BOOK REVIEWS


In the twentieth century Benjamin Franklin has become a center of controversy. On the negative side of the ledger such writers as Max Weber, A. Whitney Griswold, Charles Angoff, and others attack Franklin as a materialist of bourgeois attributes, tinkering haphazardly at gadgets. On the positive side of the ledger there are such writers as Carl Van Doren, Stuart P. Sherman, Herbert W. Schneider, I. Bernard Cohen, Bernard Fay, to name a few, who extol Franklin’s universality, empirical nature, and utilitarianism. In either case, whether it be pro-Franklin or anti-Franklin, the evaluation is made on the interpretation of the man in the broad scope of history by a writer invariably blessed by hindsight. By such process Franklin sometimes loses personal warmth.

In the twenty-seven letters compiled in Mr. Franklin the reader discovers Franklin, the man, blessed with warmth of personality and exhibiting human traits that tingle with life and ripple with humor. Here are not the letters of earthshaking importance. Rather they are the letters of a man of the world willing to give advice to anyone for the taking, of a family man cursed with servant troubles, of an inquisitive man who rides down a dust storm to see how it functions, of a man of seventy tempted by a court beauty of Paris. Here are the letters of a brother, a husband, a friend, a politician, a scientist, a wit. All these epistolary efforts possess a diversity and scope that reveals the depth, charm, simplicity, and wisdom of the man, so that in the end one is gratified by the warmth of his human relationships and by his attitude towards life.

So well do the editors produce the humanity and humaneness of Franklin that one loses sight of his greatness, his diplomacy, and his political astuteness. The letters do not go beyond July 5, 1785. There is no core of material to bring out his work in the French and Indian War, his conciliatory efforts with England from January 1774 to March 16, 1775, or his achievements in the Revolution. These shortcomings will be rectified in the forthcoming twenty-five volume work of Franklin’s papers, edited by Leonard W. Labaree, and Whitefield J. Bell Jr.

Of special interest are the excellent and concise introductions that
Serve as preludes to the letters, so that a tenuous thread of continuity is provided throughout. Unfortunately the source of each letter is listed in the table of contents instead of in close proximity to the letter. The format and type are pleasing to the eye.

*Mr. Franklin* is not a work that will bring raves of commendation from the historian, for it is of necessity a cursory work; yet it serves as a worthy tribute to a worthy man, marking the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Franklin's birth.

*West Chester, Pennsylvania*  
Edward G. Everett


It will be agreed by many persons familiar with the period that the most influential American religious leader during the two crucial decades following 1855 was Bishop Matthew Simpson of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This new study of *The Life of Matthew Simpson* by Robert D. Clark, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts of the University of Oregon, is a significant contribution, both, to a better understanding of evolving Methodism, and to a clearer insight into the religious aspects of the great fratricidal conflict of a century ago.

Dr. Clark presents his study of the life and times of Bishop Simpson under twenty-five chapter headings, many of them with intriguing titles. The literary style is of a highly readable excellence, and the whole is obviously based upon thorough research into primary source materials. Full use is made of the Bishop's *diary and journal*, and of other private papers. The stirring events of the mid-nineteenth century are developed from contemporary records, especially the files of the different Methodist *Christian Advocates*.

The volume covers the span of Matthew Simpson's life, 1811 to 1884. He had close ties with Pittsburgh and the region round about. Born and reared at Cadiz in the then new frontier State of Ohio, he attended Madison College at Uniontown, Pennsylvania; commenced his ministry in the Pittsburgh Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church; served as a pastor in Pittsburgh, and then for a short time at Monongahela, from 1834 to 1837; and was a Professor and Vice-Prese-