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Neutrality, Its History, Economics and Law, Vol. II: The Napoleonic Period and Vol. III The World War Period

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BOOK REVIEW

NEUTRALITY, ITS HISTORY, ECONOMICS AND LAW. New York. Columbia University Press, 1936.

Vol. II: THE NAPOLEONIC PERIOD. By W. Alison Phillips and Arthur H. Reed. Pp. vi, 339.

Vol. III: THE WORLD WAR PERIOD. By Edgar Turlington. Pp. xi, 267.

“What Price Neutrality” has been a question uppermost in the minds of League of Nations officials and private individuals interested in discovering a road leading to peace and security. This problem is approached in Volume Two of this new series which deals with the period of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

Part One by Professor Phillips is an account of belligerent and neutral commerce between the years 1793 and 1812. This section contains no new material but is valuable for its excellent summing up of detailed legal questions presented in a style unusual in such works. The author has rendered a long needed service by separating essentials from non-essentials and placing in two hundred and eight pages a clear recital of Jay’s Treaty, the relations between the northern European nations and the warring powers, the controversy between the United States and Great Britain over the impressment of seamen, the actions and reactions resulting from Napoleon’s “Continental System”, and the moves leading up to the United States’ declaration of war against England in 1812.

Part Two of this volume is the only satisfactory study, in any language, dealing with the concrete effects of the wars upon neutral commerce and industry. For every country concerned there are charts showing the general prosperity of the European neutrals during the period of conflict. Comments upon the trade of the Scandinavian states and the German cities would lead too far afield and leave untouched an American’s chief interest — a picture of the United States from the death of Louis XVI to the beginning of the end of Napoleon Bonaparte.

There are some lessons to be taken to heart by the world as a whole and the United States in particular in these days of League sanctions and League embargoes. With the young American republic unable to utilize the argument of force, President Jefferson was determined to show Europe that injustice could be met with

justice. In view of the fact that Congress had long before in 1794 passed an embargo act, whereby for thirty days no vessel was allowed to leave an American port for any foreign harbor, he found himself armed with a sword of righteousness. Consequently, on December 18, 1807, the American President laid before Congress a proposal which was later enacted into law prohibiting "all ships and vessels in the ports and places within the limits or jurisdiction of the United States, cleared or not cleared, bound to any foreign port or place", from sailing. The results of this embargo, as Professor Reed points out, were hardly suitable as an alternative to war. Regardless of drastic penalties, the law consistently was defied. Many an American vessel in foreign harbors at the time of the law's passage, carried on business without entering ports flying the stars and strips; others obtained licenses to trade from the governors of Maritime States who saw huge fortunes in law violation, and the Canadian border witnessed a great smuggling trade which was carried on under the noses of bewildered American agents.

The trade and commerce of the United States suffered during the time the embargo existed. The shipping and agricultural interests were virtually ruined. Unemployed sailors and bankrupt ship-owners stood on the quays and saw their livelihood blocked by an idealist. The products of American farms, having no markets overseas, fell fifty per cent., and the prices for clothing and manufactured goods rose rapidly. From the beginning the embargo failed to achieve its aims and died, to become as Professor Lawrence M. Sears says in his *Jefferson and the Embargo*, "a study of a humanitarian autocrat administering a panacea for the woes of mankind."

If the Jeffersonian embargo move produced a temporary depression in the United States, this policy did not prevent a later period of prosperity which lasted until the end of hostilities. Employment opportunities were greater during the war. Most of the colonial carrying trade of the world came into American control and Jefferson's comment in 1790 that "the new world will fatten on the follies of the old," remained true until the return of peace to Europe brought a reaction in the neutral countries. In the United States especially, like the post-war days of 1929, the anteroom to a regulated and golden heaven was found to be the entrance into a chaotic inferno.

Some of the general features of the Napoleonic era can be fitted into the World War years. This is particularly the case in regard to the business booms in neutral countries. Volume Three of the set does not emphasize this aspect of the situation but concentrates upon neutral losses through blockades and interferences "by sovereign right". There are ninety-three tables dealing with prize courts, neutral trade and shipping, neutral shipping losses, marine war risk and the technical procedure of determining cargo losses due to the sinking of vessels by mines or submarines. Figures also are given which show that neutrals were able to carry on their normal trade and commerce only when they were self-contained economic units or possessed materials needed by the warring nations. The first four chapters are valuable because they help to explain the development of economic nationalism in neutral countries.

This volume, however, is lacking in one important respect. The statistical investigations alone are not sufficient. There is no link between factual delineation and social forces. One would like to see these facts interpreted in such a way that the *raison d'être* of neutrality is made clear. It is impossible to present a complete study of neutrality by emphasizing only the economic consequences of the World War as seen in financial, commercial, and industrial enterprises. Any coherent account consists of this economic skeleton filled in and padded with social tissues. No history, therefore, is adequate which does not maintain a balance between the economic and cultural (*i.e.*, social) elements of society.

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