
When in midsummer, 1755, General Edward Braddock marched to defeat on the banks of the Monongahela and the frontiers of Pennsylvania were thrown open to an unprecedented series of Indian forays, Benjamin Franklin, then postmaster of Philadelphia, editor of the Pennsylvania Gazette, and member of the provincial assembly, was presented with an opportunity to demonstrate talents seldom ascribed to him. As head of the committee of defense of the assembly he was commissioned by Governor Robert H. Morris to lead an expedition to the frontier for the purpose of organizing a system for defense. A week before Christmas, 1755, he accordingly set out from Philadelphia. For fifty days he was on the frontier—at Bethlehem, at Easton, at Reading—planning protective measures, organizing militia, and reestablishing confidence. His final task was to advance still farther westward to Lehigh Gap, where the village of Gnadenhutten had but recently been reduced to ashes by the Indians; here he erected Fort Allen as an outpost. He hurried back to Philadelphia on February 5 to take his seat in the reconvened legislature and to become a "general" in the "Regiment and Artillery Company of Philadelphia," organized for defense against a threatened invasion from Canada.

From varied and widely scattered sources Mr. Nolan has brought together the materials for this narrative of Benjamin Franklin's brief military career. That the story needed telling is demonstrated by the fact that it has been given only incidental attention by Franklin's various biographers and that it is not even mentioned in the otherwise comprehensive article on Franklin in the Dictionary of American Biography. There is reason for rejoicing in the way Mr. Nolan has performed his task. With nice balance he has sketched in the necessary background and from a multiplicity of detail has woven a simple but dramatic narrative. While he sees Franklin's mission as but one incident in the struggle between the provincial government and the settlers, he does not ignore its significance as an important step in the British counter-campaign against the French. Fully appreciative of the nature of the Franklin genius, Mr. Nolan draws his hero with such humor and understanding that the portrait at times becomes kindly caricature.
To students of western Pennsylvania history the book is chiefly important for its portrayal of the results in the East of a western event. They will find pleasure, however, in the occasional glimpses that are afforded of characters that are important in the western scene. For example, there is the picture of Conrad Weiser at Reading, sulking because Richard Peters forgot to bring him a sword, and of the commissioners, scurrying around to find him a sword so that the conference could proceed. The Reverend Charles Beatty, who two years later was destined to preach the first Protestant sermon on the site of Pittsburgh, was chaplain on this expedition. Franklin found him a "very agreeable" companion and was delighted when the Presbyterian clergyman agreed to distribute the rum to the soldiers after prayers in order to induce them to attend. Any student of frontier history cannot fail to be delighted by such bits as Franklin's views on the use of dogs on a military expedition: "In case of meeting a party of the enemy, the dogs are all then to be turned loose and set on. They will be fresher and finer for having been previously confined, and will confound the enemy a good deal, and be very serviceable" (p. 37).

The book is as pleasant in format as any it has been the pleasure of this reviewer to handle. The binding, paper, type, and general make-up are entirely admirable. The headpieces, consisting, with one exception, of vignettes by J. G. Chapman from H. Hastings Weld's edition of the Autobiography, are a happy addition to the book, and the end-paper map of the expedition greatly clarifies the text. The lack of an index in such an otherwise satisfactory volume as this is greatly to be regretted.

Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey


To illustrate the three-quarter-century struggle between the English and French colonists for the possession of the interior of North America, Miss Calder has edited a collection of heretofore unpublished journals, surveys, and letters. Two of the eighteen accounts thus made available are of interest to students of western Pennsylvania history.

An extract from the journal kept in 1756 and 1757 by Major John Smith, the original of which is in the Public Record Office, London, contains ambitious plans for the capture of French forts in the West. Major Smith had been a