American Opinion of Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century.

By Sister Mary Augustina (Ray), B.V.M., Ph.D. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1936. 456 p.)

A revealing analysis, this study is of value to those students of American intellectual history interested in securing perspective on the attitude of the average eighteenth-century American towards the Roman Catholic Church.

In the first two chapters the writer, with the aid of thorough documentation, shrewdly traces the English background and origins of the American non-Catholic conception of the papacy and the Church of Rome. The next three chapters vividly record the hostile interpretation of Catholic culture, the predominant influence of the Protestant clergy in fostering that interpretation, and the influence of the educational system and the press in shaping the intellectual and religious ideas of the times. The author then appraises the practical implications of this acquired American religious attitude and its influence on the social and political life of the average colonial Catholic; recreates the Catholic's days as he saw and felt them; and interprets events and problems of the times, such as the Spanish-French-Indian conflicts, immigration, land-holding, and the franchise, in terms of their effect on him, his daily life, and material destiny.

The beginnings of a happy change in attitude toward the blessings of religious liberty and tolerance are revealed as the work progresses. The aid of Catholic France and Spain during the Revolution, the influence of Lafayette, and the efforts of the American Catholic laity brought about divergences from traditional religious prejudice and gradually altered the assumption that the Roman Catholic was a social and political problem, essentially wanting in concern for democratic ideals and national unity. The effect that the federal and state constitutions had in promoting better relations between the various religious denominations furnishes further evidence of changing conceptions of religious and social tolerance. The writer sums up the situation: "The ideal of religious liberty embodied in the constitutional bill of rights, together with the conception of social and political equality which was gradually accepted as the corollary of that vision, was destined for fuller, if not complete realization.
... If much of the old prejudice remained, much also had disappeared. Both tendencies are reflected in the various phases of American life—in its legal aspects, its literary output, its human relationships. The most important single gain perhaps was the opportunity for the Catholic to live a normal social life, to slough off his own prejudices and to help his Protestant and deistic neighbor to do the same in the give and take of everyday life."

With an excellent format, copious notes, exhaustive bibliography, and index, this book is both comprehensive and meticulous but far from pedantic. Its treatment of the controversial religious issues is both exceptionally well informed and eminently fair. Every page reveals the author as a sincere and painstaking research worker who has successfully achieved the historic sense.

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As indicated in an article by the reviewer in the September, 1936, issue of this magazine, the background of the early history of western Pennsylvania is complex and involves many different approaches. In this connection it cannot be overlooked that early western Pennsylvania was, from the point of view of its later history, fundamentally a by-product of the British Empire as it was in the eighteenth century. In these volumes Professor Gipson has endeavored with much success to furnish any interested reader a scholarly survey of the British Empire in the middle of that century. As noted in his preface and demonstrated in footnotes the author has devoted years of laborious research to his subject. It is probable that additional volumes are to follow these three, and it is to be hoped that nothing will prevent their issuance.

To a great extent it is impossible to judge a whole by a mere part, but in so far as this can be done, it may be assumed that this comprehensive work, on its completion, will be a valuable contribution to British imperial historical writing. It is, of course, improbable that the treatment of any particular topic