

IN BRIEF REVIEW

While there have been numerous studies of the history of Germany in the Middle Ages, I believe *Feudal Germany*, by James Westfall Thompson (Chicago University Press, \$5.00) is the first one published in English that stresses the social rather than the political aspects of medieval Germany. Politically Germany was identified with the Holy Roman Empire for centuries, and the historians who have studied this period have almost invariably made their works histories of the Holy Roman Empire rather than histories of Germany.

Yet there were powerful social and economic forces at work in Germany throughout the Middle Ages that most historians have overlooked. There was a very powerful national consciousness despite a very sharply defined tribal division—a national consciousness that existed even in the tenth century, when the kings of France were vassals of robber barons and the kings of England lamentable weaklings, and when the people of both England and France had not begun to build nation states.

This national consciousness expressed itself not only in the building of a very definitely national German civilization that was to come to full flower in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but also in a great social movement comparable to the Westward movement of the American pioneers in the nineteenth century. This movement was the reclamation and civilization of what is now Eastern Germany—originally German territory that was overrun and conquered by the Slavs shortly after the breakdown of the Roman Empire.

Like the story of the frontier of western America, this is a story of wars against the barbarians of Christianization, of reclamation and cultivation of a vast fruitful wilderness; a story of grim, desperate pioneer life that struggles tirelessly against the hostility of the wilderness and of the enemy barbarians.

But like the pioneer American, the medieval German who pushed eastward beyond the Elbe and the Saale was to see his endeavor

rewarded with success after many grim and bloody generations. And in the forging of character—the sturdy character of the individual and the even more sturdy character of the nation—this grim experience of the expansion and reclamation of his country is one of which all Germans may be justifiably proud.

The years of research that have gone into the making of this work have not dimmed its intensely human interest, nor detracted from the freshness or dramatic force of its material. It is an epic in which Professor Thompson the poetic dramatist frequently overshadows Professor Thompson the scholar.

The careers of financiers, like those of governments, can only be written many years after their death, when enemies are dead and archives are opened. Wall Street isn't dead but some of its archives are being opened and the lives of its earlier giants are being written. R. I. Warshow has made a beginning in *Jay Gould, the Story of a Fortune* (Greenberg, \$3.50) on the task of telling the life story of Jay Gould. In a rapid reportorial style he has put into a brief two hundred pages the outstanding events in the life of the best hated man of his time, of whom his own partner, Daniel Drew, said, "His touch is death".

At a period when bribery, perjury, and merciless trickery were at their hour of perfect flowering in American business, Jay Gould made his fortune, and neglected none of the methods in vogue. Ruining every man who ever associated with him for long, he was uniformly gentle at home, and combined his passion for financial gambling with an equal devotion to azaleas and to good books! Warshow in the course of a swift narrative merely touches on the psychological problem of Gould's life. He points the way, however, to a future psychological study, which should be of great interest and importance.

Gould was a poor boy of Puritan New England stock, who began life with that love of

power and wealth which physical weakness and poverty often give to a sensitive nature. His real start he received by insinuating himself into the affections of a kindly and generous old man who set himself up in the leather business as part owner. By a series of characteristic manipulations Gould soon had the whole business, but his unscrupulousness ruined his reputation in the trade and he went to New York with only a small sum saved out of the wreckage. But he promptly found his way to Wall Street and to a profession more congenial to his talents. Some of the best chapters in Warshaw's book deal with the mighty duel between Vanderbilt and himself over the Erie. He was the only man who ever beat Vanderbilt to a draw. The Commodore made two significant remarks about him. The first, made at an armistice meeting over the Erie fight, was: "This Erie war has taught me that it never pays to kick a skunk". The other was: "Jay Gould is the smartest man in America".

The complete victory of reputable anthropologists over the pseudo-scientific advocates of Nordic superiority has created in the lay mind a vague suspicion that there is no such thing as race at all; which is of course more than the scientific anthropologists bargained for. Professor Melville Herskovits has rescued the word "race" as a legitimate and intelligent term. In *The American Negro* (Knopf, \$2.50), a brilliant essay of eighty-two brief pages, which Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois has called an epoch-making contribution in the field of Negro anthropology, Dr. Herskovits shows plainly that the Afro-American, as we now know him, has definitely left behind him the period of anomalous miscegenation and is emerging before our eyes into an authentic and unique racial personality. Through breeding within his own group and following a pattern of marriage based on color, he is establishing a new human variety, the American Negro. The author's anthropometric work and his conclusions are cautious but richly original.

"The most decisive victory in all history gained by the white man over the American Indian" is the last clarion made by C. M.

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