

An American Jungle



Paul M. Angle—"case histories."

it, and consistently regarded the Army as subordinate to civil authority. Cautious and courageous, diligent and systematic, he became the more determined to defend his country as her danger increased. He attributed his success to having invariably "walked on a straight line." As Mr. Freeman remarks, "Early in his life he had acquired a positive love of the right and he had developed the will to do the right."

It is not alone the drama of the period that creates the degree of interest peculiar to this volume; Washington comes alive as never before. If he is still Olympian, he is at least relatively human. Perhaps no one, not even a writer of Mr. Freeman's skill and insight, can make him completely credible. Parson Weems, in Mr. Freeman's opinion, was nearer the truth than some of the great man's debunkers.

On the other hand, Mr. Freeman's method scarcely lends itself to the degree of humanizing to which most of us are, perhaps unfortunately, accustomed. Adhering rigidly to what he terms "the established verities," he makes few attempts to penetrate Washington's mind; and the writing, though impressively factual, is often bald and cold. But when occasionally he indulges in legitimate surmise, as in Washington's considering his memories of the war while waiting for the British surrender at Yorktown, Mr. Freeman achieves color and warmth. One wishes he had ignored more often the discipline of his method and, at the risk of being merely "plausible," as he describes part of the hazard, had given his imagination greater play. But this would not have been Mr. Freeman, whose discipline, industry, and patience rival in the field of scholarship those very qualities which his subject displayed during the years of the Revolution.

BLOODY WILLIAMSON. By Paul M. Angle. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 300 pp. \$4.

By WILLIAM E. WILSON

IN all his writing, Paul M. Angle, now director of the Chicago Historical Society, has exhibited a rare combination of talents: the sharp eye for detail and the vivid, swiftly-moving narrative style of a first-class newspaper reporter together with the unimpeachable honesty and the scholarly thoroughness of a fine historian. In "Bloody Williamson," he has combined these qualities again and has produced a book that few readers will be able to put aside until they have finished it.

Most non-Illinoisians will probably not recognize the name of Williamson County until they encounter the name of Herrin, but that name appears on Mr. Angle's second page and by the time his readers have reached that point they will be wholly engrossed in the suspense of the night preceding the Herrin Massacre of June 22, 1922. That massacre grew out of an attempt to break a strike against a strip mine of the Southern Illinois Coal Company. Its owner, William J. Lester, had imported strike-breakers and by June 22 they were holed up in the mine under siege, surrounded by some five hundred strikers armed with rifles, revolvers, and dynamite. By noon of that day, eighteen men were dead, most of them murdered in cold blood after they had surrendered. Five more were to die before the long, involved course of indictments, trials, and investigations reached its fruitless end more than a year later.

Williamson's reputation for bloodshed and brutality does not rest upon that one episode alone, however. The county had already earned the epithet, "bloody," a half century earlier when a tavern brawl precipitated a feud between the Bulliner and Henderson families that was to last eight years. By 1876, a local historian had computed a total of 495 assaults with deadly weapons and 285 murderous assaults in the county since its founding. The Bulliners and Hendersons and their allies were responsible for large shares in these figures.

In 1906 and 1910, there were outbreaks of violence in Williamson County again, resulting on these occasions from conflicts between union and non-union miners, but not representing the basic struggle between organized and unorganized labor, in Mr. Angle's opinion, so much as deep-

rooted racial and economic prejudices. In the first instance, an operator named Samuel T. Brush expressed his doctrinaire disapproval of unionism by firing all his newly organized employees and indiscreetly importing Negro strike-breakers from the South. In the second, Joseph Leiter, a Chicago millionaire, set out to prove that he could operate without the United Mine Workers by making a citadel of his mining property, equipping it with bunkers, machine guns, a searchlight, and a trained body of armed guards. In both instances, the results were murders, skirmishes, ambushes, lynchings, and explosions.

Since the Herrin Massacre, there have been two further wars in Williamson, neither of them related to labor disputes. The Ku Klux Klan, led by S. Glenn Young, rode high, wide, and horrible through the county in the mid-Twenties, and the age of gangsterism, with Charlie Birger and the Shelton boys playing the leading roles, burst upon the county a few years later. Like the actors in the "Bloody Vendetta" of the Sixties and Seventies and of the three violent labor disputes, the principals in these later conflicts stopped at nothing in their exercise of power through violence. The stories of their killings and beatings read like the case histories of an asylum of maniacs, the only difference being that few of these Williamson maniacs were ever incarcerated.

In his foreword, Mr. Angle expresses the conviction that "the story of 'Bloody Williamson' is more than a record of lawlessness in one small Illinois county." He believes that it is the story, in microcosm, of the whole United States, demonstrating our "family hatreds, labor strife, religious bigotry, nativistic narrowness, a desire for money and to hell with the rules." His concluding chapter, in which he returns to this thesis, does not round out his argument as fully as one might expect; and yet a lengthy peroration is perhaps not necessary to a book such as this. Only an uninformed and thoroughly insulated man or woman could read this tale of concentrated evil without realizing that its potentialities have long existed everywhere, not only in the United States but throughout the world, evil which must be recognized and extirpated if we are to survive.

William E. Wilson is professor of English at Indiana University. His latest novel, "The Strangers," is reviewed in this issue.



—Culver Service.

Riel's Rebellion—"a more honestly pious figure of war never existed."

Wilderness Washington

STRANGE EMPIRE. By Joseph Kinsey Howard. New York: William Morrow & Co. 601 pp. \$6.

By A. B. GUTHRIE, JR.

"HISTORY," says Joseph Kinsey Howard, "is impatient with intangibles." It is also infinitely indifferent to men and morals. Mr. Howard regretted the former; he never reconciled or tried to reconcile himself to the latter. And so it was that his was a lifetime of interest in and efforts for the unfortunate and mistreated. So it was, too, that the neglected and all-but-forgotten story of Louis Riel and his mongrel nation should enlist his sympathies and command his talents.

His book, published a little more than a year after his sudden death, is history reflective of his humanity, as it is reflective of his integrity, his

scholarship, his depth, his informed respect for language. It will endure as a contribution to historiography, as a contribution of a kind rare with the professional historian, which Mr. Howard was not. History, whatever else it is, is never dull; the professional historian too often is.

Louis Riel was the leader of the mixed bloods or Métis of the great Northwestern plain that straddles the boundary between Dakota and Montana to the south and the Canadian provinces to the north. They were a people apart, these Métis, sons and daughters and later descendants of white fathers and Indian mothers, who had no nation and no tribe except as they could be tribe and nation of themselves. Twice, in 1870 around the present Winnipeg and in 1885 on the South Saskatchewan, Riel led them in struggles for what white people re-

gard, with reference to whites, as the simple rights of man. He wanted a geographical home for them, suffrage, representation in the Dominion Parliament, land grants for schools, other reasonable and feasible concessions from a Government that he wished his people to be allied with, not servile to or divorced from.

His plans were far more political than military. He knew he couldn't win at war. If it came to such a pass, he hoped a show of arms—resistance rather than rebellion—would bring political settlement about. And twice he had to fight.

Not many were killed in those conflicts of 1870 and 1885, even as casualties were counted then. One non-atomic bomb these days could do more damage than all the pieces fired. And perhaps because the list was small, history has given little space to the engagements, or to their causes or contingencies or consequences.

But possibilities of great importance were involved, and results brought forth that we can see today. There existed then the chance, if slim, of American expansion across the boundary clear to the territory of Alaska, and expansionists sought to turn Dominion-Métis troubles to this end. Antagonisms, racial and religious, were so aroused as to help set a still-existent pattern of Canadian society and politics. The fate of the Plains Indians, especially those resident within the United States, was affected. Indeed, Mr. Howard believed that with a little luck and a little more of foresight the Sioux, Crees, and Blackfeet, along with their cousins, the Métis, might have won sizable concessions from white civilization. "There were times," he says, "when Manifest Destiny slid off the trail and bogged down."

Riel emerges from these pages as a mystic, an egomaniac, almost a religious fanatic, a priest of sorts, though he quit studying for the Catholic priesthood and once renounced the Church. At one time he was insane or at least unsettled. He spent months in an asylum. There were people who thought he was crazy to the last. But there was a quality of leadership in the man, and of wisdom and unselfish aspiration and humility and moderation, the manifestations of which are not to be treated as fugitive aberrations because of contradictions in his make-up. Probably a less bloodthirsty or more honestly pious figure of war never lived.

The result of all his efforts—except

A. B. Guthrie, Jr., is the author of "The Big Sky" and "The Way West," novels of white men and the Northwest Indians.