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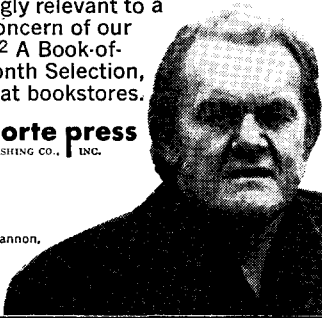
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contrary, serve as a standard with which to measure all hypotheses about them. In the social sciences, however, the situation is not nearly as favorable. The objects of study themselves are relatively elusive, their character is often different for every observer, and scientific parochialism in that area leads quite naturally to conscious and unconscious quackery.

Dr. Lifton, it seems to me, is in this connection a victim of the sociology of science. Laymen, and his fellow scientists in other disciplines, are predisposed to take his pronouncements at face value on the assumption that he is the discoverer of his chosen objects of study—as if mankind were an Ultima Thule no other explorer had yet sighted—and that no one else is in a position to criticize the adequacy of his descriptions or the soundness of his conclusions. And no one is, except Missourians. Once the ill-bred question is asked, "What is he saying, and how does it square with our own experience of life?" then the veil of the temple is rent, and the aura of arcane knowledge is dispelled. But Dr. Lifton's readers have not generally put that question to him. In that regard they have not dealt fairly with him; he has a right to complain of them.

Emile Capouya is a writer, editor, and publisher who comments frequently on literary and political subjects.

CHARLES SUMNER AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN

by David Donald

Knopf, 631 pp., \$15

Reviewed by T. Harry Williams

■ Charles Sumner has frequently provoked and sometimes puzzled historians. Most of those who were provoked reacted against certain harsh qualities in his personality and decided that this Senator from Massachusetts had been a malign influence in the politics of the Civil War era, a leader in that fanatic band of antislavery men who had helped to bring on the war and to make its aftermath a tragic experience. Thus W. A. Dunning wrote in the early 1900s: "He was the perfect type of that narrow fanaticism which erudition and egotism combine to produce." Dunning was the first great historian of Reconstruction, but he had a pro-Southern and Democratic bias that made him see Sumner through hostile eyes. Yet

Carl Sandburg, writing at a later time and presumably without such a bias, rendered a somewhat similar verdict. In his sketch of Sumner in his life of Lincoln, Sandburg said: "He was perhaps the most perfect impersonation of what the South wanted to secede from." Sandburg added: "The winds of doctrine roared in the caverns of his mind."

For a time there were almost no favorable evaluations. To be sure, W. E. B. Du Bois, the Negro historian of Reconstruction, pronounced that Sumner, while "no leader of men," was "a leader of thought, and one of the finest examples of New England culture and American courage." But Du Bois's opinions had little impact upon historians when they were issued during the 1930s. Gradually, however, and coinciding with the rise of the civil rights revolution, a more benign attitude toward Sumner began to emerge. Allan Nevins, in his monumental series *The Ordeal of the Union*, attempted a balanced portrait, and concluded: "Indeed, he was a remarkable combination of qualities good and bad." But, Nevins added, "He regarded himself as an unerring exponent of moral law." The process came to a climax with the appearance of the school of "neo-abolitionist" historians, who looked on the antislavery movement as a great moral crusade that had been treated unfairly by previous writers, and considered Sumner one of its heroes. In a typical comment Fawn Brodie described him as the "personification of the Puritan in politics" and the "conscience of the whole nation." But she felt impelled to admit that he "believed in government by exhortation."

There is an evident note of puzzlement in all the estimates of Sumner, even the ones by those who most admire him. Obviously, he was a compelling and towering figure. But on what basis did his claim to greatness rest? He was clearly an apolitical politician, a man who attached unusual importance to the power of words, an urger of moral principles, a scorner of compromise. How did such an individual attain a position of influence in the American political system, and manage to remain a Senator from 1851 until his death in 1874? Or was he really what he seemed, lofty and detached? Were his fine words possibly mere cant designed to serve his personal ambition or the selfish aims of certain groups behind him?

In 1960 David Donald attempted an answer to the problem in his *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War*, which carried the story down to the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861. It was the first biography of Sumner in fifty years, and the first by a historian

trained in modern research techniques. Donald brought impressive credentials to his task. Recognized as a skilled craftsman, he had recently won additional attention by arguing that Lincoln and the Radical Republicans had not been divided by fundamental differences, as previous scholars had thought, but had been united on basic objectives. This concept, which placed Donald in the "consensus" school, was not accepted by all historians. It was, however, a seminal and stimulating idea, and forced others to rethink the whole subject of Civil War politics.

It is well that Donald had unusual qualifications, for he was tackling an unusually difficult subject. Sumner was active not only in politics but in the peace movement and in prison and educational reform, and the source materials on him were immense. Moreover, Sumner was a complex man, probably driven by concealed frustrations, certainly not what is called "normal." Professor Donald felt called on to do what all biographers should do but few consider: he attempted to measure the inner nature of his subject, using the tools of psychology. The book was widely hailed, although some of the neo-abolitionist historians charged that Donald had failed to understand Sumner and the antislavery movement, and questioned his psychological approach. Allan Nevins voiced a common reaction when he said the project promised to be "one of the enduring American biographies."

Now, ten years later, Donald has given us his concluding volume. It spans the years from 1861 to 1874, or the administrations of Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, and U. S. Grant. Sumner's career during this period posed for the author an even more awesome task than did his earlier one. Not only was Sumner an increasingly influential leader in Republican councils, he was chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and in this position he exercised at times a controlling voice in determining foreign policy. Donald therefore had, in addition to exhausting his domestic sources, to dig into European archives.

Always in opposition before 1861, Sumner now enjoyed his position as a member of the Lincoln administration. It seemed that his role would be a large one. Lincoln turned regularly to Sumner for advice on diplomatic affairs, giving the Senator what Donald calls, with possible exaggeration, a "virtual veto over foreign policy." Lincoln, that astute manipulator of power, was perhaps playing Sumner off against Secretary of State Seward, but the President also realized that Sumner could be of real aid to him and the government. Widely known and re-

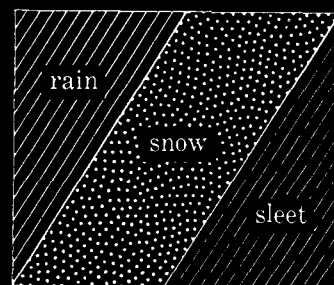
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spected in England, the key nation in the European system, Sumner as an administration adviser was eminently fitted to present the Union cause abroad. And, except for a few aberrations, he performed his part well. He helped as much as any man did to avert European intervention in the war.

Gradually, however, Sumner became restive in his role as an administration stalwart. He was perhaps psychologically conditioned to disagreement. He felt that Lincoln was moving too slowly on the emancipation question, and would not move any faster unless pushed by public opinion and Congress—and speeches by Charles Sumner. He was one of the leaders of the Radical



Republican faction that believed the war offered a providential opportunity to strike down slavery, as it finally did. Donald details the struggle between the conservative Lincoln and the Radicals, but repeats his contention that it was not fundamental and concerned means instead of ends. Lincoln and Sumner had a "basic compatibility," he declares.

Sumner had no compatibility at all with Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson. Neither did most other Republicans, Donald states, stressing that the party was essentially united on a Reconstruction policy. Sumner was in the vanguard of the Republican attack on the President and helped to arouse public concern on such issues as civil rights. But Donald thinks that he had little influence on actual legislation and was in fact losing authority in the Party, a process that had started toward the end of the war. Sumner, Donald explains, was a "political outsider; he disliked committees, except when he was chairman, was ineffectual in caucus, and proved inept at drafting legislation. He announced principles as from Mount Sinai, and deplored the compromises needed to transform ideal into legislative reality.

If Sumner was undergoing some kind of change in his political behavior, the process became more pronounced under Grant. Although a Republican President again sat in the White House, Sumner continued in the role of administration critic. He was still chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, and from this position of power he tried to control the negotiations with England to settle the Alabama claims originating in the Civil

War, and he sabotaged Grant's plan to annex Santo Domingo. (Donald's account of these episodes is especially fine.) The President was so enraged at the rejection of his annexation scheme that he engineered Sumner's removal from the chairmanship. At the time of his death in 1874 Sumner was in political eclipse, and possibly might have failed to be re-elected. Still unpassed was his cherished Civil Rights Bill, which was his most important, and practical, legacy to the future. More than any of his contemporaries, he realized, as Donald notes, that the viability of American democracy "depended upon the ability of the white and black races to live together in peace and equity. Instead of huddling the sensitive question of race relations out of sight, he wanted it discussed broadly and openly when American institutions were still flexible enough to permit major racial changes."

The book has its shortcomings. The author's consensus theory gives some of its pages a bland quality. One could wish that Donald had more fully analyzed Sumner as a radical type. He does not quite explain the bases of Sumner's popular support. But these are minor objections. With the appearance of this volume, Nevins's prediction has been fulfilled. This should be one of the enduring biographies.

T. Harry Williams, who has written and edited many books about the Civil War period, teaches history at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge

**FRASER YOUNG
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1438**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1438 will be found in the next issue.

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QZSLZ MBU B VQZBUWIZ DX
DH QDYZ HMBH PA NIZUHQD-
XL NDHM B ADXZ NPF BX.

—OPIS MBQDABK

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1437

We know lots of things we used to didn't know, but we don't know any way to prevent them happening.

—WILL ROGERS.