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(Continued from page 26)

what we all crave is to recover the past as a human reality and to comprehend it as the thing that made us what we are. Most of the histories that are written defeat our desire by presenting the past as a conflict of abstract forces. We turn to the novel and biography because, although they generally present a partial or distorted view of events, they at least humanize them and so lend them significance. Mr. Branch has evidently felt this need for making the past humanly real and in some of his chapters he has succeeded pretty well. The one on the old National Road, with its "Pike boys," its wayside inns, its endless procession of wagons, stage-coaches and droves of hogs is especially good. He shows a real insight into pioneer character. He brings out the neurotic urgency of the pioneering instinct, and its furious will-to-power, which impelled the pioneer farmer to fight and conquer the land rather than cherish it. He sees that the real explorations were all performed by obscure and forgotten men and that the Pikes and Fremonts only followed trails that had been known for years.

The book is well organized and well written, but it leaves me wishing that Mr. Branch had written his story more exclusively in terms of those Plain Men whom he praises, and had relegated political and military history to the notes.

H. F.

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