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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Florida's *Golden Sands*, by Alfred Jackson Hanna and Kathryn Abbey Hanna (Indianapolis and New York, The Bobbs Merrill Co.; 1950) with- illustrations, maps; notes on sources and index, 429 pp., \$4.00;

Florida's Golden Sands is a historical account of the East' Coast of Florida from Fernandina to Key West. The treatment is topical rather than chronological, except in a very limited sense. The approach is social and economic, highlighted with a great deal of personal- and human interest. Each chapter is in itself a complete 'unit, and- they are arranged in a roughly chronological sequence which gives a., definite picture of developing society and culture in 'the region. Subjects treated range from well-known episodes 'in the history of the region to many about which little or no writing has been done.

The book is surprisingly well-balanced considering the difficulty of weaving together the diverse elements that make up the story of the East Coast.. This is achieved by treating 'the better known events with restraint and putting considerable emphasis' on new material. for the more obscure topics. The Hannas could build upon wide knowledge and experience in the materials of Florida history.. but the greatest value of this volume lies in the amount of new material brought together here far, the first time. Occasionally, as in the description of the international slave trade, material is added- for what seems to this reviewer little more than dramatic effect. This does' not remove the fact that the book is skillfully organized and well-written.

Golden Sands is written for the general reader rather than for the scholar, which is good rather than bad. To label this popular history is to say that it is presented in a form that the great body of Florida's citizens and the general reader can and will appreciate and enjoy. More of this kind of writing should be done. It is a product of an immense amount of research in widely scattered and asserted sources. Presented as separate episodes in the

development of the region this extensive labor might be overlooked. Many of the stories that add value and interest to the book cannot be verified or documented, for they are imbedded in the rich folklore of the region. More of this kind of material might well be put into local and state history and thereby reach a much wider audience. The errors of fact or date that critical readers may find are an inescapable feature of such writing and do not affect the excellent combination of soundness and readability of the volume.

A list of references for each chapter is appended. Acknowledgments of the contributions of numerous individuals indicate another rich source of such material. An index adds usability to the volume.

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Slavery in Alabama, by James Benson Sellers. (The University of Alabama Press, 1950, pp. 426. \$4.00)

Uncle Tom's Cabin is in a fair way to end its days as part of the general corpus of mid-nineteenth century sermons dedicated to the cause of social justice as preached by the more radical crusaders of that day.

With increasing and with generally impartial zeal, one scholar after another has concerned himself with the realities of slavery. The time seems nearly fulfilled when land and planter and slave will definitely be placed in that almost inevitably checkered relationship such as any existing status quo always assigns to the *dramatis personae* who walk the boards on the stage of every-day life.

Certain it is that modern research, while candidly recording the seamy side of slavery, finds that institution, if not romantic, at least and for the most part tolerably bearable; and as a not too abnormal part of an age that, the world over, lived either near the spartan fringe of the rough and tumble backwoods, or at best knew violations of human rights that, by comparison dress Ole Marster in gray instead of in villainous black.

And at the last it was in that suit of gray that the Rebel rode on his Raids to defend his homeland from a shape' of things that he feared would be the worse if untutored thousands of black servants suddenly were turned loose to cope with problems they were by no means prepared to solve.

If Marse Robert and Albert Sidney are enshrined with Nathan Bedford and Old Jeb as men who had the courage to ride for that bygone and oft gracious way of life, it is because men then realized and do now realize that domestic institutions cannot be broken up like. so many physical structures without plunging society into sorrows that only Heaven can cure.

Slavery *in Alabama* undertakes to do for the history of the "peculiar institution" what other writers have done for various other southern states and regions.

Fully, and with an extensive recourse to private manuscripts, public documents and secondary sources, cited in the bibliography, the author sets before us the result of his investigations.

Beginning with slavery as it existed in the colonial and territorial periods, the book carries us, in twelve chapters, into such significant aspects as the daily plantation life, the relation of the slave to Church and State, to the planter and to his fellow laborers. Slave crime and punishments, runaways, the slave traffic and the status of-free negroes come in for their share of attention.

The-book is more than a mere digest of old planters' diaries though these are freely used. Many angles and aspects of slavery, found characteristic of the institution and the problems attending it are revealed to us as part and parcel of the Alabama *scene*.

The co-partnership of planter and slave in the task- of subduing a wilderness is noted, as well as the part played in Southern economy. and life by a preponderating yeomanry whose slave holdings were usually small and often non-existent.

An interesting' and informative 'section of the book

deals with the actual size of some of the larger plantations, now and then almost baronial in extent. The tendency toward a self-sufficing regime, and the gradual decline of that condition, is noticed.

The fertility of some Alabama soils and the consequent extraordinary yields of cotton is in keeping with some of the lush areas in Mississippi, and reveals the stake held by many large and influential planters of the Deep South, as compared with those struggling with the worn-out lands in older portions of the Cotton Belt.

Planters like John Horry Dent of Barbour county, are revealed as careful systematic and successful business men whose fortunes were owing as much to their ability as to the richness of Alabama soils.

Like Mississippi, Alabama had a growing aristocracy of planters, many of whom had been originally humble yeoman farmers; but who, as early as 1840, averaged nearly eighty slaves apiece, and by 1860 nearer ninety. By that year the larger planters held upward of 30 per cent of the declared wealth of the state, and their attitude toward emancipation, police control, free negroes, and abolition movements became increasingly conservative, ending in rather extensive rationalization concerning the benefit of slavery.

As one aspect of this conservatism it is not unlikely that planters of that day would have labelled free negroes as potential "fifth columnists" had they known of such a term. Planters likewise gave evidence of thinking that the North was essentially as dangerous and inimical to settled southern interests as is our Red Element today. The fear of Negro insurrection is made clear, and a growing impatience with all or any sort of questionable outside interference is revealed.

Apparently planters, long before the War, were all too well acquainted with starry-eyed idealists of the kind they came to know even more fully during the fevered nightmare of Reconstruction.

It is not to be wondered at that Alabamians felt driven

into an active defense of their social economic system, and the subject is given a separate chapter.. -

The book is quite free from typographical errors, The indexing is adequate, and stylistic qualities of the book are excellent, the diction is clear and straightforward. Perhaps time spent on a fuller analysis of Alabama soils, crops, and regions would not have been wasted. Many terms peculiar to the old cotton régime would seem to indicate the usefulness of a glossary. Maps of heavy and light plantation areas would likewise have been a help to readers, unfamiliar with the area. Perhaps room might have been found for more stress on the place of Alabama in the Cotton Kingdom.

The book is evidently the result of much labor and is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the field in which it belongs. Based on materials widely scattered and not readily available, it will take a prominent place on the shelves of those who wish to know more accurately what the "peculiar institution" really was like.

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