

*History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the Final Restoration of Home Rule at the South in 1877.* By JAMES FORD RHODES. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1906. Volumes VI and VII.—xx, 440; xiii, 431 pp.

When in 1892 Mr. Rhodes published the first volume of his now famous history, he announced, in imitation no doubt of Macaulay, that he purposed "to write the history of the United States from the introduction of the compromise measure of 1850 down to the inauguration of Grover Cleveland." In the preface to the two volumes which now appear he announces, however, that further reflection has convinced him that a more natural close is the date of the final restoration of home rule in the South after the inauguration of Hayes, and he has acted in accordance with this conviction. He believes that to write a purely narrative history of the succeeding years would be "to shirk a duty and to miss the significance of the period." He confesses that the nineteen years' devotion to the one period has had a tendency to narrow his field of vision, and he says that he feels the need, before attacking the social questions involved in our more recent history, "of a systematic study of the history of Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries . . . in order to bring to bear the light which the experience of those countries may throw upon our own progress since 1877." Historical students will join in wishing that Mr. Rhodes may enjoy his well-earned rest, and that he may later find the necessary time and strength to continue his survey.

As regards the two volumes that are now presented to the public, it seems probable that the general verdict will be that, though entitled to high praise, they are not in all respects up to the high standard set by some of the volumes that appeared before them. Eagerness to complete a work on which the author had so long been engaged may have been an unconscious factor in producing this result, but there were undoubtedly other causes. The period covered is perhaps the most complicated and difficult in our history; much of the material upon it is not yet available; the judgments of history on many aspects of it are not yet made up. Owing to the vast number of legal questions involved in the period, Mr. Rhodes is by training and temperament less fitted to deal with it than with some of the years covered by his earlier volumes.

In his account of Reconstruction Mr. Rhodes obviously intends to be fair, and he usually manages to keep upon solid ground. It may be suggested, however, that in his judgment on the Congressional plan

of Reconstruction he, in common with many other historians, is too much inclined to apply principles and precepts which are admirable in times of peace and quiet but which lose much of their force in times of revolution. And the Civil War and the events that followed it assuredly constitute one of the greatest revolutions known to history ; a revolution that did not go in the direction expected by those who began it, but that was all the more cataclysmic because it took the opposite direction. Measures that are utterly without justification in times of peace are regarded as entirely legitimate in times of war ; and much the same justification may be urged in favor of some of the measures resorted to in the period of Reconstruction. A great war had just resulted in the triumph of certain principles which the world is now agreed were just and right. In the eyes of the victorious party the problem which then presented itself was the preservation of the principles that had been vindicated upon the battlefield. One policy—the milder one—gave some promise of achieving that result ; but whether it would have done so is still a matter of debate and of doubt. A harsher policy, a more “ thorough ” one, assured the result beyond reasonable question and appeared, in the eyes of many, to promise other benefits, most of which, as the event has proved, did not materialize. The latter policy was, of course, adopted ; under similar circumstances it would have been adopted by any party, in any country, in any age. It produced some lamentable results. Nowhere else in American history have there been such corruption and disorder as then followed in some of the Southern states—except at the very same time in the metropolis of the country under Tweed. But the nation as a whole was safely tided over the crisis, and the results of the war, so far as was physically possible, were secured. It is easy now to point out the failures of Reconstruction. They are obvious. But can any reasonable man doubt that the failures of any other policy would also have become obvious? No country that passes through a complete social revolution can hope to settle down at once to peace and quiet, any more than an individual seized with a virulent attack of smallpox or Asiatic cholera can hope to recover without some degree of suffering and inconvenience, whether the treatment he receives be in accordance with the principles of allopathy, homœopathy or Christian science. Suppose the Johnson plan of Reconstruction had been adopted by the Radicals. There would, from the very nature of the situation, have been great disorders in the South, that might well have surpassed those which actually did occur—and historians like Mr. Rhodes would now be chiding Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens for their childlike faith in human nature.

If this reasoning be sound, it seems clear that the historian of the Reconstruction period should devote more space than Mr. Rhodes has done to the successes of Reconstruction and less space to its failures. As a starting point he could take the fact that, speaking broadly, the public school system of practically every Southern state was created by the carpet-bag governments. Then, if he cared to go into the causes of financial prostration during the carpet-bag era, he would find that some, if not most, of that prostration was due to the destruction of property during the war, to the emancipation of billions of dollars worth of slaves, to the disorders incident to the change from one labor system to another, and to the panic of the early seventies, which well-nigh ruined the whole country. Even the amount of stealing done (and it must be admitted that at the lowest estimate there was enough of it) was by no means so large as is generally represented. The great increase in the state debts is not, as some writers would have us believe, a fair measure of speculation. Expenditures had been increased by the necessity of repairing the ravages of war, by the establishment of a school system, and by bonuses to railroads and canals, some of which were *bona fide* enterprises. Tax receipts had fallen off as a result of the decrease in the value of property, and state bonds had to be floated far below par. Financiers had little faith in Southern bonds, partly because of unsettled conditions, and partly because in the period before the war so many of the states in that section had repudiated their debts. What faith they had was mostly misplaced; for after the states were "redeemed" a large proportion of the bonds was repudiated, the good along with the bad. Such matters as these should receive more consideration than is usually accorded them by writers on the period, for assuredly the carpet-bag governments have enough to answer for without being saddled with what is not their due. And, not to discuss this aspect of the matter further, in passing final judgment upon the policy of Reconstruction it should not be forgotten that, despite all the mistakes that were made, the United States recovered from the effects of the Civil War in a shorter time than any one, judging from similar occurrences in history, would have ventured to predict.

In the two volumes under examination the reviewer has noted a number of errors and some doubtful statements with which it would be easy to quarrel—which all goes to show that even a master can lay no claim to infallibility. Only a few such matters can be noted here. The assertion that "'bull-dozing' tactics do not seem to have been used to any extent, if at all, in the South except in South Carolina" during the campaign of 1876 (vol. vii, p. 224) is certainly untrue, at least as

regards Louisiana, where even the testimony of Democratic witnesses shows beyond the shadow of a doubt that several political murders and numerous political outrages did occur. There were not so many such cases as in some previous elections, and some of the alleged outrages were unquestionably hoaxes, but there were cases enough to change the vote materially. If Mr. Rhodes had made use of the testimony collected by the congressional committees instead of relying merely upon their reports, he would not have made this statement. He may be pardoned for not reading all the evidence, for it makes up several thousand pages of finely printed Congressional material, and it is valueless unless subjected to the most careful critical processes. Again, it is incorrect to say that Hayes had 185, Tilden 184, "regularly authenticated" votes (vol. vii, p. 239), for in Oregon the "regularly authenticated" votes were those cast by the Democratic claimant Cronin and his trumped-up college. Nor is the statement on the same page, that the Democrats then had no desire for the vote in Oregon, in exact accordance with the facts in the case. Some of them, it is true, held the motives Mr. Rhodes sets forth, but a very large number would gladly have taken the one all-essential vote from any source. The account of the cipher dispatches (vol. vii, p. 244) is somewhat misleading. Despatches "savoring of corruption" were not only sent "to Colonel W. T. Pelton, Tilden's nephew," at Tilden's home, but numbers of actual propositions to buy votes were, on his own confession, sent by Pelton to agents in the Southern states, and Pelton himself went to Baltimore to conclude a corrupt deal. Herein lies a distinction and a decided difference. Watterson's announcement about "one hundred thousand unarmed citizens" was made in a speech on January 8 at Washington, and not, as Mr. Rhodes says, in the *Courier-Journal* (vol. vii, p. 242). Hayes took the oath of office on the night of the 3rd of March, not on the 4th (vol. vii, p. 279); but it is not strange that Mr. Rhodes failed to ascertain the exact facts on this point, for they were not published until a year ago. The opinion that the Republican case was better managed than the Democratic (vol. vii, pp. 280, 281) is correct; but there ought to be more recognition of the fact that the Republican counsel had the advantage in that they were able to place themselves squarely on the line of cleavage between state and federal powers, whereas the Democrats were forced in the different cases to adopt positions that were inconsistent with each other. The quotation from the *Nation* in which O'Connor's argument is referred to as "a masterpiece" (vol. vii, p. 281) is misleading. As a matter of fact, his speech was rambling

and disappointing. The statement that if the commission had gone behind the returns the votes of Florida and Louisiana would either have been counted for Tilden or altogether rejected (vol. vii, p. 282) is wholly unwarranted and totally erroneous. The Republicans were prepared to fight the contest through even had the commission decided to go behind the returns. The fact that the Republicans saw it to their advantage to make the first fight on constitutional grounds has created an altogether wrong impression concerning the real strength of their position in the disputed states. That, under ordinary circumstances, it would have been better to throw out the votes of the disputed states is unquestionable; but there was much justice in the Republican contention that with a fair election these states would have cast their votes for Hayes, and that it was not right that Tilden should reap the reward of Democratic intimidation and violence. To have thrown out votes under such circumstances would have established a precedent fraught with future temptations.

Now that Mr. Rhodes's work is in a sense completed, an attempt may be made to appraise it as a whole. It may be said at the outset that he cannot lay claim to having produced a new historical synthesis, for he is a story-teller rather than a philosopher. But, as a story-teller, he has some decided merits; and he will probably take a place among the half-dozen greatest historians whom this country has produced. He has gone into the sources, and his work is no mere compilation. He is discriminating and usually fair, though in his efforts to be impartial and please both sides he sometimes goes so far as to leave out coloring that ought to be put in. This is not the best method for arriving at historical truth, but it goes far toward closing "bloody chasms" and "keeping peace in the now reunited family." He has managed to make his pages interesting, though rarely engrossing. He has not himself written many passages that are quotable, but he has a keen eye for quotable passages in the writings of others. If he does not often lead his reader over mountain peaks, he does succeed in keeping him out of the slough of despond. When all this is said, it must still be admitted that in this matter of literary expression lies perhaps his weakest point. Though his style is readable and eminently creditable, it lacks that form and finish, that indescribable charm, which all writers seek but few attain. And when this is said of a historian, it means that sometime, when desire and skill meet more happily in some other man, the work will be better done. Only one American historian has written in such a way that it may be doubted whether this will prove to be his fate. Possessed by a life-long ambi-

tion to do a certain work, equipped with the requisite education and means, living at a time when it was still possible to acquire a first-hand knowledge of the wild life he sought to portray, and gifted with a marvellous literary style, Francis Parkman was able to tell the story of New France as it will never be told again. But even Parkman's work will have to be edited here and there to make it square with information that was not accessible to him. Such is the vanity of the labor of the historian.

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*The Life of Charles A. Dana.* By JAMES HARRISON WILSON.  
New York and London, Harper Brothers, 1907.—545 pp.

*The Life and Letters of Edwin Lawrence Godkin.* Edited by  
ROLLO OGDEN. With portraits. New York, The Macmillan  
Company, 1907.—Two volumes: 322, 278 pp.

It is a fact not without interest that there should appear almost simultaneously the biographies of two men whose careers were contemporaneous, who filled much space in the public mind, and who were alike even amid their very striking differences. Their differences—antagonisms, indeed—political and personal, are sufficiently well known. The points of likeness are, however, also quite perceptible in the circumstances of their lives. Not to draw a too Plutarchian parallel, it is enough to remember that each of these conspicuous men began his public life not long before the outbreak of the Civil War, that each in his own way served the national government throughout that conflict, that each at the close of it became the chief of an influential journal, and that from this time to the end of his life each exercised a considerable influence over public opinion.

Still, the contrasts are much more fundamental than the likenesses; and they are exemplified in these two biographies. Mr. Dana was not given to writing letters or preserving personal memoranda. Hence General Wilson has cast his biography in narrative form with comparatively few quotations. Mr. Godkin, on the other hand, carried on a large private correspondence and wrote to his friends with the same gusto and vivacity as for print and of course with still more unreserve. Mr. Ogden's work is, therefore, as he himself describes it, that of an editor. He has allowed us to read of Mr. Godkin's life, experiences and opinions largely in the pungent sentences of Mr. Godkin himself, the citations being very deftly held together by a tenuous thread of narrative.