BOOK REVIEWS


In 1936 Dr. Gipson published the first of a series of eight volumes under the general title of The British Empire before the American Revolution. The work under review is a revised version of the first volume. This series has been generally accepted by scholars as the final word on the period and is a classic in historical literature.

In making this revision Dr. Gipson showed the good judgment of not injuring a good book by radical changes. This volume, though fuller in treatment, has much in common with the original production. A chapter on Wales has been included and a useful summary at the end has been added.

There is a full, fair, and even sympathetic treatment of political, economic, and social conditions in each of the component parts of the British Isles. Religious and ethical conditions are also discussed, with a candid exposure of moral shortcomings. The reader is impressed with the great inequality as to economic status between the upper and lower classes. This was especially marked in Ireland and was one of the causes of the great distress suffered there by the masses in the unhappy period of the early 1740's. He points out, however, as other causes of the poverty of the Irish tenants, their idleness and over-indulgence in alcoholic beverages.

England is represented as being far ahead of the other states in economic well-being and the general welfare of the masses. Moral conditions were far from ideal, however; prostitution and drunkenness were far too prevalent, but in general the moral tone of the people was sound. Despite the "rotten borough" system, the control of the government by the upper classes and the graft that featured this control, the masses enjoyed considerable individual freedom. The unjust laws against Catholics were not enforced in any of the divisions and these religionists enjoyed freedom of worship. The obligation to give financial support to the established (Anglican) church, however, worked a hardship on them and Protestant dissenters.
A gloomy picture is presented of the Highland Scots and the Welsh farmers, as well as the Irish tenants. The union of Scotland with England was in the long run beneficial to the former, but the immediate effect was unfavorable. In Scotland industry was not as well organized as in England and so the manufacturers in Scotland could not compete on equal terms with their rivals in England.

One bright spot in the picture was the attractive appearance and rapid growth of the towns in all four of the political divisions.

A reviewer is expected, as I realize, to search for and point out factual misstatements and typographical errors. The sound scholarship of the author and the careful accuracy of the proofreader have deprived me of this opportunity. A careful scrutiny has resulted in locating only a comma where a period was intended and a reference (p. 79, note 98) that might mislead the reader into identifying the Moravians with the United Brethren.

In short it might be said that the new volume is a fuller and better version of one that already had top rank in American historiography.

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That a belated revival of interest in covered bridges has taken place is evident in the number of newspaper, magazine, and book publications in the last few years. This revival became recognizable to this reviewer during the preparation of an address before the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, published in the Society Magazine (Vol. 42, No. 1, March 1959). It was evident then, as now, that the number of covered wooden bridges in the United States can not be stated accurately. While there were over 1600 such bridges listed in thirty-one states in 1954, they have been disappearing rapidly especially on the main highways; most of the remaining wooden bridges are on secondary, county or township roads.

A recent report of the State Highway System of Pennsylvania states that there are now 132 state-maintained covered wooden