

The Tragic Conflict: The Civil War and Reconstruction. Edited by William B. Hesseltine. [American Epochs Series. Edited by Frank Freidel.] (New York: George Braziller, 1962. Pp. 528. Bibliography. \$7.50.)

Few men are as qualified by knowledge or experience to compile a Civil War anthology as is Professor William B. Hesseltine of the University of Wisconsin, and *The Tragic Conflict* reflects commendably his ability to spotlight and situate one era amid the complicated maze that is the American heritage.

The anthology itself is both balanced and comprehensive. Hesseltine has first gleaned excerpts from forty-five different sources and then grouped them under six major headings: Disunion, The Armies, Emancipation and the Negro, The Confederate Effort, Political Developments, and The Economic Impact. Like previous anthologists, he has utilized such works as Grant's *Memoirs* and Edward Pollard's *Southern History of the War*. Unlike previous compilers, Hesseltine has also dipped into such excellent but little-known memoirs as John Will Dyer's *Confederate Reminiscences* and Whitelaw Reid's *After the War*. The excerpts are from such varied sources as General Jacob Cox's *Military Reminiscences* and the *Poems of Paul Hamilton Hayne*. Yet in that variety, by skillful selection and deft commentary, Hesseltine has woven a unique history of the years 1850-1877 that is heterogeneous in foundation and homogeneous in bringing "the tragic conflict" into perceptible focus.

However, and relatively speaking, historians will pay small attention to the anthology. Rather, they will carefully analyze—and possibly denigrate—the editor's twenty-one-page introduction; for here Hesseltine has interpreted the whole Middle Period in a manner that is revisionary or revolutionary, depending largely upon one's background and/or leanings.

"There was little in the America of 1880," he states, "that had not been foreshadowed in 1850." Then, snipping at the heels of the "repressible" historians, Hesseltine concludes: "Perhaps, indeed, the Civil War was a desperate effort [by the South] to stave off the inevitable." From this kickoff point Hesseltine roars through the field of historical interpretation with the calmness of a starving Apache chasing buffalos. Few established groups escape a poke from the Hesseltine pen. To the idolaters of Lincoln goes the following: "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address might have been delivered just as appropriately by Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America." The nationalist school of historians comes in for a blockbusting salvo. Throughout the Civil War, Hesseltine asserts, Lincoln, his "swollen bureaucracy," and large business interests "battled against States' Rights." In the end they not only destroyed the old Federal Union but, simultaneously, "they destroyed one of the ancient bulwarks of human liberty—the power of the states to protect the people."

With the grass growing greener over Calhoun's grave because of the above statement, Hesseltine then uncorks a powerhouse right on the Reconstruction school, especially that small element of revisionists who see justification and godliness in the events of 1867-1876. Recon-

struction was no reconstruction at all, Hesseltine states. "It was in fact a new national construction," although it was highlighted for a decade by "an era of unprecedented corruption" on the part of "carpet-baggers, scalawags, and Radical Republicans." Hesseltine's reference to "hate-mongering Radicals, intent upon destroying the South and prating about freedom" hardly coincides with those modern writers who would have us accept the image of "Lincoln and his loyal opposition."

The whole introduction contains a multitude of sweeping generalizations. Many are true, some are provocative, and several will no doubt invite long and loud rebuttals. This reviewer might agree with Hesseltine's analysis of Robert E. Lee as "a supreme tactician sadly deficient in concepts of strategy" if the axiom applied only to Gettysburg and not to Lee's conduct throughout the war. Yet the statement hardly has validity in the case of Chancellorsville, where Lee's daring in tactics and strategy reduced his capable opponent, Joseph Hooker, to a state of blubbing disconcertion.

The book has one glaring weakness, which is not the fault of the editor. The publisher, displaying rare shortsightedness in a volume of this size, omitted an index and thus restricted appreciably both the value and the usefulness of the total study. Only a superior anthology could withstand so painful a wound. This is such a work, presented in a stimulating fashion that has made the name Hesseltine synonymous with academic excellence.

National Civil War Centennial Commission James I. Robertson, Jr.

Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers. By Rufus R. Dawes.

Edited with an introduction by Alan T. Nolan. (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, for the Wisconsin Civil War Centennial Commission, 1962. Pp. xv, 330. Illustrations, table, bibliography, index. \$5.00.)

The Twenty-fourth Michigan of the Iron Brigade. By Donald L. Smith.

(Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Company, 1962. Pp. 312. Maps, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$6.50.)

A happy aspect of the Civil War centennial observance has been the republication of esteemed but relatively obscure books such as Colonel Dawes' which otherwise would have remained collectors' items not available to the ordinary buff or to students remote from large city or university libraries. And—whatever may be said about the centennial jubilees and battle reenactments—contributions to the literature of the war like Mr. Smith's give lasting value to the observance. Often regimental histories yield fresher, more detailed pictures than are found in biographies of the celebrated leaders or the more popularly read and applauded general histories.

Dawes' *Sixth Wisconsin*, long regarded a Civil War classic and indispensable to those concerned with the formation, growth, and campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, is here offered as an old treasure in a new chest. The publishers have performed a valuable