

make a permanently important contribution to the history of the labor movement in the United States.

GEORGE E. BARNETT.

*The Diary of James K. Polk during his Presidency, 1845 to 1849.*

Now first printed from the original manuscript in the collections of the Chicago Historical Society. Edited and annotated by MILO MILTON QUAIFFE, Assistant Professor in the Lewis Institute of Technology, with an introduction by ANDREW CUNNINGHAM McLAUGHLIN, Head of the Department of History of the University of Chicago. In four volumes. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company. 1910. Pp. xxxii, 498; 494; 508; 462.)

THE voluminous diary of President Polk owed its origin, we are told, to "a very important conversation" between Polk and his Secretary of State, Buchanan, at a Cabinet meeting August 26, 1845, on the Oregon question. Polk insisted upon the line 54° 40', while Buchanan was equally strenuous for the line 49°. Buchanan was overruled, but the despatch which he was obliged to write to Pakenham was magnanimously characterized by Polk as "admirable". So important did Polk regard the incident that he forthwith wrote out an account of it for future reference, and thereafter, until June 2, 1849, two weeks before his death, kept a daily record of his public life. It is in every way an extraordinary record and an historical document of the utmost importance. That Polk could find time or strength, in the momentous years of his presidency, to set down such full and detailed accounts of his varied occupations, testifies to rare persistence and strength of will.

Only an extended review could possibly take account of all the notable matters to which the diary refers, or enumerate the controversies on which it sheds light. Of no other administration, save that of John Quincy Adams, have we so full a record from the President's standpoint. Here is unfolded, for example, the history of a cabinet during nearly four eventful years; and Cabinet proceedings, even in these days of newspaper publicity, are a little known part of American history. Polk was the undoubted ruler of his Cabinet; and though he consulted his advisers on all occasions, he enunciated his own views with distinctness, insisted upon obedience, and had his own way in the end. Towards the end of his term, he tells us (September 23, 1848), he had so far familiarized himself with departmental details as to need advice only on "a great measure or a new question"; and he never called for opinions in writing, believing that harmony was best insured when members talked face to face. He was impatient of delay or inefficiency in departmental business, and more than once called his Cabinet sharply to account; the War Department particularly was in bad condition, and the State Department a source of annoying political leakage and covert opposition. He did not have an entirely harmonious political family of course, and had at times to suffer something strongly suggestive of disrespect; but

he seems to have kept his temper and with dignified insistence made his will prevail.

The bane of his life, however, was not a hard-bitted cabinet, nor yet such great national questions as Oregon, Mexico, or the Wilmot proviso, but the unending horde of office-seekers. Not a week passes without a scathing denunciation of the crowd of "patriots" who haunted the White House, hung about the door of his office, forced themselves into his presence on any and every occasion, and besought him for offices just vacated, or to be vacated, or already satisfactorily filled, or yet to be created. No official could fall seriously ill without precipitating applications for his place in case he should die. The list of beggars comprised every grade of ability and character, from Benton and Charles J. Ingersoll to rakes, adventurers, party hacks, and political schemers. Among the most persistent visitors were women, for whose political activity Polk had special aversion. Until after the Barnburners' Convention in New York, in 1848, when some of the Van Buren Democrats began to work openly against him, he struggled to treat all factions in the Democratic party alike, incurring the enmity of Buchanan by his course; but for the whole business of patronage he shows increasingly angry dislike, and his diary fairly exhausts the vocabulary of expletive and denunciation.

The origin of Polk's war message of May 11, 1846, has been told by Mr. Schouler, who used the Bancroft transcript of the diary, in his essay on "President Polk's Administration". The question of moral responsibility involved is, perhaps, one of opinion and emphasis, but it may at least be doubted whether Polk's daily record, taken as a whole, does not give his case a somewhat more favorable aspect than is given it in Mr. Schouler's essay. So far as members of the Cabinet and some of his political intimates were concerned, Polk had made no secret of his purpose to acquire from Mexico, by purchase, a considerable territory. The war message, rapidly as it was written, seems to have been some days in mind. On April 25, in laying before the Cabinet the matter of our relations with Mexico, Polk was for "a bold and firm course"; while Buchanan recommended a declaration of war, and the other members, without dissenting, agreed that a message ought to be prepared in the course of the next week. Thereupon Polk "stated the points which should be presented in the message" and asked Buchanan to prepare the draft from materials in his department. Three days later the question was again taken up, with the same conclusion and the same request to Buchanan. On Sunday, May 3, Polk sent for Benton, told him that "we had ample cause of war", and that while he would delay until the arrival of Slidell, who was daily expected, a message would be sent in before the close of the session. Benton was averse to war if it could honorably be avoided, but was promised a sight of the message before it was transmitted. On the 5th and 6th the Cabinet again discussed the Mexican situation, and the 7th was mainly occupied by Polk "in examining the present state of our relations with Mexico, with a view to make

a communication on the subject to Congress". On Friday, the 8th, Slidell arrived, had an hour's conference with Polk, and urged that the United States should now take the redress of grievances into its own hands. At the Cabinet meeting the next day, when the subject was "very fully discussed", all agreed that any hostile act by the Mexicans at Matamoros ought at once to be followed by a war message. Polk, however, went further, recommending "definitive measures", reiterating his opinion that the United States had ample justification for war, and giving it as his opinion that a message should be ready by Tuesday. To the latter point the Cabinet, when questioned, agreed, except Bancroft, who wished to withhold the message until some act of hostility had been committed. The relevant correspondence in the War and State Departments was directed to be copied for submission with the message. Then, in the evening, came the news of the collision on the Rio Grande, and the preparation of the message over Sunday proceeded as described by Mr. Schouler.

In the light of this procession of events, however, it seems hardly correct to say, as Mr. Schouler does, that on May 9 Polk "took up a war policy", when the question had been before the Cabinet almost daily for two weeks, and when Polk himself had already spent nearly a whole day in preparation for a message already practically decided upon. The criticism of Polk for not taking time to look over the transcribed correspondence, although he had read the originals, seems also somewhat overstrained; must a President personally verify the work of a departmental copyist?

Among the many "mean expedients . . . for heading off public opinion in the unhappy republic whose patriotism thwarted us", Mr. Schouler, in the same essay, refers to the employment of Roman Catholic priests to accompany the army, "not as chaplains", but "because they spoke the Mexican language" and might "undeceive" the adversary. What Polk did, according to the diary, was to solicit the aid of Bishop (afterwards Archbishop) Hughes of New York in securing some priests from the United States who knew Spanish to accompany the army "as chaplains and others", for the purpose of assuring the Mexican clergy that their religion and church property were not to be interfered with by the American invasion. Later (October 14, 1846), in an interview with the Rev. William L. McCalla, an applicant for a chaplaincy in the army, Polk stated that Mexico being a Catholic country and the priests having great influence over their ignorant people, "they would probably deceive them by representing that the United States was waging war against them to overturn their religion"; with the result that a desperate and sanguinary resistance would be offered. It was to "undeceive" them on this point that Spanish-speaking priests were used; not, indeed, as chaplains, because Polk found that there was no law authorizing such appointments, but as army employes.

Enough has been said to indicate how many are the points which may well be re-examined in the light of this invaluable record. Pro-

fessor Quaife prints the diary in full, but with modernized punctuation and uniform date-headings for the daily entries. Occasional omissions in the text are supplied in brackets, and a few incomplete or obscure expressions are similarly elucidated. The notes are confined to personalia and brief historical summaries. The editor also supplies a short biographical sketch of Polk, and Professor A. C. McLaughlin contributes an introduction. It is greatly to be regretted that the index, so supremely important in a work of this character, contains but incomplete reference to the names which crowd the text.

WILLIAM MACDONALD.

*A Congressional History of Railways in the United States.* By LEWIS H. HANEY, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Acting Head of the Department of Economics in the University of Texas. Volume II. *The Railway and Congress, 1850-1887.* (Madison, Wis.: Democrat Printing Company. 1910. Pp. 335.)

THE relation which the several departments of the federal government hold to the railways of our country is the result of a gradual evolution extending over a period of practically eighty years. The impelling force of this evolution has been the public mind working through the activities of Congress.

In a previous volume the author has traced the development of this relation to the end of the first half of the last century. In the volume under review this work is carried forward to the enactment of the Interstate Commerce Act in 1887.

As stated by the author the book is "a history of action and reaction between railways and the government" and aims to present "an accurate and intelligible account of Congress' various railway experiences".

The subject is treated under the two general heads, Aid and Regulation. Under the first are discussed the various forms of aid, such as land grants, the reduction of duties on railway supplies, extension of credit on duties, the guarantee of bond interest, and subsidies requested of or granted by Congress for the construction of railways in undeveloped sections of the country. Under the second head the author develops first the earlier manifestations of railway regulation and restriction based, for the most part, on the powers delegated to Congress by the Constitution to provide for the public defense, to levy taxes, and to provide post-roads; and second, the development of regulation based directly on the power conferred on Congress by the "commerce clause" of the Constitution.

It is impossible in a short review to do more than express a few generalizations. The author has collected a large amount of important information from the volumes of the *Congressional Globe* and *Record*, which is practically inaccessible to the average reader, and has presented this information in such a manner as to give an intelligible account of the relation of Congress to the growth of our present-day