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## Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

*Latin America, A History.* By Alfred Barnaby Thomas. (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1956. xiii, 801, pp. \$6.50.)

Several years ago, in the wake of President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy, and the widely awakened interest in Latin America, attention was focused on the scarcity of good books about that area, especially textbooks for college use. Publishers and authors present got to work with the result that several excellent new survey histories of Latin America have appeared recently. Certainly one of the best of these is *Latin America, a History*, by Professor A. B. Thomas of the University of Alabama.

This book is designed for use as a college text and in content, organization, format, maps, reading lists, etc., it reflects the experience and understanding which have made Dr. Thomas renowned as one of the best and one of the most popular, history teachers in the South. It is not a book to be read casually or superficially, but is designed to give a sound, factual, honestly interpreted survey history of all the Latin American countries, stressing "the human forces operating in its culture and the continuity of its development" (author's preface). Particular emphasis is given to the cultural history of each country.

The organization of the book is logical. The colonial period deals with the Indians, Iberian backgrounds, conquest and colonial administration. The section on the wars for Independence is particularly well done, with a thoughtful analysis of the underlying causes and far-reaching results as well as the more obvious, immediate ones. In his treatment of the modern republican period, Dr. Thomas hit on a happy compromise between the simplification of generalizing or accepting certain countries as typical of the rest and the complication of presenting the detailed history of each of the twenty republics. He has accepted the theory, which most Latin Americans themselves seem to prefer, that each country is unique and that the history of each country must be presented individually. Having adopted this framework, the author achieves a pattern by dividing the countries into natural geographic groups,

the Atlantic, Pacific, Caribbean nations, with Mexico, Central America and Panama handled in a separate category. One could wish, however, that Dr. Thomas had defined his pattern a little more clearly by a brief preliminary analysis of common factors, problems, or differences among the countries in each group.

An excellent up-to-date study of Inter-American affairs provides a fitting conclusion to this book. Again, however, an omission is noted. Why is no mention made of Puerto Rico, the proud new Commonwealth which has effectively undertaken the role of interpreting the Anglo-American and Spanish-American cultures to each other?

Two of the strongest and most useful features of this new history of Latin America are to be found at the close of the book in the bibliography and the index. Recognizing that a survey history should serve primarily as a base of departure for further study, Dr. Thomas has included a very full reading list, with some descriptive notes, so excellent and complete that its titles might well serve as the nucleus for the Latin American collection in any library. Equally useful are innovations in the unusually detailed index.

To emphasize the usefulness of this history as though that were its chief virtue is to do an injustice to Dr. Thomas' vigorous style and zestful, infectious enthusiasm for his subject. This is a book which everyone interested in Latin America will want to have and to keep.

IONE STUESSY WRIGHT

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*Reminiscences of Big I.* By William Nathaniel Wood. Edited by Bell Irvin Wiley. (Jackson, Tenn., McCowat-Mercer Press, 1956. 138 pp. Illustrations, appendix. \$3.95.)

Lieutenant "Nat" Wood and the 19th Virginia Regiment went into camp at Chaffin's Farm seven miles east of Richmond in September, 1863. While enjoying the fruits of a well-earned rest, Nat and a few friends came upon a tasty looking cat. One of the men remarked, "What nice venison she will make." This lone feline was slaughtered and nicely dressed and placed tenderly

into the camp kettle to cook. Each time the simmering cat was tried for tenderness, the report was, "not done yet." The cat was boiled throughout the first day, and even through the second, but she continued to resist the fork. At the end of the second day, a camp table was set up and the feast was served. One soldier inquired, "What is the matter with this knife?" As the cat had resisted the fork, so did she also resist the knife. It seemed that the choice "venison," the feline veteran of three years of war, was as tough as her antagonists.

This is but one of the many stories told by Nathaniel Wood in his, *Reminiscences of Big I*. The Big I, a name evidently invented by the author after the War Between the States, was a Second Lieutenant in Lee's Army. Although Wood was an officer, the editor concludes from his study that the Big I "was a soldier's shavetail who never forgot his humble beginnings and whose first interest was always the well being of his men."

The most significant reward that one receives from reading Wood's reminiscences is a vivid picture of the life of the common soldier in the Army of Northern Virginia. Wood, whose tour of duty carried him from First Manassas to just before Appomattox, mirrors with words the trials of the soldier. We read of the long marches, up the Shenandoah Valley and into Maryland and Pennsylvania, the continual lack of supplies, cold rations and the lasting friendships of the field mess, an occasional poker game, the digging, digging of trenches, Rebel ingenuity and the Confederate soldier's unshakable faith in General Lee. Although the common soldier's burden was heavy, seldom did his sense of humor desert him. Wood gives considerable attention to the humorous incidents of war, indirectly showing how humor sustains the fighting man.

Along with the "foot slogger," such men as Lee, Beauregard, Hill, Stuart, Mosby and others appear when Wood had occasion to meet or observe them. Most vivid is the author's description of Pickett as he encountered the General after withdrawing from Cemetery Hill on that momentous day in 1863.

Three days before Appomattox the Old Nineteenth deployed as skirmishers at Sailors Creek and Big I and his men fought their last battle. Wood was captured and was interned at Old Capital Prison in Washington. Soon thereafter he returned to civilian life at Charlottesville, Virginia.

Thanks to Bell Wiley the *Reminiscences of Big I* have been rescued from obscurity, and after his usual thorough job of editing, it is now available to Civil War enthusiasts. Adding an introduction, illustrations and an interesting appendix, Mr. Wiley has presented a much improved edition of the original limited edition of 1909.

In the tradition of "Johnny Reb" and "Billy Yank" Bell Wiley presents a genuinely interesting book, one that gives a better understanding of the little man in a big war.

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*Steamboats in the Hyacinths.* By Ella Teague de Berard. (Daytona Beach, College Publishing Company, 1956. 64 pp. \$2.00.)

Both on the dust jacket and in the preface, it is claimed that this little volume is a history of steamboating on the St. Johns River. Actually, it consists of the reminiscences of John Wilson Somerville of the years from 1880 to 1900, together with a small amount of material gathered by the author.

The author terms these twenty years the "steamboat decades," and by explicit statement and implication repeatedly dates the beginning of the steamboat era as 1880. The total neglect of the preceding half century of steamboating may be seen in the following statement: "Before the coming of the steamboats to the river, the only communication between Jacksonville and the south side of the city was by rowboat, but after 1880 a hundred stern and side wheelers ran on the St. Johns."

Practically the only statement relating to earlier vessels is a passing reference to the *Essayons* (misspelled *Eesseon*) during the Seminole War. Actually the *George Washington*, out of Savannah, in May, 1831, holds the claim of being the first steamboat on the river, and she was followed by dozens of others before 1880. A few of these receive mention, but are somehow squeezed into the "steamboat decades." An example is Hart's

*Silver Spring*, built in 1860 and not surviving until the first official steamboat list, of 1868.

In many respects the period 1880-1900 could better be taken as the beginning of the end. While the development of the state during the period was great, the rapid expansion of the railroads was driving the boats from the river.

Over 100 steamboats are mentioned, and in many instances there are interesting comments on the vessels. These observations of Somerville are the major contribution of the book, and had it purported to be no more, there would be no basis for criticism. One can only conclude that the history of steamboats on the St. Johns remains to be written, and that this book, despite the limitations mentioned above, is an addition to the woefully meager literature on the maritime history of Florida.

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