
Franklin D. Roosevelt during his campaign for the presidency in 1932 described Senator George W. Norris as "the gentle knight of American progressive ideals." The author of this book endorses Roosevelt's estimate. This is not to say that the book is a eulogy; the author, a political scientist, often criticizes Norris' pet ideas, such as the unicameral legislature and progressive inheritance tax. He finds an absence of sophistication in Norris' notions about the virtue of small business, evil of political parties, and railroad-middlemen responsibility for farm distress. Still, he always returns to the theme that Norris was a man of conscience and courage who for more than forty years fought the good fight for American liberalism.

This is not a biography of Norris but a description and analysis of ideas and proposals over the many years of his public service. It presents Norris as a man of the nineteenth century who never quite made peace with the twentieth; a Populist more than a Progressive, who retained timeworn ideas about "rugged individualism" and laissez faire, who saw the "interests"—trusts, railroads, bankers—as the great enemies of democracy.

The author used the Norris Papers in the Library of Congress, speeches and articles, the autobiography, some unpublished graduate theses, and a range of secondary material. He did not consult collateral manuscript sources.

The book could have benefited from careful editing. The author's prose often has twists and turns, as on page 5 where in the space of twelve lines the reader confronts three "buts" and two "however." He meets a "Yet although" on page 111 and a "however, although" on page 149. On page 78 he finds that some areas of the economy were "by their very nature natural monopolies."

While it lacks the spark of Norris' Fighting Liberal and offers no novel interpretations, this book is a useful contribution to the expanding Norris literature. It is a concise and critical analysis of the thought of an important spokesman of American liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century.

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That E. E. Dale is one of the profession's most talented yarn spinners can be attested by any historian fortunate enough to have attended a publishers' party at one of the uncrowded conventions of a generation ago. There Dale could often be found, tall glass in hand (but seldom touched), sprawled comfortably in an easy chair, charming his listeners with tales of his boyhood on a Texas farm or his early
manhood on the cattle ranches of the Southwest. His fund of cowboy lore was as delightful as it was inexhaustible. "There's no such thing as strong coffee," Dale would drawl, "only weak men." Or he might add another cattle country slogan: "There are mighty few women who know how little water it takes to make good coffee."

For a younger generation of historians who missed those memorable sessions, this book will provide a revealing experience. In it Dale tells of his boyhood on a pioneer farm in the lower Cross Timbers of Texas between 1882 and 1892. He was three years old when his Missouri-born father moved there after trying his hand at gold digging in California and Colorado and homesteading in Nebraska. He was thirteen when the restlessness that infected so many frontiersmen sent the family on westward, after converting fifty-six acres of scrub and brush into a thriving farm. In that decade Dale grew from a lisping child to young manhood, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Yet Dale has written this nostalgic book not to chronicle his own growth but to record instead an era of history that has vanished forever. His purpose is to recapture the atmosphere of rural America in the 1880's, and in this he succeeds admirably. He tells of the way of life, of the food that people ate, the clothes they wore, the games they played, the hard work that was their constant lot. His experiences, and the anecdotes that spiceme them, underline the differences between the simple society of that day and the interlocking social order of today. His was a childhood in which self-sufficiency was the rule (his father complained bitterly at having to spend three hundred dollars a year on his family when his father had spent only one hundred); in which provincialism prevailed (going "back east" meant a journey of thirty miles into the next county); in which parents were respected (Dale was sure of punishment if he forgot to address his father as "Sir"); in which workaday tasks absorbed the waking hours (schooling was only required between the eighth and sixteenth year and was even then usually neglected); and in which youth found pleasure in old-time religion and simple play parties rather than in the mechanically oriented amusements of the urban-industrial world.

This, in other words, is a book to be enjoyed by oldsters seeking to recall a rural past and by less fortunate youngsters who were denied such firsthand experiences by the accident of birth. Carping critics may suggest that Dale's total recall is suspect when he records episodes and conversations that occurred in his third year, but they may be ignored. He has captured the spirit of a past age, and has done so magnificently.

The Huntington Library

Ray Allen Billington