NOTES AND QUERIES

Book Notices

FRANKLIN PIERCE. YOUNG HICKORY OF THE GRANITE HILLS. By Roy
Franklin Nichols, Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania,

It is not to be questioned, probably, that every man who ever came
to be, or shall become, a President of the United States should have his
biographer. The very office lends distinction to him who holds it, though
it is likely, as has been believed, that in Millard Fillmore and Franklin
Pierce the American Presidency reached the nadir of that moronic com-
plexion which it wore in the period from John Quincy Adams to Abraham
Lincoln. Intelligence was told to go about its business and let politics
alone when Jackson ascended the throne, and afterward, for long years,
African slavery kept us in the slough of littleness.

Pierce's turn came in 1852, and out of New England, the last of all
places for a man of his pattern of mind. In the exclamation of R. H.
Dana, Jr., we may find a description, as good for us at this later day
as it was for the generation for which the words were phrased—"A New
England Democrat, doughface, militia colonel, a kind of third-rate
county or, at most, state politician President of the United States!!"

In addition to this Pierce had a reputation as a fop and for tipsiness,
from which he reformed and to which he reverted. Four years of such
a man in the Presidency were long. His excuse for his political course
was a love of the Constitution which served the uses of so many men
in our public life in the period, though they diverged so far from one
another in their understanding of the meaning of our great charter.
Compromise, peace, states and peoples of states living on together in
harmony were the theme, while parties were being reorganized and the
inescapable war of the sections was nearer at hand than even the
wisest knew. It is quite impossible for the biographer of such a figure
to be very enthusiastic for his task, or for him to inspire in his readers
an admiration for the poor subject of his book.

However, the historian may not change his picture with a view to
making it unduly pleasant. Professor Nichols is one who has scholarly
standards and his investigations direct him to the truth. He had no
object to serve and serves none except the presentation of fact. He has
chosen to labor in a corner where there was darkness and has put us
under lasting obligation to him for throwing light upon obscurity. The
book is pleasantly worded. The various events are correlated skilfully
and the narrative moves on so that it may be followed with ease. If
Pierce's life were one in which trifles that stir us but little today pre-
dominated, we may be sure that they have been put together by one
who makes the most of them without giving them undue value. His
thumb-nail sketches of the members of Pierce's cabinet and his quick
strokes generally, picturing a man or a situation, are delightful.

Even in such a time how was it, it may be asked, that Pierce could
become a President of the United States? In the first place he was an
orator—a man who could make himself heard. He had an impressive
presence and affability. He was beside this "available"—a consideration
which has had so much to do in this democracy in giving us our Presi-
dents. It is "availability" in a particular situation with reference to
the reigning mood of the populace and the catching of the necessary
votes that determine the choice of a candidate. If he shall not com-
mend himself to the politicians in these regards, he will not often be
brought forward for the suffrages of the people. The fact that Pierce was so inconspicuous as to have few active enemies; that he promised to do no harm to the Compromise; that he, though a Northern man, would let slave owners alone in the prosecution of their schemes to extend their territory and to preserve the balance of power; that he came, indeed, from the state of John P. Hale and the very land of Abolition made him the man of the hour. Heroes fit some periods in history; dolts and sluggards thrive in other days.

Professor Nichols's solution of the problem of documentation may be the correct one, at any rate for a book which it is hoped may attract the general reader. This reviewer of his interesting and very valuable work, marked as it is by evidences of the most industrious research, prefers the footnote. The note may be passed if it is not wanted—there it is at the bottom of the page for whom it is meant. Professor Nichols's ample sources are mentioned for the separate chapters at the end of the volume. He also appends a complete bibliography and some material of a highly important character in regard to the Ostend Manifesto, that scheme to buy Cuba from Spain and add it to the slave ground of the South.

ELLIS PAXSON OBERHOLTZER.


To those interested in American mercantile and naval history—especially that of our War for Independence—no better account can be found than in this recently published volume of one of the many New England men who took such an active part in the struggle against England during the years 1775-1782. Born in 1749, of Connecticut parents, Gideon Olmsted soon learned the art of seamanship and followed that calling for over half a century; but his most thrilling experiences were had during the Revolutionary war. He commanded the sloop Seaflower, the privateer Polly, and the re-captured English privateer sloop Active, as well as the privateersmen Gamecock and Hauck.

Three times was he captured by the British, was wounded in action, and while he captured six English vessels during the war, his most unfortunate experience was to be found when in command of the Active. It was when bringing this vessel into the port of Philadelphia that he was accused by some as being an enemy captain, his ship libelled by the Pennsylvania Admiralty Courts, and he began a legal struggle which lasted for thirty years. During this period Olmsted spent much of his time in Philadelphia, and as a result of his legal warfare the famous "Fort Rittenhouse" struggle was brought about. The author has covered all fields of Gideon's naval activities with meticulous care and as the result of this research has succeeded in giving to students of American history a worthwhile publication which is well worth the time spent in perusing its pages. One gains a more intimate picture of the War for Independence, especially on the sea, by reading this work. And the long struggle between the State of Pennsylvania and the United States over the famous case began. David Rittenhouse, who as Treasurer of Pennsylvania, stake-holder of the proceeds from the sale of the re-captured Active, which were invested in United States Certificates, was the innocent cause of that long struggle between the two authorities.

Mr. Middlebrook has covered the marine experiences of Captain Olmsted, as well as the long legal battle, in a most entertaining manner and given his readers an exceedingly instructive outlook into a little known field of American history. The unfortunate part of this book is that the edition is limited to two hundred copies and many will be prevented from perusing its worthwhile pages. Like the author's other pub-
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Applications.—The Frigate *South Carolina*, Revolutionary War; The Loomis Journal, War with Tripoli; History of Maritime Connecticut, 1775–1783; and Captain Samuel Smedley, *Ship Defence*;—a mass of historical data are to be found within the pages of “Captain Gideon Olmsted, Connecticut Privateersman, Revolutionary War.”

H. E. G.

**Notes and Queries**

Information is desired about living descendants of:

1. Dancy Stanley (brother of John Wright Stanley, Revolutionary patriot), whose daughters Eliza and Sally married Rhodes and Crittenden in North Carolina, about 1810.

2. Wright Stanley (brother), whose grandsons Charles and William Ward were in California in 1856.


4. John Duncan of Barnstable, Massachusetts, who married a widow Appleton at Beaufort, North Carolina, in the 1750’s.

The three Stanleys were born in Charles City County, Virginia, 1742–56.

EDMUND RUFFIN BECKWITH,
20 Exchange Place,
New York City.
From the oil portrait of Richard Penn by Joseph Highmore, presented to the Society by Mrs. John Frederick Lewis