

Book Reviews

American Diplomacy in the Great Depression: Hoover-Stimson Foreign Policy, 1929-1933. By Robert H. Ferrell. Yale Historical Publications, Studies 17. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957. Pp. ix, 319. \$4.50.)

No one would contend that the period 1929-1933 marked any decisive turning point in the history of American foreign policy, like the period 1914-1919, say, or 1939-1945. And yet the decisions that President Herbert Hoover and his Secretary of State, Henry L. Stimson, made and the policies that they implemented did in some measure affect the disintegration of the world order that was then in progress and would soon culminate in the tragic events of the late 1930's. In this thoughtfully conceived and brilliantly written study the author, an assistant professor of history at Indiana University, has told how and why all this happened.

The author has organized his narrative around the major events in American foreign policy during the Hoover administration. His accounts of the London Naval Conference of 1930, the Manchurian crisis, the Shanghai incident, the World Disarmament Conference, the emergence of a new Latin American policy, and the World Economic Conference are all quite full and satisfying. The story of these events was already a familiar one, and the author has not added anything particularly new to our knowledge about the main outlines.

Having said this, one should hasten to add that this book is a notable achievement and a significant contribution to the literature of recent American history. For one thing Professor Ferrell has brought all the fragments together and constructed the whole story, in all its interrelated complexity, for the first time. Moreover, he has done prodigious, even massive, research in the personal papers of the American principals, in the American and Japanese archives, and in a variety of other sources. The results are everywhere evident in this volume—in the richness and newness of its detail, in the freshness of its approach, and, best of all, in the obvious authenticity of the narrative.

There is, moreover, new light here on the personalities and motivations of the men who guided the American ship of state during the period 1929-1933. The portraits of Hoover, Stimson, William R. Castle, Charles G. Dawes, and others that emerge from these pages are vivid, sympathetic yet critical, and wonderfully revealing. They are portraits of men caught up in the greatest economic cataclysm of modern times, struggling to apply outworn remedies to new situations, and failing nobly on the whole. The portrait of Stimson that the author draws, incidentally, is perhaps the most significant of all, for it tends to confirm the unfavorable one that Professor R. N. Current depicted in *Secretary Stimson, a Study in Statecraft*. Not least among Professor Ferrell's contributions is his bibliographical essay, which surveys the immense sources and literature of his period with thoroughness and revealing commentary.

American Diplomacy in the Great Depression is the kind of book that will evoke admiration and considerable controversy at one and the same time. The controversy, it should be said, will rise not over the author's excellent methods but over some of his interpretations. To this reviewer, for example, it seems that he has given altogether too much weight to the depression as the cause of the collapse of the international political order in the early 1930's. No one would argue that the depression was not momentarily significant; the question is whether other factors were also of major importance. This reviewer would emphasize more than Professor Ferrell did the isolationist traditions and ideals of the American people and especially the essentially mediocre quality of the political leadership of the democracies during this period. It is begging the point somewhat to say (as Professor Ferrell does) that Hoover, Stimson, and others were able men. What the world needed desperately and did not have was great leadership.

Secondly, this reviewer has to enter a word of dissent about the way that the author deals with the Manchurian crisis. His treatment of this matter is really quite excellent on the descriptive level, but he fails to confront what is the most important question that can be asked about American policy during this episode. It is whether Stimson's policy of setting the American government in stern opposition to Japanese imperialism in Manchuria bore any substantial relation to the national interests of the United States. This reviewer is not here suggesting that this or that answer would be correct, only that Professor Ferrell does not really grapple with the problem.

These of course are matters of individual judgment, and such criticisms are quite unimportant in view of the total achievement of this volume. Professor Ferrell's first study on the Kellogg Pact revealed his ability at monographic writing. The present volume shows that he has mastered the techniques of general writing. We can all look forward to his promised third volume on the foreign policy of the first Roosevelt administration.

Northwestern University

Arthur S. Link

A History of Presidential Elections. By Eugene H. Roseboom. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957. Pp. vi, 568. Bibliography, index. \$8.50.)

H. L. Mencken once described our presidential elections as quadrennial circuses, and on many occasions the proceedings at the national conventions and the antics of campaigns would seem to justify such a conclusion. Yet presidential elections are necessary in the functioning of our Republic, and they are a vital part of our national history. Moreover, they have been a source of wonder and mystery both to the politician and the scholar. For no one can be absolutely certain what a national convention will do or what way the voters will turn, and likewise no one can be absolutely certain why a candidate has won or lost. This element of uncertainty and guessing has made presidential elections an elusive and exciting game for everyone in the country.

While there has been a profusion of literature about American politics—leaders, campaigns, parties, theories, and so forth—little has