BOOK REVIEWS


By title as well as by content this voluminous work is primarily a contribution to the history and historiography of journalism. As is expected, the book is well characterized in statements on the paper cover, by the publisher, about the author and the book. Since, however, paper covers are not kept in libraries, it might have been well to indicate on the title page that J. Cutler Andrews is a Ph.D. (1938) from Harvard University and Professor of History and Chairman of the Department of History at Pennsylvania College for Women in Pittsburgh.

As claimed, correctly, by the publisher this volume is of particular interest to newsmen, and professional military personnel. In his Foreword Arthur M. Schlesinger well estimates the book. Three of his sentences may be used. Dr. Andrews, he says, “has written a scholarly, readable, comprehensive narrative of the war correspondents on the Northern side of the great sectional conflict.” In further elaboration, he says, “For no other war in modern times, European or American, has the news reporting been analyzed as exhaustively.” In careful statement, he adds, later on, “This book demonstrates that the Civil War was of decisive importance in developing the technique of modern war correspondence,” a sentence in which the scope and value of the book is admirably stated.

The organizational and statistical data about the book are important. In twenty-four chapters, the volume furnishes information about journalistic activities in connection with all major and not a few minor campaigns and battles from 1861 to the surrender of Lee at Appomattox in 1865. On these chapters there are nearly two thousand footnotes, which should have been at the bottom of the pages of context, but are found organized by chapters at the end of the book. The list of Northern reporters includes nearly four hundred names, of which one hundred and seventy-seven are indexed, as included in the narrative of the context. Quite naturally only about one-sixth of those listed and one-third of those indexed are given more than mention.

The extensive bibliography, with the inevitable omission of some
little known but highly relevant manuscripts and imprints on specific military matters covers nineteen pages of fine print. Divided into nine somewhat overlapping classifications, the bibliography includes nearly five hundred items many of them sets of volumes. Conspicuous are thirty sets of papers of individuals, sixty-two newspaper files and twelve sets of published and unpublished government documents. The extensive index is highly valuable but not free from the usual errors, as illustrated by the names of correspondents, Spenser, Stanley, Start and Woodal.

The mere volume of the above data, both literally and figuratively carries great weight. A more serious matter is the purport of such scholarship and extended research. In careful survey of the volume this reviewer continuously asked about the value of the material for other than the history of journalism, a matter followed by the more important question of the significance of the press. The answer too frequently was bound to be that much of journalistic history of this type, is incidental. The emphasis is upon news and especially upon getting in print “fustest with the mostest.” Scoops and beats seem more important than wisdom, influence or, in many cases, truth itself. Journalistic prestige and circulation figures seem to dominate the situation. The age old query about the value of newspapers as historical evidence comes up here. It is well known that official military reports are often inaccurate and unreliable and Dr. Andrews mentions this. And he admits that journalistic reports are even more subject to such shortcomings.

The question of the influence of the press on army command and administration is sensed by the author but, of course, not determined. The influence upon government and politics is similarly mentioned and likewise left uncertain. In historiography of journalism, such as this, as well as in journalism itself, it appears that the matter of how one got the news, and how it was gotten to the printer is more important than the news itself.

Chapter twenty-four, with the inadvisable title “Thirty,” might well have been used earlier, possibly as the fifth chapter. It is a postview, but much of it could have been used as a preview. Significant interpretative citations are relevant to this review. On Page 638, Godkin is quoted as saying, “There never was a war which afforded such materials for ‘special correspondence’ of the best kind as this one.” Dr. Andrews, Page 628, states, “Clearly this tragic conflict offered unusual opportunities for outstanding achievement in the reporting field,”
an objective historical finding, though the idea of achievement, at such tragic cost, is appalling.

The author himself asks five questions relating to "Any over-all judgment of Northern press performance during Civil War days"... The last of these, about "press performance" (not about the history of the war) interestingly enough, is, "And in what measure did their reporting have a propaganda, as well as an objective, value for the men in the service and the folks back home."

Dr. Andrews in his love for the history of journalism has not lost historical objectivity. The context, and particularly chapter twenty-four, reveal the numerous and mighty shortcomings and not uncommon criminalities of journalism. Yet the reader turns from such a work, however, excellently done, with several conclusions. The first of these is that something more than journalism must always be used in historical presentation. Another is that a much shorter and probably more important volume might be written on the influence of journalism, 1861-1865, on the totality of the story of those years in the United States.

In resume, this book seems to the reviewer highly valuable. It is, in current inflation, more than worth its list price and should have a large sale. A particular merit may be the very fact that it leaves the historical person, and probably others, discontented, dissatisfied with the picture so well presented.

Alfred P. James

Two Centuries of the Church of the Brethren in Western Pennsylvania. Compiled and published by the Historical Committee, District of Western Pennsylvania, Church of the Brethren. (Elgin, Ill., Brethren Publishing House, 1953. 644 pp. Appendix and Bibliography.)

This book will be of interest to a great many persons who have some ties with the people, known under the various names of Dunkers, German Baptists, Brethren or Church of the Brethren. Although the sect is not large in numbers, there are individuals in almost every community in Western Pennsylvania who were once affiliated with the Brethren, even though they now hold membership in another church. Beside these there are many more who are of Brethren descent. They