BOOK REVIEWS


The history of diplomacy is no longer what it used to be. Bemis, Owsley, and the present author have seen to that. The merchant, farmer, and small-time politician have been admitted to the company of ambassadors, princes, and military attachés. The wharf has become as important as the drawing-room, bills of lading as revealing as dossiers, and the boatman’s curse as telling as the whispers of designing diplomats. To use the less florid words of the author, “commercial and political developments conditioned the work of the diplomats and in large measure determined the outcome of their negotiations.”

This means that, as far as this book is concerned, western Pennsylvania has come into its own. No problem agitated the people of this region more than the “Mississippi question” in the opening years of the nineteenth century. Only by transporting their surpluses of wheat, meat, and liquors to New Orleans could the merchants and farmers pay their bills. Only by espousing the American right of free trade down the river could politicians expect to be elected to office. This and other local facts are skillfully woven by Whitaker into the larger pattern of his monumental work. Pittsburgh as a gateway to the West, as a nascent industrial center, as a thriving mart of trade, as a center for shipbuilding is made an integral part in a great international movement that could have but one outcome—the acquisition of New Orleans.

The impingement of these local factors on the course of diplomacy is clearly demonstrated. It is pointed out that in 1786 when Congress was ready to acquiesce in the closing of New Orleans there was no commerce with that port either from the north Atlantic coast or from the inland towns. In 1802 the downstream exports from the latter were valued at two million dollars, and to the Atlantic ports there came seventy-four American ships direct from New Orleans. “Here was an argument,” writes Whitaker, “that even merchants on the remote Atlantic seaboard could understand . . . By 1802 it was evident that the more produce the West sold down the river, the more goods it would buy over the mountains.” As for Spain, the author has clearly shown that this overwhelming trade effected a commercial revolution in lower Louisiana so
that the country could no longer be maintained as an integral part of the old Spanish empire.

This is a worthwhile book for everyone to read who is interested in the history of western Pennsylvania and in the relation of this region to world history. It is written with an animation of style that provides a happy escape from the dullness of the average historical narrative. It is skillfully arranged so that objectives and developments appear in normal and clear proportions and with a minimum of the clutter of long quotations, antiquarian discursiveness, and barren speculation.

*Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey*  
**Randolph C. Downes**


This volume, like the others in the series to which it belongs, is not a history of the nation in the period with which it is concerned but a survey of the life of the people. Political, diplomatic, and military events are ignored; and economic and social conditions and developments are extensively portrayed. The greater part of the volume is devoted to the decade of the fifties, with topical chapters dealing with transportation and industry, agriculture, immigration, health and amusements, intellectual activities, and religion. Labor problems, crime, drinking and prohibition, and feminism are treated in a chapter entitled "The Growing Pains of Society"; and separate chapters deal with the special aspects of the South and the "New West." A chapter on the slavery issue furnishes the transition to the treatment of the war period, which deals with the preparations for the struggle and its effects on the life of the people in the two sections. The central theme of the book is the increasing divergence, leading to inevitable conflict, between the culture patterns of the North and the South; and many of the chapters conclude with summaries that emphasize that divergence. More attention might have been given to the elements that made for cohesion such as a common cultural heritage and the economic interdependence of the sections, especially in the interior. If the conflict was irrepresible, perhaps also the ultimate reunion was inevitable.

Any book that deals with the life of the people must be highly selective, for the possible topics and the pertinent materials are almost unlimited. It is natural for the writer to use the materials with which he is most familiar and