

Immortality in Defeat

"Death of a Nation," by Clifford Dowdey (Knopf, 383 pp. \$5), is an account of General Lee and his soldiers at the historic battle of Gettysburg. Richard S. West, Jr., who reviews the study, wrote "Mr. Lincoln's Navy."

By Richard S. West, Jr.

CONSIDERING how Lee's barefooted, butter-nut-clad troops cleaned out the haberdasheries and smokehouses of Chambersburg, the Gettysburg campaign may be interpreted as the Civil War's "greatest commissary raid." Militarily the campaign marked Lee's final effort to break loose from Jefferson Davis's defensive strategy. Then, as the spearhead of Lee's last great thrust into Northern territory was blunted and turned aside by "those people" at Culp's Hill and Cemetery Ridge, Lee's hopes for overwhelming victory died away, and with it went the Confederacy's last chance for survival. The meaning which Civil War author Clifford Dowdey finds in Gettysburg (and few will take issue with him) is that the three-day tragedy spelled literally "the death of a nation."

As a writer on the Civil War, Mr. Dowdey has served an apprenticeship in two earlier books ("Experiment in Rebellion" and "The Land They Fought For"). He is a resident of Richmond who has been interested in the Civil War for the past thirty years, and an ardent admirer, though by no means blindly uncritical, of Robert E. Lee, and he aligns himself with those who take a dim view of "Lee's war-horse" and acrimonious postwar critic, General James Longstreet.

In lieu of footnotes Mr. Dowdey has included a readable twenty-page note on sources which inspires confidence in his craftsmanship. "I have in my possession," he writes, "the diary of a great-uncle, who, a chemist, was transferred . . . to the field medical corps and served at Gettysburg. But he was obsessed with working out a formula of meat juice to serve as a meat substitute for the wounded and ill, and, try as I might, I could not justify the inclusion of Uncle Ira's findings in a narrative of the invasion." This willingness to sacrifice Uncle Ira has given "Death of a Na-

tion" a firmness of texture not really inherent in its sprawling subject.

From the outset Mr. Dowdey conveys an awareness of Lee's many problems, and, as the factual and quietly paced narrative proceeds, an understanding of some of the reasons for the campaign's failure.

In the background always is the image of that fallen giant Stonewall Jackson, to whose loss at Chancellorsville a few months before the Gettysburg operation Lee had not yet adjusted. On the eve of the latter's departure Jefferson Davis had "interfered" by withholding certain tried-and-true brigades for garrison duty and replacing them with new troops. Both A. P. Hill and R. S. Ewell, commanders of the Third and Second corps, had previously done well as division leaders, but how they would perform under their present increased responsibilities was to be seen only in battle. In Mr. Dowdey's interpretation, unknown to Lee, his "war-horse" Longstreet, of the First Corps, lusted to succeed Stonewall as Lee's chief advisor, and Lee's failure to accept his advice about where to attack at Gettysburg turned Longstreet so sour as to impair his judgment as a commander.

From the start Lee was badly served by his cavalry. "Jeb" Stuart's role had been to move northward to the east of the Blue Ridge while the infantry ascended in the valley. Instead, he undertook a "gallant" dash clear

around the Union Army (motivated by sheer vanity, in Mr. Dowdey's opinion), crossed the Potomac not far from Washington, and became so bogged down with the capture of a Federal wagon train that he didn't regain touch with Lee until the afternoon of July 2, when the Gettysburg battle was in its second day. Deprived of his scouting cavalry, Lee at Chambersburg had no means of knowing where Meade's army was when, on June 30, he turned eastward to concentrate his infantry, and stumbled upon the enemy at Gettysburg.

The complexities of the three-day battle are artfully described, piecemeal and in slow motion from the ugly struggle at Devil's Den on the first day through Pickett's spectacular and disastrous charge on the third. In Mr. Dowdey's opinion Lee erred by granting his untried corps commanders the same wide discretion he had always given to Stonewall Jackson. Battle fatigued, as was Lee himself, they failed to measure up to what had been expected of them. "Death of a Nation" tells its tragic story with dignity and charm. It is well worth reading.

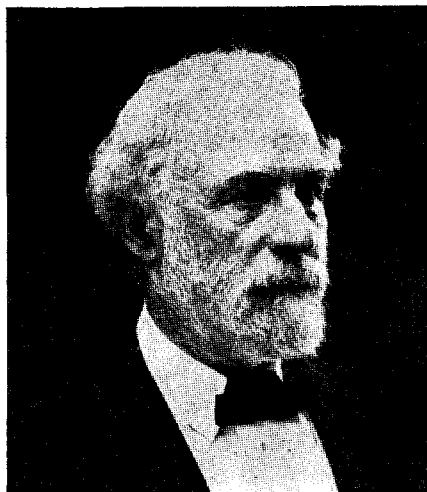
A "Put-up" Job?

"Why the Civil War?" by Otto Eisenschiml (Bobbs-Merrill, 208 pp. \$3.75), is an interpretation of the forces that started the Civil War, with Lincoln as the chief culprit. Our reviewer is Bruce Catton, author of "A Stillness at Appomattox."

By Bruce Catton

IT APPEARS that the Civil War was a put-up job, and Abraham Lincoln was the man who did the putting. Lincoln arranged things purposely so that the misguided Confederates would fire on Fort Sumter; then, when the firing had taken place, he further manipulated things so that the people of the North would accept the bombardment as the beginning of a war. There would have been no war if Lincoln had not gone out of his way to stage it; he did it purposely, believing that the war would be short and easy and would offer a handy way out of a tough political situation.

This, if I understand everything correctly, is roughly the thesis which Mr. Otto Eisenschiml advances in "Why the Civil War?" And whether the book is presented as a serious contribution to history or is simply intended to stir up the animals and touch off a fine argument is a trifle beyond me. The interpretation is not



Robert E. Lee, 1870—"... stumbled upon the enemy at Gettysburg."



Darwin in Dayton

"Six Days or Forever?" by Ray Ginger (Beacon. 248 pp. \$3.95), reviews the Tennessee vs. Scopes anti-evolution case and the myriad implications of the famed "monkey-trial." Joseph Wood Krutch, our reviewer, was himself an observer at the trial.

By Joseph Wood Krutch

exactly new. As long ago as 1937 Professor Charles W. Ramsdell of Texas advanced much the same argument, and more recently Professor E. Merton Coulter of Georgia wrote in somewhat the same vein, suggesting that the real question was whether Lincoln was a conscienceless schemer or merely uncommonly clumsy.

What is new is Mr. Eisenschiml's painstaking examination of events in Washington between the day Lincoln took office and the day the war began. Some very odd things did happen here, in all truth. It took Lincoln a long time to make up his mind about things; Secretary Seward was assiduously following a policy of his own; contradictory orders were issued; sheer inexperience with the intricacies of government led to a succession of blunders—and, all in all, the record contains a good many unanswered questions, most of which can be summed up in the blanket question: What on earth was going on here, anyway?

What was going on, obviously, was the confusion inevitable when men found themselves obliged to grapple with an extraordinarily pressing and intricate problem for whose solution neither their own personal backgrounds nor the national experience itself offered any guide lines. But to Mr. Eisenschiml all of it was planned confusion. Lincoln had an angle, as they say, all the way through, and if he made mistakes he made them on purpose. To the eye of preternatural suspicion nothing ever just happens. The thread of cunning, calculated chicanery is visible all the way through, even if tracing it involves one in such absurdities as holding up James Buchanan as the statesman whose wavering, quavering course a really wise Lincoln would have followed.

To say that this book raises more questions than it answers is to put it mildly. To say that the answers which it does offer are less than convincing is to be even milder. Perhaps the best way to sum it up is to take refuge in the hackneyed remark: This is a very controversial book.

THE "monkey-trial" at Dayton, Tennessee, is probably the most often recalled incident of the whole gaudy Twenties—and rightly so. The present reviewer sat it through in his native Tennessee, and the present book gives what strikes him as incomparably the truest account ever written of the facts as they occurred, of the personalities involved, of the social, political, and moral forces at work, of the whole atmosphere of the event.

To do that in the very different world of today is no easy task. Anyone whose own adult experience is confined to the past twenty years will almost inevitably try to see the contrast in terms of the brutal and bloody conflicts of his own time. He will think of the "trials" in Moscow, Berlin, and Budapest. Or perhaps of Salem and witchcraft. But the Twenties did not play so brutally or for keeps. At Dayton nobody (except perhaps William Jennings Bryan) got hurt, and most did not want anyone to. What one saw there was perhaps one-tenth dangerous fanaticism and one-tenth genuine intellectual debate, but all the rest was circus, jape, and at least moderately clean fun.

Consider first the origins: A kindly, ignorant, simple-minded Congressman, having heard that young people were losing their faith over Darwin, drew up on impulse a bill prohibiting the teaching of evolution in state schools. It was passed by a legislature which thought it meaningless and didn't want to get involved in a religious argument. It was signed by a Governor who stated publicly, "Nobody believes that it is going to be an active statute." Perhaps it never would have been had not the Civil Liberties Union (with less to occupy it then than now) offered to finance a test case which most of Tennessee hoped would never be made. It persuaded an obscure, not conspicuously intellectual high-school biology teacher and coach to cooperate. Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan were drawn in. Before anyone quite knew what was happening a back-woods religious argument

had become a *cause célèbre* throughout the civilized world.

Consider now what happened at the trial itself: On the quiet little town converged several of the most publicized figures in American life. To H. L. Mencken—a sort of presiding genius—the trial was a soul-satisfying exhibition of the yokel antics he loved and satirized. To Darrow it was an exhilarating court battle during which he could expound his kindly village-atheist philosophy, and probably all the more agreeable because nobody's fate was seriously involved. To Bryan it looked like a good opportunity to defend before a sympathetic audience a grotesque religious position for which he knew it was becoming harder and harder to find such an audience. To the town of Dayton it was an unexpected and intoxicating spotlight.

Consider finally the results: First, a series of flamboyant orations impartially applauded by an enraptured audience. Then the expected verdict, "Guilty," which few believed meant anything. Finally, long after and almost unnoticed, a Superior Court review which declared a mistrial and entered a *nolle pros*. Except as history, legend, and myth the incident was closed. The defendant, Scopes, was given a scholarship to study biology. Bryan, the real victim, died a few days after the close of the original trial, and it seems not unlikely that his death was hastened by the realization that, paradoxically, he had lost.

Arthur Garfield Hays, of the Civil Liberties Union, complained bitterly that the court had pusillanimously made it impossible to retry the case. But such a retrial would have served no further purpose. New and more serious threats to enlightenment and civil liberties would soon arise. But, in so far as the anti-evolution trial had represented such a threat, its whole basis and conception were too anachronistic to give it much chance of achieving any significant or lasting success. If any real villains were involved they were the educational officials who, for the most part, kept their mouths shut because, after the manner of their kind, they feared for their appropriations.

Mr. Ginger will not agree wholly with my interpretation. He makes more than I should make of the sinister potentialities which seemed to be inherent in the attempt to make fundamentalism the law of the land. But I still feel that it was mostly sham battle and that the serious threats to decency came, not from rural fundamentalists, but from newer philosophies preached by abler and more sophisticated men.