Following these histories laid in more distant fields, *Whirling Spindle* in its final third is a broad sparkling account of the social life of Pittsburgh families in their progression of homes in Minersville, on Ridge Avenue, and in Shadyside; their schools, churches, amusements, and cultural life as well as some references to business affairs, with side lights on connections in Philadelphia, Washington, and abroad.

As usual with publications of the University of Pittsburgh Press, its format and press-work have as great distinction and attraction as the skill of the author and the subject matter of her book.

Altogether, *Whirling Spindle* is well worth reading and owning.

*Pittsburgh*  
HENRY O. EVANS

*Old Thad Stevens: A Story of Ambition.* By RICHARD NELSON CURRENT. (Madison; The University of Wisconsin Press, 1942. viii, 344 p. Illustrations.)

Thaddeus Stevens, grim, brutally frank, clubfooted, the dictator of Congress during the Civil War and reconstruction period, has never lacked attention from historians and journalists. The seeming enigmas of his long career and testy personality have fascinated biographers, who have tried to explain him by fitting him into a pattern of their own making. Some have noted the savage wit that characterized his speech and conjectured that he was an illegitimate son of Talleyrand. Some have wandered down Freudian paths and surmised that his failure to marry resulted from a glandular maladjustment or from his worship of his mother. Others have seen the key to his character in his alleged love for his mulatto housekeeper. All have pictured him as a bitter soul, tortured by hatred of the South and panting to punish and humiliate the Southern people. “None has taken adequately into account,” remarks Professor Current, “the simple fact that he was, above everything else, a man of politics seeking always to get and exercise the powers of public office.” Emphasizing this theme but not neglecting the intriguing personal aspects of his subject, Dr. Current has produced a scholarly and gracefully written biography. It is by far the best life of Stevens we have, and should be read by every student of the Civil War, of reconstruction, and of Pennsylvania history.

Dr. Current’s volume treats all phases of Stevens’ varied life: his birth and growth in Vermont; his removal to Pennsylvania where he practiced law in Gettysburg and Lancaster and became the owner of the Caledonia Iron Works; his first ventures into politics as an Antimason and Know-Nothing; his appear-
ance on the national political stage; and his rise to supreme power in Congress in the years of civil war and reconstruction. The emphasis is naturally on Stevens as a national figure, but there is a lot of Pennsylvania politics in the story, particular space being given to the struggle between Old Thad and Simon Cameron to control the state Republican organization. The Stevens that emerges from these pages is, strangely enough, a frustrated figure. Despite his domination over Congress (the author calls him the greatest dictator that body ever had), Stevens failed to achieve his two greatest ambitions—to be a member of the Cabinet and to be a United States Senator from Pennsylvania.

The author rejects the widely-held idea that Stevens was a "Great Commoner" or a great equalitarian. He shows convincingly that from the beginning of his political career Stevens was the spokesman of the conservative business classes, with whom his interests were directly associated. Throughout his entire career Stevens used his influence in state and national politics to foster and advance the development of industrialism. His reconstruction program was dictated not by a hatred of the South but by a resolution to preserve against agrarian attacks the special privileges gained by business during the Civil War.

If the book has a fault it is the exceedingly brief treatment accorded Stevens' part in the fight for free schools in Pennsylvania. The author concedes that this episode shows that Stevens might have had an idealistic streak in him, but immediately advances the suspicion that Old Thad was probably trying to drive a wedge between the Democrats, who were split on the school issue. There seems to be no documentation for this statement.

Louisiana State University  
T. Harry Williams


Here is another valuable collection of *The Territorial Papers of the United States.* This volume relates to the territory of Michigan during the years from 1803 to 1819. There are to be two additional volumes covering the years from 1819 to Michigan's admission into the union in 1836.

Like all previous volumes this one has been carefully edited. It will be of incomparable value to persons interested in the early territorial period of Michigan. Most of the papers here included are of an administrative character. This is only natural. Most of the business that occurred between the federal govern-