

## Book Reviews

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*My Life: The Memoirs of Claude Bowers.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962. Pp. 346. Index. \$6.50.)

This autobiography is disappointing, chiefly because of its brevity. In his nearly eighty years Bowers saw and participated in many major events in this country and abroad and he had the writing skill to interpret these events and the motives of their chief actors. Ordinarily, though, a sentence or two is all that is allowed to try to bring a character to life. The wonder, however, is not that in this short book Bowers usually fails; it is that he succeeds as frequently as he does. An example of his success is the treatment of Joaquin Miller, "the Poet of the Sierras," who had left his native Indiana to gain fame in California. Miller is discussed at greater length than many persons of more importance and he does come alive in this book.

Bowers' career divides into four distinct periods: the Indiana period, which includes the Washington years as secretary to Senator John W. Kern (1911-1917); the period as a national figure, his fame being based upon several books and his editorials in the *New York Evening World*; his diplomatic service in Spain and Chile; and his return to private life and writing.

Though born in Hamilton County, Indiana, Bowers spent most of his first ten years in Whitestown in Boone County before moving with his family to Lebanon, the county seat. In his first chapter he is not nearly as able to evoke his boyhood in Indiana in the eighties as William Allen White did for his in Emporia, Kansas, in roughly the same period. White, however, gave much more space to this period.

Having no money for college after his graduation from Shortridge High School, Bowers got a job with the Indianapolis *Sentinel*, where he could express his Democratic views, but where he was paid very little. In 1903 he joined the *Terre Haute Gazette* and later ran unsuccessfully for Congress twice. Most of the public events of his Washington years as secretary Bowers recounts more effectively and at greater length in his biography of Senator Kern than he does in *My Life*. And in the Lilly Library at Indiana University are a series of letters to Frank Brubeck, a *Terre Haute* friend, in which Bowers, not writing for publication, gives a rowdy, man-to-man picture of some after-hours aspects of Washington. During this period he finished his first book, *The Irish Orators*. A number of leading political figures wrote commending letters and he writes that these "encouraging letters more than anything else turned my ambition toward the writing of history" (p. 90).

The economic base for his historical studies naturally enough was journalism, this time as editorial writer on the *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, where he stayed six years. But virtually nothing is said in this autobiography about Fort Wayne as a city, although Bowers seemed to enjoy the time he spent there. In addition to his editorial

duties he engaged in Democratic politics and researched and wrote *The Party Battles of the Jackson Period*, which former Senator Albert J. Beveridge helped him get published. This book and his editorials brought him an offer of an editorial position with the *New York World*. His acceptance naturally took him from Indiana and was eventually to make him an actor on the national and international scene.

As the author of *Jefferson and Hamilton*, Bowers became a national figure. The book was reviewed favorably by a number of public figures, one of whom was Franklin D. Roosevelt (in the only book review he ever wrote), and earned Bowers the Jefferson medal given by the University of Virginia to celebrate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

After his speech at the Jackson Day banquet in Washington, Bowers' stature increased so that he was selected as keynote speaker at the Democratic convention in Houston, Texas, in 1928, where Al Smith was nominated. The campaign, in which Bowers took an active part, is covered in a chapter entitled "Politics Turns Putrid." But after 1930 Democratic politics took a turn for the better, and following the nomination of Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom he had known for some time, Bowers threw himself wholeheartedly into the campaign. In the Hearst newspapers, where he had gone when the *World* stopped publication in 1931, he wrote "editorials [that] were militantly Democratic, attacking the Hoover Administration all along the line." Bowers reports that after the election Lawrence Richey of Herbert Hoover's staff said they were "the most damaging articles of the campaign" (p. 250). Bowers did not limit himself to the written word, however; taking to the stump, he made speeches in Indiana, Michigan, and New York. On one occasion he pinch-hit for F.D.R. on a nation-wide radio hookup. Shortly before the inauguration, Raymond Moley called Bowers to tell him that he had been chosen by Roosevelt to be ambassador to Spain.

In *My Mission to Spain*, published in 1954, Bowers had written his account of the Spanish Civil War, and there is little he chooses to add to it in his autobiography. His fourteen years as ambassador to Chile is likewise handled in a somewhat cursory manner, perhaps because he had told the story before in *Chile through Embassy Windows*, published in this country a month after his death. About the five years of life remaining after his return from Chile, there are only extracts from his diary selected by his daughter Patricia. They are not particularly interesting.

As noted before, there is a sketchiness about the book. The reader learns in a general way where Bowers was, what he did, and whom he saw and talked with and occasionally the reader receives a sharp impression. But there seem, from this book, to have been no intellectual, moral, or even political quandaries. Nothing is said about the writing of history except that newspapers and letters and journals of the time studied are most useful. Of all Bowers' biographical works the least illuminating is the one on Claude G. Bowers.