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Book Reviews

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Sorrell, Gilbert Moxley. *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, Edited by Bell Irvin Wiley. *Monographs, Sources, and Reprints in Southern History* (Jackson, Tenn., 1958. McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958. Illustrations, appendixes, index. \$5.00.)

This is another volume in the series of contemporary Confederate accounts of the Civil War reprinted under the general editorship of Professor Bell Irvin Wiley. It is one of the most important of the Southern Civil War sources, and in this writer's opinion one of the most readable of the volumes in this series of reprints. Furthermore, it makes this all-important document readily available to the Civil War specialist for the first time: the earlier editions were small and most of the copies have passed into private collections.

The *Recollections* of Brigadier General Sorrel begin with the events immediately preceding Sumter, but do not enlarge upon military affairs until the author receives a volunteer commission as an aid to General Longstreet just in time to participate in the fighting at the first Battle of Bull Run. From this time on Sorrel was in the midst of nearly all the important engagements of the Army of Northern Virginia for the remainder of the War. His only long absences from duty with it came when his organization was sent to Eastern Tennessee to cooperate with General Bragg, and later, in 1865, when he was severely wounded just before the end of the struggle and was compelled to miss the final scene at Appomattox.

During all these campaigns, General Sorrel was an important staff officer or a field commander. As such he was not only associated with the ranking commanders in the Confederate Army, but usually participated in the planning as well as the execution of the events he describes. He frequently understood the causes for failure or success—why individuals performed or failed to perform the assignments given to them. Further, he was often in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of many of the Federal Commanders. Directly or indirectly, he had an intimate acquaintance with many of the leaders of both sides whose names crowd the pages of our Civil War history.

The shortcomings of the work detract little from the book's value. The chief one is the fact that the account was not written

until some 35-40 years after the events had taken place. Another is the lack of continuity-for which the author makes his own apologies. It sometimes makes one wonder what will come in the next paragraph, but again does not detract from the historical value of the account. These characteristics probably stem from the fact that Sorrel died shortly after completing his *Recollections*. It is likely that he intended to "polish it up" before submitting it for publication. This is further supported by the fact that the first edition was not printed until 1905, or about four years after the author's death.

Compensation for these minor defects is to be found in the accuracy of Sorrel's contributions. He had a keen sense of history as he had served for a long time as an official of the Georgia Historical Society. He treated his experiences with a remarkable objectivity. He used a free and easy style which made his experiences both readable and sincere; and he maintained a well-balanced approach in his evaluations of his contemporaries. His sense of humor persisted. He was loyal to his state and cause, modest, honest, and sincere in his presentations. He avoided the mistake made by so many others-that of blood-curdling, wild-eyed accounts of fighting-sometimes magnified greatly by the intervening years. Rather, he portrayed many neglected incidents that occurred between the major battles and captured the real atmosphere of the period.

The *Recollections* also point up the growing disparity in the material resources available to the North and South as the war dragged on. The winter of 1862-63 showed the vast superiority of the Federals in this respect for the first time in such items as coffee, shoes, fresh meat and bacon. During Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania Sorrel was more than impressed by the fact that the ". . . drain of war had not here shown itself. . . .", and that good roads and rich crops were in direct contrast to conditions in the South. Later, he commented upon the worn-out condition of the railroads, and the crazy kinds of trains assembled to transport Longstreet's Army to the East Tennessee campaign. During the spring of 1864, he had to spend three days and nights to complete the journey from Richmond to Savannah, Georgia. By mid-spring of 1864 Confederate currency had depreciated to the point where he and other officers circulated a pe-

tition asking that the government give them the same rations as the enlisted men. Their pay was not sufficient to purchase food or the essentials of clothing. About the same time he complained that the army was no longer able to keep its ranks filled by enlistments. A few days after Appomattox he contrasted the limitless materiel of the Federal Armies in Richmond with the poor makeshift equipment of his troops.

Professor Wiley has not only included the introduction written for the earlier editions, but has added an excellent introduction of his own. The appendixes of the earlier editions have been supplemented by the addition of several letters and the obituary of General Sorrel. Many good-quality photographs have been included, some of which are not to be found easily in other publications. The present editor has also added a very good index, adequate for all normal requirements.

The publishers have followed their earlier policy of keeping the price of the book within reason, without sacrificing either the quality of the materials or workmanship. The present writer hopes sincerely that when they have completed their presently projected series, they will continue to publish other important and hard-to-find documents of the Civil War.

T. R. PARKER

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Hurricane. By Marjory Stoneman Douglas. (New York and Toronto, Rinehart & Co., 1958. viii, 393 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$5.95.)

In the process of writing this book Mrs. Douglas evidently spent a great deal of time and effort consulting Weather Bureau records and personnel, collecting first hand, eye-witness accounts, and examining the very considerable literature of the subject. And the subject of hurricanes is inherently an interesting one, especially to inhabitants of the Atlantic seaboard, although the author makes it clear that hurricanes are by no means confined to coastal areas.

A history of hurricanes and their effects on the colonization and settlement of the New World constitutes the major portion

of the book. After an opening chapter on the nature of cyclonic storms, the author devotes some 200 pages to the history of hurricanes down to 1900. Seventy-five pages are then given to twentieth century hurricanes, featuring the Galveston disaster, "Hurricanes over Florida," and "Hurricanes North." As most readers will find this section of the greatest interest, it deserves perhaps a fuller treatment. The book concludes with a chapter on "What's To Be Done?"

Mrs. Douglas makes a very good case for the importance of bad weather in shaping the course of the history of America. But to this reader at least the recital of an apparently endless succession of disasters grows wearisome. As cyclonic storms follow a more or less regular pattern of rise, terror, destruction, and aftermath, this is perhaps inevitable; but the fervency with which the author treats all this violence and carnage is in the long run somewhat exhausting.

There are occasional verbal infelicities ("Captain Parker's house with his wife and ten children, roofless, was swept south by the northeast wind into the welter of sea"), but at her best Mrs. Douglas writes vigorous and colorful prose. At times, the author is guilty of historical naivete, as when she remarks: "The United States won the Civil War, but its merchant shipping has not yet recovered from the beating it took from the *Alabama*." In the main, however, she marshals her historical material well.

Hurricane is likely to appeal more to the lay reader than to the historian or to the student of meteorological science, and the author perhaps intended that it should. The book contains a dozen or so photographs of hurricane damage, three charts of hurricane courses, and an extensive bibliography.

CLARKE OLNEY

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