BOOK REVIEWS


Stefan Lorant's Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City is not a history in the strictly technical sense of the word. Rather, it is a picture book, designed to serve as a visual guide to what is happening to Pittsburgh in the name of "its great effort . . . to remake itself."

Those portions of the volume dealing with the past are, frankly, mere prelude to "the great things that are to come."

Mr. Lorant, naturally, was a stranger to his task. When Edgar J. Kaufmann, desiring a "de luxe" promotional production, "something no other city has, not even London or Paris or Rome," summoned him to the scene in 1954, he came simply as a visitor. In only a few days, according to his foreword, he drove, walked, climbed, floated, explored, talked, had meals, watched sunrise and sunset and was inspired by "the extraordinary performance of the people in saving their city from decay." The inspiration of his book, then, was "the crusade to rebuild."

But Mr. Lorant "had hardly started on the research" for the album proposed by Mr. Kaufmann when his patron died; and the project passed into the hands of the members of the Allegheny Conference, "foremost among them" being Theodore L. Hazlett, Jr., "legal architect of Pittsburgh's renaissance." It was inevitable, then, that the volume now published for the world market is a special plea for redevelopment. As such, it is part of a propaganda for nationwide renovation of cities and towns.

One of the major difficulties encountered by Mr. Lorant was and still is the fact that redevelopment has been a controversial subject. The editor and his sponsors, the principal contributors and their associates have been and still are involved in conflict with other personalities and groups opposed to "modernization" of every sort but most particularly hostile to "interference" by "outside agencies."

An objective reviewer, therefore, is obliged to notice Mr. Lorant's handicap both critically and with sympathy. Like many other elephantine achievements of the publishing industry, his Pittsburgh enterprise is certain to be coincidentally commended and condemned. However, careful study will prompt equitable judgment. Let it be repeated that Mr. Lorant is not a professional historian and his book
is not a history in the customary meaning of the word. But it also
should be mentioned in fairness that he is a journalist and he has
brought together a compilation of noteworthy journalistic value. With
all its faults of commission and omission, his book surely will be use-
ful, if only for its promotional significance.

The pictures take precedence over the text — “more than 1000” of
them in 520 pages. Among the most pleasing illustrations are those
drawn or painted especially for “this heirloom album” and on that ac-
count new to its purchasers. But many fine old photographs and some
excellent examples of latter-day camera art also are reproduced. The
net result is graphically praiseworthy.

As to the “story” supposedly told in the book, the professional
portions contributed by Henry Steele Commager of Amherst, Oscar
Stevens of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and
Gerald W. Johnson, formerly of the Baltimore Sun, are the most satis-
fying. The chapters on Capital vs. Labor by Henry David of the New
School for Social Research and John Morton Blum of Yale un-
fortunately revive and repeat the ancient and often rebutted folk-
legends concerning alleged “barons of corporate larceny” and their
antagonists, the leaders of “the workers.” On page 214 it is declared
unequivocally that at Homestead, July 6, 1892, “ten strikers and three
Pinkertons lost their lives,” whereas the truth was that six strikers
were killed, including one shot by his own friends, and 18 wounded,
while Pinkerton casualties had been: 9 killed, 21 wounded, 100
“mutilated after surrender” (see page 84, Barnard Alderson’s biogra-
phy of Andrew Carnegie, 1902).

But, of course, the chances of error in any such book are multi-
tudinous. Even with the generous help of skilled researchers of the
caliber of Dorothy Daniel, Rose Demorest, Dorothy English, Lois
Mulkearn, Mel Seidenberg and James W. Hess, mistakes were bound
to occur — as, for example, when, on page 473, the name of Mayor
William B. Hays was spelled correctly only to be misspelled “Hayes”
on page 515 and then listed “Hayes instead of Hays” among the
errata on page 519.

Still more deplorable are the confusions in references to the
Thaw family and in those in which Samuel Bayard replaces Col.
Stephen. Mr. Lorant merits appreciation for recognizing his in-
adequacies. Again and again he earns a proper charity of judgment
that a native-born Pittsburgh historian could not expect. The most
serious of the shortcomings of his book probably is that of his neglect of persons and events at least as meaningful in the authentic annals of Pittsburgh as many of the persons and events he does not neglect. Why, for example, does a picture book which contains nine portraits of David Lawrence contain no portrait of William Penn nor any portrait of William Pitt?

Similarly, it is likely to be wondered how it happened that Billy Sunday was not forgotten while John Henry Hopkins, Regis Canevin, J. Leonard Levy, Henry D. Lindsay, John Taylor and George Rapp were ignored. The same observation applies to the inclusion of Stephen Collins Foster and Ethelbert Nevin and the exclusion of Harvey B. Gaul and Charles Wakefield Cadman. But it also seems incredible that anyone could write about music in Pittsburgh without reference to Charles Heinroth, John Philip Sousa, Sidney and Louise Homer, Will Earhart, Maud Powell, Louise Loomis and Zoel Parenteau.

This is not to argue that Mr. Lorant should have attempted a biographical directory of Western Pennsylvania. What demands attention from a reviewer of the first edition is that his book is defective in the appraisal of data and material. It simply is not logical to report Henry Bouquet at Bushy Run and disregard Andrew Byerly. Comment on the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research should not pass by Robert Kennedy Duncan. No adequate paragraph on the Carnegie Institute of Technology could treat Thomas Wood Stevens as if he never had existed. It is not defensible to discuss the art of painting in Pittsburgh without attention to John W. Alexander, J. A. McN. Whistler, Joseph Pennell, A. H. Gorson, Henry O. Tanner, John W. Beatty and Boardman Robinson. Neither is it tolerable to write about architecture in the Pittsburgh area without appreciation of Henry Hornbostel and C. Z. Klauder. The attribution of the name Oakland to William Eichbaum, twice mentioned (pages 69 and 153), was corrected in The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, Volume 40, 1957, page 287.

Some excuse for Mr. Lorant doubtless may be found in the circumstances in the midst of which he worked. Though his book was in preparation for a decade, it contains evidence that it finally was produced in a hurry. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand how Adolf Hitler appears on page 515 and is Adolph Hitler on page 371. Chronologically, very little later than 1959 is to be discovered in the volume.
But this review must not be only a bill of peevish complaints. It would be rankly unjust to represent Mr. Lorant as having failed. On the contrary, he did what Edgar Kaufmann engaged him to do. The promotional book he compiled is largely beautiful to look at. It wages a strenuous battle for redevelopment with federal help. There, too, is a provocative challenge in it for private initiative in planning and building.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

JAMES WALDO FAWCETT


The "Acknowledgments" of this publication indicate clearly that it was highly sponsored and well mustered into the ranks of historical treatises. Probably the first step of the author was the consultation of the voluminous secondary works on a subject that has long been intriguing and become, by now, somewhat trite.

The particular merit of the book is that it is based upon an enormous mass of original and widely scattered primary material unprinted and printed. Included therein are twenty-nine newspapers many of which are local or regional and probably very rare.

What is good historiography? The question is virtually unanswerable. Probably the best historical production would be a combination of exposition and narrative based almost entirely on original materials. Such a production might make a great contribution, but widespread disagreement would feature any list of such works.

A large part of historiography has long been revisionist rather than creative. The author admits (pp. 9 and 89) that his primary interest is revisionist. In pursuit of revisionism he has emphasized the significance of tradition and of non-unionism in southern and eastern counties of Virginia, later a part of West Virginia.

A House Divided does not present an unforgettable thesis. It represents scholarship rather than portrayal or literary merit and will not greatly impress one as an item in historiography.

The volume is well printed and bound. It contains only a few