

BOOK REVIEWS AND BOOK NOTES

Edited by JAMES A. BARNES

Temple University

Benjamin Franklin. By Carl Van Doren. (New York: The Viking Press, 1938. Pp. xix, 845. \$3.75.)

John Adams once said that a biography of Benjamin Franklin would have to be an intellectual history of the eighteenth century. Touching life at many points, both in America and in Europe, Franklin was the finest product of the Enlightenment, the greatest man of his time—a man who, says Mr. Van Doren, would have been outstanding in any age. "His mind was a federation of purposes, working harmoniously together," and specialized as he was to versatility, Poor Richard's many-sidedness has baffled biographers. Two problems have always faced students of Franklin: first, the discovery and compilation of the mere facts of his varied life (no accurate chronology of his life is as yet available); and second, the knitting together of Franklin in all his rôles in order to preserve the whole character of the man. The patient and indefatigable accumulation of new materials by scholars during the past twenty years has gone far toward solving the first problem; the results of their labors Carl Van Doren weaves into a brilliant synthesis to triumph over the second. This amazing man, with his insatiable curiosity, his universal interests, and his multiple activities, comes alive in the pages of this biography and, seeing him as a part of all he met and learned, the reader begins to understand how Franklin came to dominate his age. The work is also something of an artistic *tour de force*, for Mr. Van Doren has with great success blended his own style with that of Franklin, phrasing his interpretation of his subject in what would quite probably have been the subject's own words.

During the formative years, Franklin's life seemed to divide itself into three parts, more or less distinctly separated: his career as a workman; his rôle as a public figure; and his inner life. With the passage of time these fused into the life of the "sage in action." Tracing this development step by step, Mr. Van Doren demolishes with the finality of good solid fact the rather widely accepted view that Benjamin Franklin was the prototype of the nineteenth-century industrialist and the twentieth-century Babbitt, the shrewd dollar chaser with cold eye open for the main chance, the practical Puritan secularized, who achieved his worldly success by the skilful cultivation of "contacts" through his Masonic brethren. It was high time someone punctured this bubble of Gallic superficiality. Mr. Van Doren also shows how Franklin became the perfect representative of America, how he more than any living man fitted himself, as much through accident as by design, to be its spokesman. By residence in Philadelphia, the practice of his trade with its business associations and ramifications, his connection

with the Great Awakening (the first unified colonial movement), his travels up and down the Colonies, his membership in the Pennsylvania Assembly and in the American Philosophical Society, his private philosophical correspondence, and his position in the Post Office (the most pervasive of inter-colonial agencies before the Continental Congress), he admirably equipped himself to become the interpreter of his people and their land, by use of similar agencies, to England and the Continent.

Strange as it may seem, the least satisfactory portion of this, as of any other biography of Franklin, is that dealing with him as a citizen of Philadelphia and of Pennsylvania. To my mind the reason for this fact is clear. The starting point for any study of Franklin is the *Autobiography*—a work widely, but seldom critically read. No definitive critical edition of this book exists, and in consequence biographers have leaned too heavily upon its statements, many of which are open to question. In the first place, it is the work of a very old man; in the second, it was written for the instruction of a grandson while the author was in Europe, far removed from the scene of his youth and from his private papers. Old men's memories play tricks on them. Franklin assumed somewhat expansively that most of the measures for civic betterment in the Quaker City sprang full-blown from his own fertile brain. Such was not the case. No colonial city, and few in Europe, could boast the galaxy of intellectual and civic leaders produced by Philadelphia in the first half of the eighteenth century—Logan, William Allen, Syng, Bartram, Hopkinson, Godfrey, Peters, Galloway, Kinnersley, Rittenhouse, Bond, Morgan—yes, and even the “illiterate” Bradford. Greatness and capacity were required to lead these men, for each was in his own way great. But to strip William Allen, for instance, of the credit for backing the ship *Argo* in its search for the Northwest Passage, or to deny Dr. Thomas Bond the leading rôle in the founding of the Pennsylvania Hospital is manifestly unfair. And how much of a part did Franklin actually play in the framing and passage of the laws providing Philadelphia with street lights, pavements, and a better watch? We do know he seldom attended the meetings of the Common Council. Similarly the opposition to the Proprietary Party in Pennsylvania required the shrewd management of men like Galloway as well as Benjamin Franklin. Something may be made of the view that Philadelphia was ripe for its great advance just as Franklin came along, and that it would have progressed toward civic and humanitarian greatness with or without the impetus and direction he provided. On the other hand, biographers have done something less than justice to Franklin's contribution to Pennsylvania's democratic Constitution of 1776 and his work as president of the state.

One Franklin could hardly have made Philadelphia, and it is small tribute to his greatness to picture him as the clever manipulator of small and passive puppets. Rather he was a leader among leaders, first among a group of able men as distinguished in their narrower fields if not so universally capable as he. The *Autobiography* can be in some respects as misleading as *The Way to Wealth*, which Mr. Van Doren so ably exposes. Benjamin Franklin never lacked a good press; some of his colleagues did.

Brown University

CARL BRIDENBAUGH.

Birth of the Oil Industry. By Paul Henry Giddens. Introduction by Ida M. Tarbell. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939. Pp. xxxix, 216. \$3.00.)

"Many people believe that Colonel E. L. Drake was the first to discover oil in the United States. This is not true." With such a blunt beginning Dr. Giddens proceeds to devote about one-fourth of his book to events before Drake's discovery well, and thus adds additional data to the growing mass of evidence that history is an evolutionary process rather than a series of sudden changes.

Beginning with the report of a Franciscan missionary in 1627, a succession of accounts describes the existence of oil springs in northwest New York and western Pennsylvania. Local inhabitants skimmed the oil from the water and used it as a medicine. A small but unimportant traffic in petroleum was carried on before 1845. About 1850 the lumber concerns of Brewer, Watson, and Company at Titusville began using petroleum from their springs to lubricate their machinery and light their mills. In the drilling of salt wells methods of drilling applicable to the oil industry were developed. Higher standards of living and the growing scarcity of whale oil produced a demand for better illuminants, while the greater use of machinery made necessary new sources for lubricating oils. Scientists in England and America sought first to satisfy the demand by producing oil from coal. The petroleum industry took over the techniques of refining which they developed.

The honor of discovering the valuable qualities in petroleum and its commercial possibilities must be divided among many men, but to George H. Bissell alone goes the credit for perceiving what others, strangely enough, had not grasped—that the way to secure a greater supply of rock oil was to drill for it. He and his partner, Jonathan G. Eveleth, purchased land on which were oil springs, secured the financial backing of New Haven capitalists, and organized the Pennsylvania Rock Oil Company of New York. Although Bissell and Eveleth were rather squeezed out of control of the enterprise, Drake's well stems from the formation of this company. Sent to Titusville by the Seneca Oil Company, a corporation formed by the New Haven stockholders of the original company, Drake surmounted numerous difficulties and completed the sinking of the first oil well. On August 27, 1859, the drill reached the pool, and the first oil rush in history was on. Like many other pioneer spirits, Drake failed to profit materially from his discovery and died years later a pensioner of the state of Pennsylvania.

One after another new wells were drilled, new fields opened: Pithole, descriptive of morals as well as geography, had its day and passed into oblivion; Cherry Run, West Hickory, Dennis Run, and other fields, charming names but hardly descriptive of their dismal appearance, boomed and collapsed. Prices fluctuated widely. Organizations for the purpose of maintaining high prices for oil were formed and soon disappeared.

The foundations of the oil industry were established during the first decade of its existence. Storage, transportation, and marketing facilities

were developed. The swashbuckling teamsters, who at first held the producers at their mercy, gave way to the railroads and pipe lines. An assured method of getting the oil to market was established, but big business controlled the newer facilities and conformed to the oft-told tale by charging high and discriminatory rates. Iron and steel storage tanks and tank cars came into use. Oil exchanges were established to provide a more orderly marketing system. Promoters were able to float numerous corporations with fabulous capitalization and found eager buyers for the stock.

Students of local history will find much of interest in the descriptions of the oil fields and towns. Those interested in business history will be disappointed, perhaps, because of the gap left between earlier experiments and Bissell's activities and because of the lack of clarity in the discussion of the manipulations of the New Haven capitalists which led to the organization of the Seneca Oil Company and to Bissell's recession into the background.

Miss Ida M. Tarbell has contributed an excellent introduction in which the high points of the book are summarized. Her admiration for the staunch and American virtues of freedom of action inherent in the oil producers has not cooled, apparently, since the publication of her *History of the Standard Oil Company*. Just why the attempts of the producers to form organizations for the purpose of maintaining prices at absurdly high levels should be judged by a standard wholly different from that applied to similar activities of refiners and railroads, on the part this reviewer cannot fully comprehend.

Dr. Giddens has used his sources admirably. A useful bibliography is appended. One may hope that his treatment of the beginnings of one of our most important industries may stimulate similar studies of other industries.

Oklahoma A. and M. College

O. A. HILTON.

The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam, 1655-1665. By William I. Hull. (Swarthmore College Monographs on Quaker History, No. 4. Swarthmore, Pa., 1938. Pp. xi, 346. Illustrations. \$4.00.)

With this study of the founding of Quakerism in Amsterdam Professor Hull returns, after a brief excursion into Penn biography (cf. Monograph No. 3, *Eight First Biographies of William Penn in Seven Languages and Seven Lands*, reviewed in PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY, IV (April, 1937), 136), to the main theme of his monograph series on the history of Quakerism in Holland. The depth as well as the breadth of the series becomes clearer in this interesting volume, and the character of the enterprise as a definitive study of Dutch Quakerism is evident.

It was in Amsterdam in 1655 that English Quaker missionaries, particularly William Ames and William Caton, began their effort to plant the seeds of their religion in the Low Countries. The story of the first ten years, as told by Professor Hull in great detail, is one of devoted labor in a difficult field. The relatively liberal standards of religious toleration in Holland, as well as the presence of Mennonites, Collegiants, and other pietistic and mystical groups, encouraged the Quakers to hope that they

might find ready converts among the Dutch. William Ames, a former Puritan army man, whose biography is here outlined for the first time, and William Caton, a young protégé of George Fox and Margaret Fell, literally gave their lives to the propagation of the faith. Other English Friends assisted them, but they gained a foothold for Quakerism in Holland only with the greatest difficulty. Tolerant as they were, the Dutch feared the influence of a people who in their minds were one with the murderous Anabaptists of Münster and the Fifth Monarchy Men. Clergy, magistrates, and mob united to denounce, imprison, and stone the unwelcome Quakers, and the Friends spent most of their time defending themselves against the opposition which their presence and preaching aroused. The record of this controversy, as revealed by Dr. Hull, stems from the archives of Amsterdam and its clergy and from the ninescore Quaker and anti-Quaker pamphlets which appeared in Holland between 1655 and 1666. Ames died in 1662 and Caton in 1665, but not before they had made converts in Amsterdam and elsewhere who in later years became the nucleus of a truly Dutch Society of Friends, a group which had a flourishing life in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and persisted until about 1800.

The struggles of the early days of Quakerism on the Continent illuminate by contrast the story of the founding and settlement of Pennsylvania, where the obstacles were natural rather than human, and where the results were much more impressive. It is a different story, but it does throw light on the background of experience which led Friends to turn to colonization in the new world, since conversion in the old was so difficult. The relations of Quakers and Mennonites in Holland are important as a background for their later relations in America. Ames and Caton had high hopes of extensive conversions among the Mennonites, but in spite of the similarities between the doctrines of the English Quakers and the Dutch Mennonites, conversions were few and amalgamation slight. In fact, the conversion of Jacob and Judith Sewel, parents of William, the first great historian of Quakerism, aroused their fellow Mennonites in Amsterdam to active opposition to the proselytizing Quakers. Only after the first flush of Quaker zeal cooled did the Mennonites and Friends discover their basic similarity of belief and spirit of toleration which enabled them to live peaceably side by side in Pennsylvania.

This fourth volume in what is the most exhaustive history of Quakerism in any of its outposts whets the appetite for more. For this reason the recent announcement of Dr. Hull's retirement from active service on the faculty of Swarthmore College and from the librarianship of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore is less unwelcome than it would otherwise be. We may now look forward to the rapid appearance of the remaining volumes in his great series on the history of Quakerism in Holland. It is the culmination of a lifetime of study in this field, as well as in the related subjects of international law and general Quaker history. In thus making available the fruits of his research Dr. Hull has placed us deeply in his debt.

Haverford College

THOMAS E. DRAKE.

Philadelphia Folks. By Cornelius Weygandt. (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938. Pp. xx, 357. \$4.00.)

This book is a series of essays regarding life and ways in the Philadelphia of the past. Dr. Weygandt has lived a life of keen observation, and his great love of his home region has made his descriptions lush with affectionate richness of verbal adornment.

Philadelphia is a city with a country heart. The country penetrates to the center of the city and the city reaches out into innumerable suburbs. Comfortable ways, good living, seemly conduct, unhurried action, and satisfied individualism are traits which to Dr. Weygandt seem most characteristic of this city. He is most eloquent about those "good old days, those early eighties, when American life was at its most generous for folks of middling income, horse-and-carriage people, with two girls and a man on the place, greenhouse, hotbeds, fat garden and hens let out into the back street."

This series of essays has much in it for the social historian. Old customs, descriptions of people and institutions, and reminiscences of important happenings in the Philadelphia region are presented for his use. Even more important are the examples of the psychology of suburbanite Philadelphia which are here so consciously and sometimes unconsciously revealed. But it is a one-sided picture, a picture of comfortable Philadelphia with little of its poverty and less of the new Philadelphia which is such a different city from the old. It is a rich book pleasing to the taste and should take its place beside *The Red Hills*, *The Wissahickon Hills*, and *A Passing America* upon the shelves of Pennsylvania historians.

University of Pennsylvania

ROY F. NICHOLS.

Moccasins in the Wilderness. By Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck. (Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company. Pp. 238. \$1.50.)

Our young people cannot have too many stories with a background of Pennsylvania history. If the effort to teach children to read more rapidly is successful, the supply of such stories will never equal the demand.

Boys and girls have a right to ask that historical stories be interesting, and teachers should require that the background be correct. Mrs. Buck's *Moccasins in the Wilderness* will interest not only girls, whom she has particularly in mind, but boys as well. The imaginary but entirely plausible Fort Graham where the story begins is situated near the junction of the Allegheny and Kiskiminetas Rivers. The scene shifts to Fort Pitt and thence to Sandusky and back, with many danger-spiced hours in the forest. A few incidents are transferred either in time or in space, but the general truth of the picture is not affected. Among the historical characters who appear are James Poers, the minister; Simon Girty, the Tory renegade; and Colonel Daniel Brodhead.

We frequently hear demands for the presentation of Pennsylvania history in fiction, and in return we sigh for an accurate cataloging of those which exist. *Moccasins in the Wilderness* should be called to the attention of

teachers and scout leaders, especially those in Western Pennsylvania. Naturally, stories about Eastern Pennsylvania have been the more numerous, and it is pleasant to see the numbers becoming more nearly equal.

Gettysburg

ELSIE SINGMASTER.

Rifles for Washington. By Elsie Singmaster. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938. Illustrated. Pp. xii, 321. \$2.25.)

Parents whose children are of neo-literate age may well remember this book at gift-time. Through the eyes of a youngster the Revolutionary War is recreated: a sixteen-year-old lad of the York county frontier sets out in 1775 to join Washington's army and amid the camps grows up through seven years of credible adventure. The telling of the story relies mainly on dialogue, vivid, believable, flavored with eighteenth-century personality and happily evasive of the polysyllabic. This is Miss Singmaster's thirty-third book, by the way. With its terrain in good part Pennsylvania, the volume takes its place beside Elizabeth H. Buck's *Moccasins in the Wilderness* and the tri-authored *With Rifle and Plow* recently issued by the University of Pittsburgh Press in a distinctive threesome of juvenilia so backgrounded—books of clarity, camera quality, and reasonably firm historicity.

University of Pittsburgh

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH.