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Book Reviews

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A Diary from Dixie. By Mary Boykin Chesnut. Edited by Ben Ames Williams. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949. pp. xiv, 572. Frontispiece and index)

It is interesting to note that Mrs. Chesnut begins her diary by stating that she was off to Florida to visit her mother. This was in November of 1860. Before reaching Fernandina she received the news that Lincoln had been elected and remarked, "I now wish I had a chronicle of the two delightful and eventful years which have just passed. Those delights have fled, and one's breath is taken away to think what events have since crowded in." For the next four and a half years this charming Southern woman was destined to become one of the foremost diarists of her time.

For this particular task she had unusual qualifications. Through her background she was well identified with the way of life in the South and knew personally most of its leaders in both the army and in civil life. Her father had been governor of South Carolina and her husband a United States Senator and later became a military aid to Jefferson Davis. In the second place she was a keen observer, expressed herself easily and clearly, and never failed to say what she thought as though her conscience dictated an opinion on all matters. Her descriptions of places, events and people, the almost overbearing loyalty to her friends, her scathing comments with spicy bits of gossip and ***risque*** side remarks lend color to her penetrating observations. The impact of the war on morals, the confusion in Richmond with its vice, black markets, drunken soldiers and petty politics caused her great concern. However, throughout it all there was a sense of humor which seemed anchored in the daily lives of people. People, it seems, were her principal if not her consuming interest.

When first introduced to Stephen Mallory, Mrs. Chesnut liked

him in spite of what she had been told of his "unpleasant reputation." She found him witty and his stories rich and racy though no doubt spiced for her benefit. Men as a whole attracted her and she was not beyond trying out her feminine wiles for the sake of a conquest. Childless and pampered by her husband throughout her entire married life, Mrs. Chesnut sought an escape through the pages of her diary. For President and Mrs. Davis she had a blind loyalty that would tolerate not the faintest suggestion of criticism.

The first edition of Mrs. Chesnut's diary was brought out in 1904 by Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary. Portions of the original manuscript were eliminated because it was felt that it might offend persons then living or perhaps certain passages shocked the editors. The love affair of General Hood and "Buck" Preston was barely mentioned in the first edition though it was accorded considerable space in the original. Letters from Mrs. Jefferson Davis were also deleted as well as many an off-color remark from the pen of Mrs. Chesnut herself. In the fuller edition edited by Ben Ames Williams considerable of the original material has been restored. This is particularly true between September 1861 and February 1862.

There is no question but that the newer edition is a great improvement over the old. However, there are many things yet to be desired. For example, some passages have been omitted from the Williams edition on the grounds that they have no appeal for the reader. This is unfortunate. From time to time, the editor by his own admission has made minor changes without an explanation in a footnote or an insertion in the body of the text. A more judicious use of footnotes to identify places and people would have added greatly to both interest and interpretation. This same criticism is true of the index where titles of Captain or Mr. are used with last names but with no initials given. Despite these minor faults the editor is to be commended

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for making available a more complete edition of one of the most remarkable diaries which was produced in the Confederacy.

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Florida's Indians

This is the title of a brief but comprehensive and authoritative review of what is known of that subject by John M. Goggin, which should be read in connection with his study of *Fort Pupo* in this issue of the QUARTERLY, and with Mark F. Boyd's *The Seminole War* in the last number.

For some years Dr. Goggin has been studying the aborigines of Florida, both in what has been recorded and through field work. First, as an archeologist, his interest was mainly in the prehistoric Indians of the Florida area, but there is no break between the Indians the Europeans found here, their immediate ancestors, and those with whom the Spaniards lived for long years. So all must be studied; hence, the author, as an anthropologist, continued his studies, and includes a short statement regarding the Indians now in Florida.

Florida's Indians was published as vol. x, no. 8 of *Economic Leaflets*, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Florida. These *Leaflets* may be obtained on request to the Bureau by any resident of Florida. Though a leaflet, it is a good length article of 5,000 words.