

Book Reviews

The Causes of the War of 1812. By Reginald Horsman. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962. Pp. 345. Bibliography, appendix, notes, index. \$6.00.)

Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812. By Bradford Perkins. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961. Pp. x, 457. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical note, map, index. \$7.95.)

The Causes of the War of 1812: National Honor or National Interest? Edited by Bradford Perkins. *American Problems Studies.* Edited by Oscar Handlin. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962. Pp. 119. Chronology, table, map, list of suggested readings. Paper-bound, \$1.50.)

Centennials, sesquicentennials, and similar observances are usually heralded by the appearance of new historical studies of the celebrated events themselves. The causes of the War of 1812 have long been of interest to scholars. The principal facts are general knowledge. Controversy arises when relative importance is assigned to them and when they are evaluated and interpreted. Newly discovered details do not substantially alter what is already known about the course of events; they merely give additional support for the various interpretations.

Horsman's *The Causes of the War of 1812* is the outgrowth of a doctoral dissertation. *Prologue to War* is the second of a three-volume series in which Perkins is concerned with Anglo-American relations from 1795 to 1825. *The Causes of the War of 1812: National Honor or National Interest?* launches a new series of *American Problems Studies* with Oscar Handlin as editor-in-chief. Its format, sophistication, and other high standards augur well for the series.

In his analysis, Horsman uses the renewal of the Anglo-French struggle in 1803 as his point of departure. He contends that the United States was as "inextricably" involved in European affairs and that isolation was as "impossible" then as it proved to be in 1914-1917 and in 1939-1941 (p. 24). Before Trafalgar, the most serious problem was impressment, a question on which England would fight rather than yield. After the European war entered its "commercial phase of blockade and counter-blockade" American commerce was "crushed between the two Goliaths" (p. 57). The freedoms of neutrality suffered because British patriots were anxious to stop American aid to the French and British shipping interests were envious of America's growing commercial power. The belief that peaceful coercion would eventually bring concession from England led the United States to delay declaring war until 1812. Anglo-American affairs, of primary importance to America, were of minor concern to England when compared to her struggle with France. The American government did not realize this and frequently predicated her policy on the supposed sensitivity of the British government to every minor fluctuation in American affairs.

The "final tragedy" was that when England, in the midst of the depression of 1812, finally decided to give in to a major part of the American demands, America had finally given up hope and had made an irrevocable commitment to war (p. 60). Horsman asserts that basically the war was caused by certain British policies that were largely dictated by European rather than American considerations. If the Anglo-French peace of 1801-1803 had been maintained, "there would have been no Orders in Council, no impressment, and, in all probability, no War of 1812" (p. 267).

Perkins in general agrees with Horsman that the war came because specific British actions and policies threatened American interests; but, heretofore, he asserts, too many American historians have "virtually caricatured" British policy rather than devote the considerable attention to it that it deserves (p. vii).

Perkins departs from Horsman, however, when he suggests that tangible and rational reasons for action have been too much over-emphasized by scholars while "national pride, sensitivity, and frustration" have been slighted even though the evidence "leaps to the eye. Emotion, chance, and half choices" often determine international relations "as much as or more than cool reason" (p. vii). This was clearly the case in the years before the War of 1812.

Friction developed because America's choice was neutrality while Britain was engaged in a life and death struggle against Napoleon. Many Englishmen regarded Americans contemptuously, insisting that "these bastard Englishmen" be treated as "upstart commercial rivals and political incompetents" (p. 2). British attitudes were governed by emotion and not reason; but besieged nations are not given to dispassion and long-range thinking when they formulate policy. Many Americans still held on to the Anglophobia of the Revolution and were acutely aware that Britain and other European powers regarded them as unimportant in world politics. Thus, when American legislation failed to secure concessions from England, the only alternatives seemed to be war or national humiliation. Perkins also charges the presidents with considerable blame as the United States muddled its way toward war. For example, after the election of 1808 Jefferson "virtually abdicated," merely marking time until he could leave for Monticello (p. 178). And his successor, Madison, did not point out any way of reaching a "promised land of peace" and for over two years the country "wallowed in purposeless humiliation" (p. 223).

Selections from the writings of several historians who have interpreted the coming of the war make up the *American Problems Studies* pamphlet. Suffice it to indicate here that Leonard D. White and Herbert Heaton examine the breakdown of America's aggressive diplomatic weapon, economic coercion; Henry Adams and A. L. Burt stress maritime issues; Louis M. Hacker and Julius W. Pratt debate the role of Canada and Florida; George R. Taylor and Margaret K. Latimer assay the effect of the depression of 1811-1812; Norman K. Risjord and Horsman de-emphasize the importance of the West per se (Horsman's *Causes* was not yet available to the editor); and, finally, Irving Brant, Perkins (from his *Prologue*), and George Dangerfield

evaluate the performance of Madison. This commendable and convenient package offers much for undergraduates to chew over and wrestle with in research papers and seminar discussions; it is also an excellent introduction to the literature of the subject.

The Horsman volume and Perkins' *Prologue* are both products of prodigious and meticulous scholarship. Perkins examined heretofore inaccessible English and American papers and archives and re-examined others in light of recent scholarship; English-born Horsman was blessed with the advantage of English and American training thus giving him an unusual perspective for his study. Horsman's strength is readability and clarity; Perkins' forte is detailed corroborative evidence. The Perkins book will appeal primarily to scholars; the Horsman study will attract the lay reader as well.

Both add new detail which they have uncovered; but their principal contribution is interpretive. But, as Perkins points out in his introduction to the pamphlet, "Not one of the interpretations discussed . . . was left unmentioned, either by advocates or opponents of war, in 1811 and 1812. . . . Thus, in one sense, historians have really only continued a contemporary controversy. Their disagreements . . . suggest that the problem of war causation is highly complicated." What is still needed is for someone "to correlate and synthesize the various sets of causes," a suggestion as valid today as when it was made in 1941 by Warren H. Goodman in "The Origins of the War of 1812: A Survey of Changing Interpretations" (*Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXVIII, 185). The Perkins pamphlet is a helpful introductory move in that direction.

Miami University

Dwight L. Smith

The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain. Edited by Vernon Carstensen. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963. Pp. xxvi, 522. Notes, maps, tables, graphs, appendix, index. \$6.75.)

As stated in the editor's preface, this volume of articles was published primarily to celebrate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United States General Land Office, predecessor of the present Bureau of Land Management. An advisory board of scholars on the history of the public lands was set up to select for republication two dozen articles from some sixty. Because the subject is basic to so many fields of historical interest, the articles have appeared in many diverse and even obscure journals. Perhaps a majority of the articles selected have been published since the Second World War, thus demonstrating a growing interest in the subject. The editor and advisory board are to be commended for bringing these articles together under one cover.

The articles are arranged in five parts with a commentary heading each part. Part One includes three articles on the origins of the public land system; Part Two, nine on the distribution of the public lands; Part Three, nine on criticism and interpretation of public lands