
In a day when we are weltering in scandals whose tentacles reach into the highest places, when the American dream seems to be sinking into a nightmare bog, there could hardly be a more welcome and heartening book than this.

Here is good history, well presented for the general reader. Even the nonhistory buff may find it harder to put down than most novels.

No Pollyanna book this. Pittsburgher Ketchum — who has lived more history than many of us have written — tells, as Myrt of the old radio serial used to say, “the bitter with the better.” There was strife among the patriots of 1776, division, greed, cowardice — almost any minus factor we could name. There were many who were ready to give up the fight for freedom and try to make what peace they might with Britain. But there was a leaven of dogged courage and love for liberty — enough that it would miraculously survive to leaven the whole lump of dough.

Never were Tom Paine's words more appropriate than when he brought forth the unforgettable phrases from which Ketchum has adapted his title. Those were desperate times, that tried the soul of even the most valiant. Sunshine patriots and summer soldiers were falling away every hour. Defending the middle colonies was an unbelievably small force, most of them hopeless, held together and to the cause almost solely by a fierce loyalty to George Washington. Whatever his weaknesses and failures may have been, surely few men in all history ever inspired a more complete devotion to duty and a cause.

Because Washington's sole chance (and that of a nation) depended principally on a holding action in the winter of the first year of independence, many historians have tended to slur over it, except for the victories at Trenton and Princeton.

Ketchum rightly sees that these things did not materialize from thin air. He sets the stage properly with two long chapters — a full quarter of the book. But if these ninety-nine pages be called “the longest introduction on record,” the honest critic would have to add: “and the most interesting.”

Some historians may cavil at certain interpretations of matters that look different from different points of view. They may carp at some choices of source material. (What reviewer ever failed to find something to question if he really tried?)
But the fair-minded reader will most likely have forgotten such things when he reaches the summation that is wrapped around a nucleus on page 396: "Because those battles were fought . . . history passed a turning point. The army and the cause it represented could and would endure. The issues that had been responsible for the war in the first place would be settled at some future time and place."

In this day which tries patriot souls, *The Winter Soldiers* renews the conviction that there are things so fundamental in democracy that they are worth all the pain and strain that must be faced by a nation finding its way towards the golden future of which the winter soldiers dreamed.

*The Pittsburgh Press*  

*George Swetnam*

*If ordering any of the books reviewed in the magazine by mail, please allow for sales tax in Pennsylvania and postage.*