

one and assigned the task a low priority. The first halting steps were taken because something had to be done to protect American shipping heretofore shielded by Portuguese warships which kept the Algerians confined to the Mediterranean. It remained for the depredations of French privateers during 1797 and 1798, combined with national infuriation at the XYZ Affair, to force a reluctant Congress to send a navy to sea.

This study was written by Dr. Smelser while he was a Forrestal Fellow in naval history at Annapolis. It is the first study published under that grant. If other studies approach this one in merit, it is to be hoped that they too will soon be published.

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K. Jack Bauer

Nicholas Biddle: Nationalist and Public Banker, 1786-1844. By Thomas Payne Govan. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959. Pp. xii, 428. Illustrations, note on sources, bibliography, index. \$7.50.)

In the annals of American biography, the 1950's may go down in history as the "be kind to businessmen decade." John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford were favorably reinterpreted in full-length studies by Allan Nevins. Even Jay Gould found an able apologist in Julius Grodinsky. Finally at the close of the decade this revisionist trend reached a culmination in the book under review, Thomas Payne Govan's adulatory biography of Nicholas Biddle.

In his Preface Govan says: "I began the research upon which this book is based, with the intention of writing an objective, impartial biography that would do justice to Biddle and his opponents alike. This ambition has not been fulfilled. I have written an apologia, a defense . . . but I could do nothing else and remain loyal to the evidence." Even this candid statement hardly prepares the reader for what follows. In the first chapter, Govan states his belief that as a boy Biddle did not inherit privilege or status. He then provides an account of Biddle's distinguished ancestry, his father's career as a leading citizen of Philadelphia, his boyhood home "in the fashionable section of the city," and his education at both the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton.

Throughout Biddle's struggle with Jackson over the rechartering of the second Bank of the United States and his later attempt to play the role of central banker after his institution had been chartered by the state of Pennsylvania, Govan defends his hero with unquestioning devotion. Neither omitting nor playing down the aspects of Biddle's career which have been most criticized, Govan finds that Biddle's course was uniformly wise, his purpose always to promote the national welfare, and his interpretation of that welfare enlightened. Biddle's thoughts seem almost to become those of the author. Even Biddle's megalomaniacal rationalizations during his last desperate years are accepted without question. Thus, when Biddle (or is it Govan? One is seldom quite sure.) contended that Jackson and Van Buren were really responsible for the near insolvency of the state of Pennsylvania, that he (Biddle) bribed

members of the Pennsylvania legislature for patriotic reasons, and that he speculated in cotton and objected to the resumption of specie payments for the public good, Govan never raises any question as to the soundness of Biddle's explanations.

The book reflects the narrowness of the author's research, which consists chiefly of an exhaustive examination of the Biddle papers. Much might have been gained had more attention been devoted to other contemporary records, even to the secondary accounts of the period.

In defense of this book, it can be said that the author threads his way with some skill through the complicated political intrigues of the age and that he competently and lucidly describes Biddle's involved banking and foreign exchange operations. Possibly this strongly partisan and uncritical study provides an understanding of Nicholas Biddle, the man, which might not be gained from a less friendly biography.

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George Rogers Taylor

Lincoln's Youth: Indiana Years, Seven to Twenty-one, 1816-1830. By Louis A. Warren. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959. Pp. xxii, 298. Illustrations, endpaper maps, notes, sources, index. \$6.00.)

The Philosophy of Abraham Lincoln: In his own Words. Compiled by William E. Baringer. *Keystone Series.* Edited by C. A. Muses. (Indian Hills, Colo.: Falcon's Wing Press, 1959. Pp. xxxii, 167. \$3.50.)

Almost twenty-five years ago Louis A. Warren, then editor of the *Larue County Herald* of Hodgenville, Kentucky, published *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood*. A product of rigorous research and critical analysis, the book replaced many a flimsy legend with solid fact, raised the status of the Lincoln family, and demonstrated that Lincoln's early years were considerably less drab than they had previously been pictured.

The book also led to Warren's appointment as Director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation at Fort Wayne, Indiana. Lincoln students hoped that he would soon do for the Indiana years—also a murky period—what he had done for the Kentucky years. The duties of his position, however, were too onerous, so it was not until his retirement in 1956 that he could really devote himself to the Indiana book.

The result, one regrets to say, is disappointing. The text is padded with long excerpts or summaries of books which Warren, sometimes on doubtful authority, credits Lincoln with having read, and with much silly, unsupported tradition—which the author rejects, to be sure—that could better have been omitted altogether. (Chapter XII, "Romance," is a case in point.) In addition, there are far too many suppositious statements: "This book must have impressed Abraham . . ." (p. 111), "As a boy Abe may have heard from his father the tragic story of John Fitch . . ." (p. 148), "Apparently Abe had performed his tasks