

one), when she kills a rattlesnake, and when she is frightened by one of Doctor John Connolly's ruffians from Fort Pitt.

The book is most valuable for its interesting vignettes of pioneer life. Detailed descriptions portray the settlers building a log cabin and making its furniture — all in three days; corn is husked and taken to the gristmill on Loyalhanna Creek; sap is gathered and maple syrup made. The section in which the family is snowbound gives a picture of a warm, close-knit family life, with fiddle music and riddles the chief entertainment.

Home was the center of life; here children were taught to read and write; here the mother spun thread, wove and dyed cloth, and made clothes for the family; here children roasted the chestnuts they had gathered and made dolls from cornhusks.

Helen C. Smith's attractive illustrations give an added dimension to the book. Besides pictures to illustrate the events in the story, there are drawings of tools and farm implements, household articles, even directions for making a doll from cornhusks.

Helen C. Smith herself discovered the site of the fort at old Hanna's Town. Through this book she and George Swetnam will undoubtedly arouse much interest in the excavations and restorations now being conducted at this historic spot.

*Department of English*  
*Carlow College*  
*Pittsburgh*

SISTER MAUREEN WALSH

*The Mollie Maguires and the Detectives.* By ALLAN PINKERTON.  
(New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973. Pp. 552. Introduction, preface, illustrations. \$5.00.)

Those interested in the tumultuous labor troubles of the Pennsylvania coal fields in the late nineteenth century are indebted to Dover Publications for reissuing what was once considered the definitive work on the Molly Maguires. At the same time, the reader constantly must be aware that this is not a book of history; it is a propaganda piece by the head of a successful detective agency who was interested in increasing his company's business. This is, as the preface to the present edition states, "a biased, self-serving" book. Originally published in 1877, it is now about one hundred years out-of-date.

That does not mean that the new release is useless. By itself it

stands as a historical document and does a great deal to illustrate the mentality of the Victorian era which produced it. It tastes and sounds of a distant period in American history. Faced with the turmoils of the present day, one can bury himself in the flavor of the past. The charming nineteenth-century woodcuts add to this general tone. The blacks do not fade to white through grays; there are no pinks to confuse the simple transition from red to white. The villains are thoroughly evil; the heroes are all snow white. This is Frank Merriwell's America in which evil must suffer its fate and in which virtue is sure to triumph before the final page. The heroes look cleaner and brighter than their opponents. Their language is crisper and more literate than that of the forces of darkness. In the flavor of a simpler age, all heroes are brave and all villains are cowards.

Pinkerton's book purports to examine labor difficulties in Pennsylvania's anthracite region in the years following the Civil War. These were times of great industrial distress. The panic of 1873 brought economic decline to coal and railroads, as it did to every other American industry. True to the prevailing economic theories, Pinkerton blamed the resulting personal distress, not on the layoffs and wage cuts, but on the improvidence of the workers who would not save for hard times. When strikes and industrial disorder resulted, the detective accepted Franklin Gowen's (president of the Reading and Philadelphia Coal Company) contention that a conspiracy of Irish miners was responsible for the property destruction and death that occurred in several counties of eastern Pennsylvania.

It is at this point that the story begins. Pinkerton sent one of his operatives, James McParlan, to infiltrate the Molly Maguires with the ultimate aim of destroying that organization. In the florid and lurid fashion of the times, *The Mollie Maguires and the Detectives* recounts McParlan's activities from his assignment to the task until he appeared as a prosecution witness in several murder trials. By McParlan's account, he impressed the miners with his rascality to such an extent that he became the confidant of the murderers. In actual fact, he more likely played the role of agent provocateur in stirring up additional difficulties. By Pinkerton's admission, he occasionally drank to such an extent that he was unable to perform physically; yet it is stoutly maintained that his mental capabilities remained unaffected. Again, by Pinkerton's admission, there were several instances in which McParlan had advance knowledge of planned murders but was unable to take steps to prevent them without blowing his cover. Yet, it was on

the basis of his testimony, corroborated only by witnesses whose own lives were threatened with prosecution, that at least ten men met their deaths.

Obviously, then, one cannot use this book as an objective analysis of the Pennsylvania labor troubles. Still, much of historical merit can be discovered in its pages. We find, for example, that Franklin Gowen served as one of the state's prosecutors in the trials of suspected Mollies. The lists of jurors in those trials indicate that men of Irish descent were systematically barred from serving on the juries trying their fellow countrymen. Yet, Hibernians were numerous enough in those counties to control the elections. A murdered policeman became a virtuous man who worked to establish law and order. At the same time, when the detective had difficulties with another officer of the law, that constable was depicted as a drunkard and a vicious man. Pinkerton can justify attacks on suspected Mollies by vigilante mobs, even when such attacks resulted in the death of an innocent woman. In the battle for righteousness, such crimes can be absolved. Finally, though McParlan posed as a killer and as a counterfeiter and developed the reputation as the meanest of a bad lot, he was never personally asked to participate in a Molly assassination.

In the final analysis, it is the flaws as history which make the reappearance of this book useful as a historical document. Pinkerton recounted the facts as he believed them. And he believed them because he helped to create them. Still, the editors of Dover Publications have not fulfilled their obligations to the present generation by including only a brief introduction pointing out the misleading nature of Pinkerton's document. One longs for greater editorial comment documenting the flaws and pointing out misstatements of fact or interpretation. One almost immediately thinks of Bernard Bailyn's editorial masterpiece, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution*. Using that as a standard of scholarship, publishers should not blithely reproduce the documents of the past; they should enhance them with the scholarship of the present. The inexpensive way is not always the most useful way.

*Department of History*  
*West Liberty State College*  
*West Liberty, West Virginia*

ARTHUR E. BARBEAU