age 55, yielded to some strong compulsion and “disposed of a great many of his letters and papers” (p. 333). Did his supercilious exterior cloak a basic unsureness as to the validity of his own decisions?