

NEW BOOKS.

HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES FROM
THE COMPROMISE OF 1850.*

In the third volume of his work Mr. Rhodes confirms the impression created by the earlier volumes, that he is giving us as satisfactory a history as could be expected at only the present degree of remoteness in time from the period of which he treats. A great history of the Civil War is as yet impossible; the groundwork of fact is not yet ready for the finer touches of philosophic genius. A good history is not only possible, but is realised in the work before us. The present volume, like its predecessors, gives evidence of a correct appreciation by the author of the scope and character of the task that he has undertaken, an amazing degree of industry and intelligence in the accumulation of material, and a praiseworthy spirit of impartiality in framing judgments upon men and events. However one may differ from his conclusion upon any particular point, Mr. Rhodes leaves no room for doubt that that conclusion has been evolved from a conscientious, even laborious, balancing of evidence.

The third volume covers the period from the Presidential election of 1860 to the capture of New Orleans in April, 1862. The main narrative is preceded by a chapter of 113 pages on the social conditions prevailing in the decade from 1850 to 1860. This introductory chapter—which can be designated only by description, since Mr. Rhodes does not honour his chapters with titles—is one of great value. Its calm presentation of facts and tendencies in connection with the commerce, finances, transportation systems, health, amusements, literature, and religion of the people furnishes a much-needed corrective to the impression created by many so-called histories, that the sole occupation of our people between 1854 and 1860 was a passionate and acrimonious debate on the question of slavery. In treating of the tariff, Mr. Rhodes rather unnecessarily, though in the most amiable manner, drags in his own views on the gen-

* History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850. By James Ford Rhodes. Vol. III., 1860-62. New York: Harper & Brothers, \$2.50.

eral subject, and incidentally exhibits again his admiration for Daniel Webster, by presenting and endorsing the ideas of the latter as expressed in 1824. One of the most interesting passages in this chapter is that on the health of the people. The author has gathered together from contemporary literature a large number of passages bearing on the subject, but he fails to give sufficient weight to the fact that almost all the opinions and observations embodied therein relate to what we call the higher social classes, and are put forth by writers of a satirical tendency, like Holmes and Curtis. Mr. Rhodes's conclusion that "during the last forty years the American physique has unquestionably improved," seems to rest too much on a comparison of the results reached by "the precise observations" of such careful statisticians as Emerson, Everett, Holmes, and Curtis (p. 72), with the personal dimensions of that invincible and irrepressible optimist, Edward Atkinson (p. 74).

The two long chapters in which are treated the events between Lincoln's election and the fall of Sumter constitute distinctly the best history of the period that has thus far been written. The author's effort to be perfectly fair both in presenting facts and in passing judgment upon individuals is often very conspicuous, but is always very successful. That Buchanan, while weak, was not unpatriotic, has been grudgingly conceded by a few Northern writers before Mr. Rhodes; that Jefferson Davis was really sincere in his expressions of regret at leaving the Union has never before been presumed without discussion. Again, take the theory that the secession of the cotton States was the outcome of a plot concocted by a knot of Southern Senators at Washington; the seven pages which Mr. Rhodes devotes to laying this fancy render its resuscitation by any intelligent being an impossibility. As to the efforts at compromise in and out of Congress, the author is, we think, disproportionately elaborate. His general conclusion is that the Crittenden proposition, if adopted, would have warded off the crisis; that the Republicans were re-

sponsible for the failure of this proposition; and that Lincoln was chiefly responsible for the attitude of the Republicans. But at the same time he holds that no compromise would have permanently settled the issues at stake, and that morally the attitude of Lincoln was justifiable.

Throughout the whole discussion of the influences that determined the course of events in the winter of 1860-61, there is one point at which Mr. Rhodes is fairly open to criticism. He does not ascribe sufficient—indeed, he scarcely ascribes any—importance to the persistency of extreme party antipathies during the period. To the observer at the present day, the magnitude of the disaster impending overshadows everything; but at the time itself the peril, while appalling, was yet too vague in form to overcome the concrete and perfectly definite passions of recent political controversy. Both the hesitation of Buchanan to deal sharply with South Carolina, and the reluctance of Lincoln to consider compromise, were in no small measure due to the fear that some party advantage would be gained by Republicans and Democrats respectively. It was very hard to believe that civil war was actually at hand; it was very easy to believe that great popularity would accrue to the party through whose representatives a settlement of the crisis should be effected. Hence the policy of “masterly inactivity” on the part of the Republicans, to which Mr. Rhodes makes only a passing allusion (p. 266). They felt that, having won the election, they should have the credit of settling all the questions involved; and therefore they thwarted the schemes that promised a settlement before they assumed charge of the administration. To the persistency of party feeling are also to be attributed the suggestions of impeachment which must have had some influence on the timorous spirit of Mr. Buchanan. He could not believe the Republicans incapable of combining with the extreme Southerners against him in proceedings based on the exercise by him of doubtful powers in opposing secession. Mr. Rhodes apparently deems the impeachment suggestions unworthy of mention. His intimated belief (p. 187) that in December the Republicans were very ready “to take up with a Democratic leader who

would stand as a champion for the Union and for the enforcement of the laws,” is quite irreconcilable with the analysis of Republican feeling which precedes it, as well as with the ideas developed above.

It is perhaps well that the author does not undertake any formal discussion of the more purely legal questions involved in the controversies of this period. The constitutional law of the situation has been treated almost *ad nauseam* by other writers. The repeated references of Mr. Rhodes to a supposed distinction between coercing a State and enforcing the customs laws (cf. pp. 303, 330) are not especially happy. There was no practical difference between the two; and the logical difference that was worked out for political effect merely arose from regarding the same fact from opposite points of view. The attempt to exclude from consideration the corporate State in using force against the individual citizens thereof, broke down utterly long before the war terminated. In respect to the questions that very early arose as to the suspension of the *habeas corpus*, Mr. Rhodes is singularly inadequate. His three-line reference to the Merryman case at Baltimore (p. 391) is inaccurate as well. A little of the space assigned to the efforts at compromise would have been better employed here. Perhaps, however, the whole matter of arbitrary arrests is to receive fuller treatment in later volumes, when the time is reached at which they became a very important political issue.

On the events after Lincoln's inauguration Mr. Rhodes does excellent work. His judgments as to Lincoln, Seward, and McClellan are most likely to be those of all future historians. Possibly the unfavourable reflections on Seward may be modified by fuller light at some points. McClellan's “own story” has unfortunately closed the way to any further apology for its author. From unpublished Sumner manuscript Mr. Rhodes has been able to make very interesting and valuable contributions to our knowledge of foreign opinion on our affairs at the outbreak of the war. In dealing with military matters, the author avoids any straining after dramatic effect, or, at any rate, fails to produce such effect. The battle and campaign maps are excellent.

As to style and arrangement, there is

some room for criticism in this as in the first two volumes. It is hard to tell the basis of the chapter divisions. Neither topical nor chronological order alone explains it. The chapters are exceedingly long—the shortest 99 pages and the longest 165! In each there is a confusing amount of abrupt transition between unrelated topics. Mr. Rhodes, however, seeks to save the reader unnecessary shock by the mechanical device of double leads between paragraphs where the change of subject is most violent. This mitigates the strain somewhat, and saves such intellectual paralysis as is inflicted by Professor MacMaster in his hop-skip-and-jump rambles from subject to subject, often without even the paragraph break. In respect to style, either Mr. Rhodes or his literary reviser (see p. 637, note) is guilty occasionally of peccadilloes. We fear that the effort to hoist into untechnical usage the word "envisage," and even "envisagement" (p. 366) is foredoomed to failure. We doubt that railroad bonds are technically known as "acceptances" (p. 39). "The nineteenth-century Addison" would probably not have moulded an apostrophe to his "million readers" in just this shape: "What an audience to address words of wholesome morality, healthy criticism on literature and art, and acute observations on society to!" (p. 94). He would have thought instantly of Castlereagh's great feat, in concluding a set speech in the Commons with the word "its." But the literary vagaries of Mr. Rhodes's work seldom affect the clearness of his meaning, and they are not to be taken seriously. Certainly they are the farthest possible from modifying the judgment that he is making an invaluable contribution to historical science.

HIS FATHER'S SON.*

In these days of the sudden swarming of writers toward the Middle Ages, and when the meat-axe of melodrama tips the standard of victorious romance, the writing of a story of modern New York, by a thorough New-Yorker, seems to me to be doubly significant. As Mr. Matthews in the past has been interested

* His Father's Son: A Novel of New York. By Brander Matthews. New York: Harper & Bros. \$1.50.

in the realities of American life, so he continues to be. The recent hurrah over the "shilling shocker" seems not to have changed his artistic motive.

As a matter of fact, a writer who is moved by motives deeper than love of money—deeper even than the love of success—does not change with the wind of public approval. Purveyors of reading matter for the million may change and does change as often as the buyers of 28-cent volumes at the bargain counters may change, finding themselves quite happy in selling prodigious stocks of easily made books, winking meanwhile at each other in contempt of the buyer. But not in this way is the lasting art of any nation produced; of this any student may convince himself by a study of the records of each distinctive age of literature.

I think there can be no controversy over this position, for the attempt to think its converse (as Herbert Spencer would say) is ample demonstration. Imagine all English novelists turning to the middle age of France for their material. Imagine all American novelists writing of Greece in the time of Alexander, and the fair-minded reader will see at once that writing of that sort is likely to be artificial and quite lifeless. The believers in an American literature rejoice at the over-production of the cheap romance. It is largely a publishers' revival, for this kind of sensationalism has always had the majority of readers and always will, just as the *Saturday Night* and "the Old Sleuth" stories outsell Hawthorne and Miss Wilkins. The sale of such literature does not surprise the student of men—he does not even object to it; he only questions the sincerity or the wisdom of those critics who put the author of the "killing tale" above George Meredith or Thomas Hardy.

What prevents American novelists from buying up somebody's memoirs of this or that court, and grinding out tales, four per year, all in the first person? Nothing but literary conscience. They are artists in motive. They are not seeking after success of that kind. Any artist should not be too successful. If he gets to be the rage he should pull himself up short, and revise not only his art, but himself.

A painter friend of mine when he finds himself selling his fifth picture in the