BOOK REVIEWS

*Allegheny County: A Sesqui-Centennial Review.* Edited by George E. Kelly. (Pittsburgh, Published by the Allegheny County Sesqui-Centennial Committee, c1938. xv, 364 p.; revised and enlarged, xv, 402 p. Illustrations, maps.)

September 24, 1938, marked the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of Allegheny County. Following the custom established at the time of the centennial celebration of 1888, an elaborate printed record of the history of the county has been published by the Sesqui-Centennial Commission under the auspices of the Board of County Commissioners. The volume thus produced is the co-operative effort of twenty-two individuals who offer in popular form the story of the development and present status of the county, and unlike the earlier record of fifty years ago the account of the actual celebration is reduced to a minimum. The volume, too, is purposely designed to bear more heavily upon the social and cultural history of the region than did its predecessor. It is not, however, an attempt to present an exhaustive history of the territory, and if at times it may appear to be merely a résumé of the history of the city of Pittsburgh it must be remembered that the county owes much of its greatness to that city.

Because each chapter is written by a different individual there is of necessity some duplication both of scope and of example. The chapters are on the whole well written and are the products of local scholars and authorities in several fields. Thus Mr. Henry Hornbostel writes of architecture, Judge Musmanno of the law, and Dr. Theodore Diller of medicine. Thus, too, do Dr. Leland D. Baldwin and Dr. Russell J. Ferguson, of the history department of the University of Pittsburgh, and Mr. Frank B. Sessa, of the staff of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, contribute respectively an historical review, an essay on politics, and an account of cultural growth. The most challenging of the chapters, however, is the one on religion, written by well-known representatives of the Protestant, Catholic, and Hebrew faiths. This particular chapter first appears in the revised edition, which also contains a fuller account of the history of labor organization in the county.

For the general reader the book will provide many interesting and informative hours. Attractively bound and of convenient size, its physical make-up
leaves little to be desired. The illustrations are numerous and well chosen, and the minor criticism that no source is given for any of the illustrations will be unnoticed by most readers. With one exception no credit is given for any of the seven maps, although the first two of them appeared in a 1937 publication on the history of Pittsburgh. The lack of an index is a serious defect if the volume is to be useful for reference; and the fact that the first reference to the actual date of the establishment of the county appears on page 63 may irritate some readers.

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This study is an ambitious attempt to portray the complicated picture of the Liberty, Native American, Free-soil, Know-nothing, and Republican parties in Pennsylvania politics for the period 1840 to 1860. It is presented in an interesting style that helps the reader to overlook a number of limitations and defects.

To begin with, it is unfortunate that so broad a study had to be presented in one volume. It would have been much more valuable as a serious contribution to historical knowledge if the author had chosen one of these parties and developed it fully. As it is, much more work remains to be done if a complete understanding of these movements is to be gained.

The study begins with a summary account of the history of the Antimasonic party in the 1830’s, of the events that brought about its downfall, and of the gradual dispersion of its members. The main discussion is then undertaken with the rise of the Liberty party followed by the development of the Native American. The trends developed in these parties are carried over and included in the Free-soil and Know-nothing organizations. In turn, the objectives and aims of the members of these groups are then joined together to create the Republican party, which the author labels uncritically “The Triumph of the Liberty Movement.”