BOOK REVIEWS


With the publication of this volume Professor Andrews has completed his impressively detailed study of Civil War journalism. Based on exhaustive research in Confederate newspaper files and in manuscript collections relating to Confederate publishers and reporters, this book, like its companion volume, The North Reports the Civil War, tells the story of the war as it appeared in the Southern press from Sumter to Appomattox.

Less populous and less urban than the North, the South began the war with fewer newspapers and coverage of the war was less complete. The western theatre received relatively little notice and naval action was practically ignored. Qualitatively, however, Professor Andrews believes that “Southern reporting at its best was comparable to the top performances of the North’s leading reporters, in terms of reliability, readability, descriptive qualities, and the reporter’s ability to grasp the larger significance of the events he observed.”

The two stars of the Confederate press, interestingly enough, were far removed in background and temperament from the fire-eating secessionists. Peter W. Alexander, who wrote for the Savannah Republican, was a loyal Whig unionist before the war. Felix Gregory de Fontaine, son of a French émigré nobleman, was born in Boston, cut his editorial teeth on a famous murder case involving Harvard professor John Webster, and was associated with the New York press for several years before moving to Charleston, South Carolina, on the eve of the war. De Fontaine became famous as a reporter for the Charleston Courier. Although Southern firepower ultimately could not measure up to that of the North, Professor Andrews shows us convincingly that the journalistic efforts of Alexander and de Fontaine were just as powerfully drawn as those by such brilliant Northern reporters as Whitelaw Reed and Henry Villard.

There is a good deal of interesting anecdotal material in the book for Civil War buffs, including the account of the “Spartan Mother” from South Carolina who reported the Battle of Manassas for Charleston Courier readers and ultimately got to the front to be reunited with her son. Professor Andrews has also done some meticulous detective work on the process of tracing down reporters’ pseudonyms.
An interesting appendix entitled "Who Was Shadow" presents one of these cases in great detail.

Probably the most significant part of this book, however, lies in the generalizations which we can draw from it regarding the ways in which Confederate journalism reflected a slave society fighting a losing battle for survival. The best Confederate reporters exhibited "realism, truthfulness and fairness" in their work, but the Southern press as a whole "experienced freedom only within the narrowly prescribed limits its editors fairly well understood." Dissenters were silenced, and as the war progressed, other Confederate papers, still ardently supporting the lost cause, fell into Union hands. Finally, during the last year of the war, "what little news there was in the Southern press was largely of Northern origin or was reprinted from newspapers published in the parts of the South under enemy occupation."

This is a weighty volume, much too substantial to be swallowed at a gulp. Professor Andrews writes clearly in an accurate, narrative style that is easy to follow. His research has been thorough, and his ultimate achievement has been to complete a major study unique in the historiography of American journalism and the Civil War.

Carnegie-Mellon University
Pittsburgh

IRVING H. BARTLETT


Contemporary genealogists and students of church history (particularly Anabaptist history) owe a great debt of gratitude to the Genealogical Publishing Company for again making available this most valuable and comprehensive volume of some four hundred pages dealing with the early roots, sufferings and migrations of Swiss and Germans of the Anabaptist or Mennonite Faith.

The full title of this volume by a leading Lancaster County historian is indicative of its contents: Historic Background and Annals of the Swiss and German Pioneer Settlers of South-Eastern Pennsylvania, and of Their Remote Ancestors, From the Middle of the Dark Ages, Down to the Time of the Revolutionary War.