

## Book Reviews

*Dictionary of American History.* James Truslow Adams, ed. in chief. Vols. I and II. Scribner, 1940. 444, 430 pp. Set of 6 vols. \$60.

THE PROJECT of which these two volumes represent the first instalment was launched in 1936 as a more or less logical aftermath of the success of the *Dictionary of American Biography*. The growing realization of the importance of the contribution made by the compilation of a comprehensive and authoritative reference work on individuals led to a demand that a similar task be undertaken for the facts, events, trends, and policies which have gone to make up American history. To meet this demand, the publishers of the biographical dictionary proceeded without subvention from foundations or scholarly societies to outline the plans for such a work. The engagement of James Truslow Adams as editor in chief and R. V. Coleman as managing editor was followed by the selection of an advisory council of seventeen nationally recognized historians and librarians representing the different sections of the country as well as different spheres of interest within their professions. The supervisory staff was completed by the appointment of Thomas Robson Hay and Ralph Foster Weld as associate editors, and the final form of the work is the result of the collective judgment of this group of twenty-one men.

The editorial program began with an appeal to the leading historical societies and to several hundred historians to assist in proposing subjects for treatment, and the comprehensive index which was com-

pleted on the basis of their suggestions was then subjected to an intensive sifting process by which near duplications and the less significant materials were eliminated. This procedure was repeated in determining the allotment of space for the individual topics and in selecting authors for the various subjects. As a result, to quote from the foreword, "More than a thousand historians, representing a cross section of American historical scholarship, have joined in the writing of the five to six thousand articles which will be found in the completed work." In its finished form the work will consist of five volumes of text and one volume of index, and unlike the *Dictionary of American Biography*, all copy was in before the actual manufacture of the first volume was begun; hence it is expected that the remaining volumes will be available by the time this review appears in print.

According to the editor, the justification for this work is to be found in the fact that although within the last few decades the discovery of new facts and the development of new interests have brought about an almost complete rewriting of American history, this new history has remained "scattered through thousands of volumes of general histories or special studies." That the growing complexity of the subject together with an increased public interest in it created a greater demand for some one source to which an inquirer might go to find quickly what he wishes to know cannot be denied. Whether the fact that a reference work rather than a synthesis seemed to come nearer to meeting that demand is perhaps

a reflection of the level of culture in our own generation, cannot be considered here. Having been given a reference work, we must attempt to appraise it for what it is.

These two volumes contain approximately two thousand articles varying in length from three to about five hundred lines and arranged in alphabetical order on double column pages. Despite this dictionary form, however, and despite the statement in the foreword that "emphasis has constantly been placed on the fact that this is a 'dictionary' and not a collection of essays or even an encyclopaedia," the nature of the contents would seem to place the work in the category of encyclopedia rather than of dictionaries. Relatively few of the articles are confined to a simple definition of terms, while in many cases they take the form of critical, and at times even philosophical, essays. Thus it is actually a combination of the three possibilities, and as such it is probably more valuable for the general user than would have been the case had it been confined to dictionary style.

While it is not possible, perhaps, for one who is not a librarian to attempt to evaluate it from that point of view, it seems obvious that this work, when completed, will quickly become an indispensable aid to the reference librarian. Within the limits of one work, as illustrated by these two volumes, may be found information on topics ranging from "Chinch Bugs" to "Constitution of the United States." In most cases, the articles on the more important topics have been prepared by the historians in whose fields of interest they properly fall, and they are written in an interesting and readable style without sacrificing sound scholarship. In each case the article is accompanied by a reference

or references, "selected, so far as possible, with a view to accessibility in the average library." Thus it will become the starting point for the finding of information on almost every conceivable subject in American history.

Occasionally, however, the result will be disappointing. It is much easier, of course, to criticize the selections made by another than to make choices without seeming to be arbitrary, but there are some cases which seem to call for consideration. For example, since one of the problems to be faced in the development of the Great Plains was the scarcity of both wood and water it seems illogical to include "Buffalo Chips" and omit canteens. Would not the question of "direct trade with Europe," as planned by southerners in the 1850's, be just as important as "Drogher Trade"? One wonders if the Franco-Texienne Company and the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, neither of which is included, were not more far-reaching in their effects than was the Castorland Company, which is included. If the "Dare Stone" deserves a place, why not also the "Drake Plate"? These are merely samples of apparently arbitrary selections.

In general, the work may be said to be more valuable for the librarian and for the general public than for the historian. While it is true that the articles furnish convenient summaries of the essential information concerning both broad trends and specific events, the historian will not always be willing to accept this as the final word. He will wonder, for example, if Gutzon Borglum is completely objective in his article on "Borglum's Colossal Sculptures," or he will be struck by the fact that the article on "The Fourteenth Colony" discusses Transylvania, Franklin,

and Vermont without deciding upon one of them, and completely ignores the efforts during the American Revolution to bring Canada into the conflict as "the fourteenth colony." More striking, perhaps, is the fact that the article on "Abolition Movement" treats abolition and antislavery as if they were synonymous terms, while the one on "Antislavery Movement" does not even contain a cross-reference to abolition. The article on "Abolitionist Literature" asserts that "the great number of antislavery newspapers began with Charles Osborn's *Philanthropist* (1820) and Benjamin Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (1821), both originating at Mt. Pleasant, Ohio, and *The Castigator* (1824) at Ripley, Ohio." The article on *The Emancipator*, of Jonesboro, Tenn., on the other hand, states that "it preceded the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* by seven months." Careful editing should have caught these inconsistencies.

The presence of a few minor flaws, however, should not be permitted to obscure the fact that because of the excellence of the work as a whole it may be expected to rank with the *Dictionary of American Biography* as an indispensable reference aid for all students of American history.—*William C. Binkley, Vanderbilt University, Nashville.*

*The Library Survey: Problems and Methods.* E. W. McDiarmid, Jr. American Library Association, 1940. 243p. \$3.50.

FOR MANY YEARS we have debated, among ourselves and with outsiders, our right to call the study of librarianship "library science." The word "science" is one of many which have come to mean so many things that they mean almost

nothing. In this review the word "science" means a method of study, a method to which no field or fields of knowledge may claim exclusive right, and "library science" is the application of that method to the problems of librarianship. While we have always had a library science, until a year ago we had not a single manual, textbook or handbook on its methodology. This condition is undoubtedly both cause and effect of the very subordinate position heretofore occupied by the scientific aspects of the study of librarianship. In June 1939 appeared a landmark in the literature of librarianship, *Investigating Library Problems* by Douglas Waples. Within less than a year has appeared a second library science manual: *The Library Survey*.

*The Library Survey* is an important book. It does not pretend to be original or profound. It is a practical handbook for the student of library problems. It "attempts to combine within the covers of one volume a wide variety of survey methods and procedures, in the hope that it will result in a saving of time and effort for future surveys." The "methods and procedures" have been assembled, in general, from actual surveys. "The author has essayed the role of reporter and commentator, rather than that of authority." Thus *The Library Survey* is essentially a survey of library surveys.

By a "library survey" the author means a systematic and thorough evaluation of the work of a library, a division of a library, or a group of libraries, in relation to its, or their, objectives. The final objective of a library survey is always a program of action. Mr. McDiarmid has given us a compendium of evaluative criteria and techniques. He has done a thorough and workmanlike, if unimaginative