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Reviews

THE SOUTH DURING RECONSTRUCTION, 1865-77, by E. Merton Coulter (A History of the South, ed. by Wendell H. Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, vol. VIII). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947, Pp. XII, 426. Map and illustrations. \$5.00.

The one disappointment that this book will bring to the reader is that it deals almost exclusively with the states of the old Confederacy and gives only incidental attention to the other Southern, but unseceding, states. But, for this contraction of subject ample compensation is made by an expanded treatment of all phases of Southern life during the period: it is the South and not Reconstruction that forms the central theme.

The story begins quite logically with a consideration of "The Cost of War" to the South. An accountant might possibly demur to the statement that "the Southerner who had invested \$1,000. in a slave suffered as great a loss as if he had invested that \$1,000. in a Confederate bond," and the sociologist would probably point out that only a small minority of the Southern people ever had any such investments to lose. For the Southern lambs shorn of their Confederate currency the rude wind was tempered by the approximate worthlessness of the said currency—as the author notes. No one can deny the devastation in the Valley of Virginia and along Sherman's itinerary, but surely there were great regions of the South undevastated and even unvisited by hostile armies. It would seem not an unmixed evil that so much land drifted back to a "state of nature" during the war. But there was loss enough in all conscience, and to the losses of war were added the losses of peace when federal agents in a frenzied and even abnormal, outburst of dishonesty stole some three million bales of cotton from the Southern people.

"The author of this work feels that there can be no sensible departure from the well-known facts of the Reconstruction program. . . ." His description, therefore, presents no "novel and unsubstantiated views" such as, for example, that Reconstruction was a class struggle and an effort to bring a greater measure of democracy

into Southern life. Congressional Reconstruction he correctly appraises as a device of Republican politicians to insure the continued dominance of the Grand Old Party. They were aided and abetted by Northern business fearful that a reviving Democracy might lay violent hands on that ark of the covenant known as the protective tariff. To these ends they gave the ballot to the negroes and began a policy of disfranchising the white men. They had no interest in the negro except as a political pawn and after giving the ballot gave him nothing more. He needed land and received only promises; he needed education and received propoganda; he needed guidance and was given power. Contrary to popular conception, there was no wholesale disfranchisement of white men. Professor Coulter estimates that the number disfranchised by the Reconstruction Acts was only one hundred fifty thousand and that only three states limited white suffrage under the constitutions of 1868. It is evident, or at least highly suggested, that the constitutional conventions were controlled by Radicals not because the Conservatives were outnumbered but because, for whatever reason, they were too apathetic to vote even after they had gone to the trouble of registering.

The carpet-bag governments under the constitutions of 1868 were, the author points out, only partially carpet-bag: in five states the Scalawags came to be dominant and proved as corrupt as carpet-baggers. "The pestilence of the times knew no limits either geographical or racial." The Scalawags were more numerous and prominent than ordinarily represented. Some of them were sincere Appeasers, more of them were hogs who now saw an opportunity of getting their fore-feet in the trough. They shared the carpet-bag ambition of using the negro as a voter, but were Southern enough to object to them as office-holders.

It was fortunate for the South, comments Professor Coulter, that this unholy trinity of carpet-baggers, Scalawags, and negroes were such crooks. Had they been sincere fanatics they might have permanently upset the civilization of the South. But their imaginations went no further than theft, in which they developed an efficiency hitherto unknown in America. The plundering of borrowed funds was comparatively harmless because the Southern states later repudiated much of the debt. But the accompanying high taxation drove the white South to the verge of despair.

"Radicalism was predestined to go" but, as the author shows, destiny received considerable assistance from outside sources. Dis-

sension among the Radicals themselves gave the Conservative Democrats an opportunity which they improved by trickery, propaganda and wholesale intimidation. The disillusionment of the negroes made them easy victims of Democratic wiles and the Scalwags rejoined their white brethren in disgust with the negro program of the carpet-baggers. The disillusionment of Northern business men, reflected first in the Congress and later in the Presidency, induced the national government to hold aloof while the Southern people threw the rascals out.

During Reconstruction plantation agriculture underwent a reorganization which substituted tenancy for slavery, the country store for the factor. The author points out that the much-publicized "break-up" of the plantation meant only an increase of tenants and not an increase of land-owners, and that the much-maligned merchant was himself hag-ridden by the bankers. The "amazingly slow" recovery of agriculture proves, in the opinion of the author, how grievously it had been wounded by war and Reconstruction. The reviewer (with becoming diffidence) suggests that the hard times of the 70's may have had something to do with it and that the author may be taking too charitable view of the 1880 census. Professor Coulter finds during Reconstruction a factory growth overlooked by a host of previous writers. One may doubt, however, if this growth came because the war jarred the "South out of its restrictive agricultural philosophy." May it not have been a decline of agricultural profits rather than a decline of agricultural philosophy? Moreover, the manufacturing growth of the 70's looks suspiciously like a continuation of the ante-bellum movement. The old railroads of the South recovered so rapidly as to throw suspicion (in the mind of the reviewer) on the completeness of their "ruin" in the war. Old and new, gave proof of their renewed national spirit by adopting the iniquities of the Northern lines. While the United States was supervising the re-entry of the Southern states into the more perfect Union resulting from the war it left the harbors of Mobile, Savannah, and other port cities blocked and permitted the Father of Waters to flow unvexed to the sea in any fashion it chose.

Except for the fact that it had a War to commemorate the literary output of the South during Reconstruction did not differ materially from that of the Old South. Recreations remained as they had been, and the "civil war turned Southern women away from all things Northern except the fashion plate." In the colleges

the curriculum turned more to the sciences and vocations, but the carpet-baggers practically closed many of the state universities by political control and insistence on mixed schools, and made a mockery of the public schools by stealing their funds. The author refers to the Peabody Fund as the "greatest act of help and friendship which came to the South during the Reconstruction." The Episcopal church was the only one to reunite after the war. The prewar chasm separating Northern Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists from their Southern brethren was too wide to be easily bridged, and was, in fact, widened by the conduct of the Northern congregations after the war. The Northern Methodists distinguished themselves by their bitter hatred and contempt for Southern people and operated as a political machine for the subjugation of the South rather than as a religious group for extending the Kingdom. When a certain "clerical gladiator" of the Methodists persuasion expressed the conviction that "rebels . . . ought to be taken by the nape of the neck and held over hell till they squalled like cats," he was promoting brotherly love in the same fashion the Abolitionists had done. In view of the records as revealed by Professor Coulter, the ultimate reunion of the two churches indicates that Southern people possess either an amazing grace for forgiveness or a truly miraculous power to forget.

Professor Coulter has written from the Southern point of view not because he is a Southerner but because he is a scholar. As always, he writes easily, with sanity and humor, with perfect craftsmanship and wide perspective. To the reviewer it appears that he has said the final word on his subject and has closed the account. In this volume the *History of the South* has gotten off to a splendid start.

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