BOOK REVIEWS


Little historical writing from the French viewpoint has found its way into the literature of the fierce struggle for dominance of the Ohio Valley in mid-eighteenth century. Such a book has appeared, and Walter O'Meara has eminently justified his reputation for careful observation, accurate reporting and dynamic expression. In _Guns at the Forks_, he has evinced a comprehensive knowledge of the literature pertaining to the French occupation of the St. Lawrence and Ohio Valleys, as well as that of the Braddock and Forbes Campaigns. He has placed this episode in its proper relation to the global conflict that decided whether France or England should dominate world commerce and empire.

Mr. O'Meara has given more colorful picturization to this otherwise hackneyed scene than has been achieved by many others. His astute appraisal and able analysis of military situations, his penetrating insight into motives and characters have made this work a valuable contribution toward a more accurate understanding of what really happened at the Forks in that far-off era. Above all, Mr. O'Meara has demonstrated a _feeling_ for the times seldom equalled by modern writers. It is difficult for a writer to divest himself entirely of modern concepts and to view ancient situations otherwise than in the light of hindsight. He has succeeded in depicting an image of events and people widely scattered as to time and place in a perspective that is truly remarkable. In a personal interview, the author sagely stated that he had chosen to write of the forts at the “Point,” because he considered that “more events of decisive importance took place here within the decade than occurred at any other place within a comparable time in American history.”

This is not to say that Mr. O'Meara is an historian in the proper sense. In _Guns at the Forks_, he has presented no new contribution to our historical knowledge of the period, merely organizing existing published material. Since the work is not documented, it can not be quoted by future writers for historical source material. What will be quotable are his concise summations of many situations that epitomize both the French and the English points of view. Examples are (page
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206) : "Whatever the feelings of the French may have been, they must have known in their hearts that the success at Loyalhanna was an empty one. The dice of war were loaded against them; their time was running out." Again (page 210) : "It [Fort Duquesne] had never been a strong fort, but at least it had been a brave one. It had never waited for its enemy to come to it, but had always gone out to meet him . . . . It had never stood a siege, and it would not stand siege now . . . . Thus, in a roar of flame, died Fort Duquesne of the Blessed Virgin at the Beautiful River." And again (page 228) : "Pittsburgh had become, not just a fort and trading post, but a town in which people were born and died, and carried on the ordinary business of living in between."

On the side of historical accuracy, O'Meara has, with emphasis, corrected the oft-repeated fallacy, that Braddock's army was ambushed, by portraying an intended ambush that the French had hoped to achieve: actual result, a head-on collision. On the other hand, he has fallen into the usual pattern of historical writers in general, in maligning Colonel Dunbar for having destroyed all of the army's stores and ammunition on the ignominious retreat to Fort Cumberland. Apparently he did not know that there exists unmistakable evidence in the William L. Clements Library that these acts were the result of written orders issued by General Braddock before his demise, which Dunbar and the chief of artillery, Captain Ord, were bound to obey and execute. An official report, with transmittal of these written orders, was published in The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, XLIV, 391. Inclusion of this evidence would have served to set the record right to the end of a better understanding of a confused situation. On page 234, the 44th Regiment of Foot has been designated a Highland Regiment. Neither was it a Highland Regiment nor was it with Bouquet. The 42nd Regiment (Royal Highlanders or the "Black Watch" Regiment) should have been named.

The bibliography in this case is a true list of sources, although it does not conform to usual practice as to format. It does not, however, compensate for the lack of acknowledgments, which usually lend prestige to a book of this kind and are always gratifying to those who aided the author. Undoubtedly many libraries and individuals were helpful in producing a work of this scope.

All in all, O'Meara has exhibited exceptionally solid judgments in regard to military problems as they existed and as conditions existed in that day. He has judged men as they reacted to their background and training in the environment of their day. He has presented history in a readable, extremely interesting, dramatic and even epic manner,
which proves that historical narrative can be at least as intriguing as the best fiction ever written.

_Pittsburgh_  
Edward G. Williams

*John Morgan, Continental Doctor.* By Whitfield J. Bell, Jr.  

This first full-length portrait of Dr. John Morgan is worth taking into one’s own life because it pleads for a good man who was, as Gamaliel Bradford might have called him, a damaged soul. Perhaps it was because he had “exquisite sensibility” that he was painfully hurt so often. When it is remembered that he was “tough enough” to survive only 54 years while Washington lived 67, Jefferson 83 and John Adams 91, it becomes evident that his weakness, whatever it was, must have been lethal as well as cruel. Some of his intimate contemporaries, obviously, were less susceptible to suffering.

But Morgan possessed sources of strength, too. He was a physician not by accident. The records of his career, still in process of being retrieved, show fixity of purpose and notable capacity for labor. From 1750 to 1756 he served in his native Philadelphia as apprentice to Dr. John Redman from Edinburgh, Leyden and Guy’s in London. The work was “hard and confining,” including as it did being “servant, coachman, messenger-boy, prescription-maker, nurse, and assistant surgeon.” Meanwhile, he studied such classics as Boerhaave, Van Swieten and Sydenham, “writing summaries of some portions, memorizing others,” and gained experience bandaging and dressing wounds, visiting private patients in their homes and “the poor sick” with his master and sometimes alone as his substitute. At twenty, he was engaged as apothecary of the Pennsylvania Hospital, in which post “he could observe the practice of other physicians . . . and gain insight from their treatments.” Further, he was a student of liberal arts and a candidate for a degree at the College of Philadelphia, and was attending lectures in pure science by Provost William Smith. Coincidentally, he had the advantage of being a member of Redman’s family, privileged to meet his friends and neighbors.

Such was the background from which Morgan moved into service in the world war which exploded at the Forks of the Ohio in 1754. He