

BOEKBESPREKINGS

Odegard, P. H. en Baerwald, H. H., The American Republic. Pp. 895. Harper & Row, New York, 1964.

Hierdie omvattende staatkundige studie oor die Verenigde State van Amerika is van besondere belang vir die student van die staatsleer en ook vir diegene wat 'n breëre begrip oor die Amerikaanse politiek verlang. Die skrywers het hulle ten doel gestel om die Amerikaanse politieke proses en die faktore wat dit beïnvloed te ontleed en te verklaar in die lig van die jongste ontwikkelinge in hierdie demokratiese staat. Die waarde van die studie is aansienlik verhoog omdat aandag gegee is aan die tipiese probleme wat in die moderne politieke gemeenskap ondervind word.

In die werk wat uit vier-en-dertig hoofstukke bestaan, word onder andere aandag aan die volgende aspekte gegee: politieke gesag en die wyse waarop dit gebruik en soms misbruik word; die kieserkorps, partystelsel, nominasies en verkiesings van kandidate; die konstitusie en die vraagstuk van die verdeling van staatsgesag wat so 'n prominente aspek van die Amerikaanse politieke ontwikkeling is; die president, sy rol en funksie in die landsadministrasie; die howe en hulle besondere rol in die staat; die federale aard van die grondwet en die praktiese probleme wat met federalisme ondervind word en ten slotte word daar selfs ook aan die Amerikaanse buitelandse beleid en die ontwikkeling daarvan aandag gegee. Alhoewel daar in die werk gepoog word om die he'e omvattende terrein van die Amerikaanse politieke lewe te behandel, kan daar vanselfsprekend nie aanspraak op volledigheid gemaak word nie. Die gebrek word egter vergoed deurdat die skrywers daarin geslaag het om perspektief te verleen aan die algemene politieke vraagstukke wat ondervind word.

Soos die skrywers tereg opmerk, is die werk aangebied in die gees van die moderne behaviorisme, waar die politieke gedragswyse van die burger in die raamwerk van die fisiese en kulturele omgewing ontleed word. In sy geheel gesien is *The American Republic* 'n bydrae om 'n beter begrip van die Amerikaanse staatkunde te verkry. Ook is dit geskryf volgens die nuwe benaderings wat besig is om in die staatkunde te ontwikkel.

C. F. Nieuwoudt.

Barnett, Correlli, The Swordbearers. Studies in supreme command in the First World War. 85c., pp. 429. Penguin Books, 1966.

Of the spate of books on the First World War that have appeared during the last few years, this work by Mr. Correlli Barnett is perhaps the most interesting. It is not a rehash of the battles fought on the Western front, but a thoughtful and penetrating analysis of the decisive effect of individual human character on the forces that are unleashed when men join in battle. Four national commanders-in-chief: two German — von Moltke and Hindenburg — one Frenchman — Foch — and one Englishman — Haig — held the destiny of western Europe in their hands during four terrible years in which millions of lives were offered on the altar of the god of war.

The author asks himself the question what other factors play a decisive role in the outcome of battles other than the well-laid and minutely detailed plans that the highcommand of each army work out before the men are sent into battle. The impossibility of pre-determining the pattern of a battle has for ages been the subject to which historians and philosophers have applied their minds. After the command had been given to attack, battles seem to take a course that is peculiarly unpredictable. Ancient leaders left these things in the hands of the gods and up to the eighteenth century God or a vague determinant — *Weltgeist* — were decisive factors according

to the peculiar way of thinking about these things. The author sees the imponderables in the pattern that a battle takes as a result of the personal characteristics of the leaders themselves, their abilities, and personal traits are determinants that override the logical plans laid down before the battle. Coupled with this are the thousands of individuals who when the moment comes are locked in battle and undergo a violent transition to mass collectivized life moving blindly across unknown terrain into a storm of hell and blood.

It is against this background that the authors seeks to find the answer to the baffling question of the outcome of particular battles which, despite the emotions roused, "changed nothing", as the author so aptly states. Schoolboy romanticising and heroics disappear and one is left with an understanding of the absolute futility of war as a final arbiter of political differences. Any decision to revert to war as a final extension of the game of power politics and diplomacy infers that the postwar situation is foreseen and therefore predictable. This ill-founded mental attitude of western statesmen brought Europe to the brink of disaster during two terrible all-encompassing wars and to-day it seems western man with all the destructive power of his technical civilization at his disposal, is again moving towards the brink. This book is in this sense a warning to the bemedalled swordrattlers who form the supreme command of the armies of the world.

The author, who is not unknown as a military historian, has a story to tell, and he tells it well. It is perhaps because of his outstanding ability to interpret the vast amount of documentary material and his grasp of the essentials of military strategy and his unique approach to the problems of the forces that are let loose in war, his comprehension of the facts of battle and his insight into the human failings of great commanders, that the attention of the reader is held throughout. Because it is more than simply an account of battles and the outcome of battles, this book must be regarded as an outstanding contribution to our understanding of the military aspects of the First World War and war in general.

T. S. van Rooyen.

Jenkins, F. G., *Chequers. A history of the Prime Minister's Buckinghamshire home.* Pp. 171. Pergamon Press Ltd., 1967.

Mr. Jenkins has taken heed of the severe condemnation levelled at geneological predominance in local historical works over the last fifty years, and except for a few lugubrious expositions of the pedigrees of the early inhabitants of the Chequers estate, the work is not bogged-down by antiquarian trivialities.

From a methodological point of view, in terms of both approach and treatment, Mr. Jenkins has produced an emulative example of modern local historical writing. Admirable use has been made of local historical documentary source material from central and private repositories. At the same time the work underlines the truism that it is impossible to write local history solely from the confines of libraries or archives. Topographical data provides pertinent information relating to why the area was chosen for human habitation and the siting of the house, and enables him to 'construe' — in Maitland's phrase — 'the testimony of (the) fields and walls and hedges'. The effective use of archaeological findings lends further depth to the narrative by tracing human activity in the Chequers area to prehistoric times. Of special interest is the description of the Upper Icknield Way, "that very important and much used highway of prehistoric times. Along this route passed travellers between East Anglia and the far West, and evidence of their presence and settlement lies in and around the Chequers estate" (p. 2).

The complex and deep-rooted process of reciprocal interaction between local and national history is a factor which neither the national, nor the local historian can ignore. William Hawtrey, who succeeded to Chequers in 1544, was a prominent participant in local affairs, represented the county in the 1562-3 Parliament and was one of the original members and shareholders in the Muscovy Company when it was founded in 1555. He had a reputation of such high standing at court that he was entrusted with the guardianship of Lady Mary Grey, a potential claimant to the throne, who had incurred the displeasure of Queen Elizabeth by secretly marrying a commoner. The inter-relationship is further stressed in the treatment of the period after 1921, when Chequers was donated to the nation as a country residence for her Prime Ministers. This was especially so during the Churchillian occupation when Chequers "came to be associated with some of the most dramatic events of the Second World War" (p. 147).

Its appeal for the wider reading-public will be that by means of the written word, liberally supplemented with excellent photographs and diagrams, the reader is taken on a conducted tour of the residence and grounds of the Prime Minister's country retreat, an experience otherwise denied them as the house is closed to the general public.

This book will prove highly profitable to all who are interested in the writing of local history.

J. W. Kew.