

BOOK REVIEWS

SOUTHERN ACCENT: From Uncle Remus to Oak Ridge. By William T. Polk. New York: William Morrow and Company. 264 pp. \$4.00.

Here, between one set of covers we have what amounts to two books about three periods in the history of the South. From beginning to end William T. Polk, of the *Greensboro Daily News*, gives us a close-up look at ourselves as we were, as we are, and as we are likely to become. It's a study of the Old South and the New South.

Although not so marked, it is plain to detect two books in one. Of the Old South Mr. Polk writes with authority and feeling. His picture of life in Warrenton, North Carolina—thinly disguised in the book as "Hastings"—points out features of community life and personal relations of the old days which have gone forever (some regrettably, some fortunately), some which are still with us, and some which are going. Through this medium the author tells his reader something of the origin and development of many characteristics which are today considered typically Southern. He explains why we are "different" and at the same time dispells many false notions about the people in the South.

It is this part of *Southern Accent* with which Mr. Polk seems most at home. His brief essays, many altogether too brief, are gems of prose. He shows a sensitiveness to the Southern scene which is rarely found these days, and his understanding of the Southern temperament should go far towards dispelling many false notions about what makes us like we are.

The second portion of the book gives us a look at the New South and the South of tomorrow. The author's style and approach, while understandably so, are entirely different. He writes less from observation and personal knowledge and relies instead on studies made by others. By succinctly presenting the findings and conclusions of such men as Howard W. Odum, Gerald W. Johnson, Rupert B. Vance, summarizing the work of Charles B. Aycock, Clarence Poe, Edward K. Graham, Sr., and quoting from them and others, Mr. Polk makes us understand what the South is thinking and what it is becoming. His grasp and understanding of the many problems enable him to put together the two and two of many authorities and come up with interesting answers.

As Southern leaders once set the pace in the political life of the nation, so they might again. By sending our best men to Washington instead of our worst or at best our mediocre ones as we frequently have in the past, the United States would profit from wise and loyal leadership. The South's habit of sending poor specimens to Washington would appear to Mr. Polk to be leaving us and going instead to the Midwest.

He has a lot to say about industrialization and the changing attitude of management towards labor and of the people in general towards factory workers. The survival and even cultivation of ideals and ideas which have long been a part of the Southern culture, we are told, must be encouraged. On the other hand there are ideas and suspicions which must be eradicated from the Southern mind. Ideally the proper balance must be worked out and Mr. Polk tells us what he thinks should be involved in reaching that balance and what to do about it.

Finally, we are told, "our civilization appears to have only three courses open to it: destruction, world domination, or world peace." The last is the best but most difficult. "The American Founding Fathers," Mr. Polk reminds us, "solved a basically similar problem when they drafted the Constitution of the United States . . . The South . . . might well direct its political genius, as it did in the days of Madison, to the creation of peace by law among sovereign states."

Southern Accent is, above all else, readable. Its common sense approach to the question of what makes the South what it is, is appealing. If only the right people in the right places can discover this book many of the misconceptions concerning the South which have plagued the country for a great many years should be cleared away.

It is a minor point, but slightly annoying that Mr. Polk should have written Johnathan Daniels for Jonathan and persistently referred to James Spencer Bassett instead of John Spencer Bassett. And too often, it seems, North Carolina was cited as typical of the whole South.

—WILLIAM S. POWELL

SELECTED PAPERS OF CORNELIA PHILLIPS SPENCER. Edited with an introduction by Louis R. Wilson. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 753 pp. \$7.50.

Most of the papers in the large volume described above were published in the *North Carolina Presbyterian*, many of them in Mrs. Spencer's "Young Lady's Column." Others include letters to the editors and editorials in the *Raleigh Sentinel*, the *Weekly Ledger* and personal letters of the "Woman who rang the bell."

The editor has gathered the *Selected Papers* under nine major topics, some with subdivisions. The sorting was a prodigious task for Mrs. Spencer frequently writes of several topics in a single piece. Each reader will doubtless find some selections under a different heading than he would have chosen, but after finishing the volume he will agree with this reviewer that the editor has done a difficult task well. A general Introduction places the writings in their period and explains the method of presentation and typographical arrangement, and each part is prefaced with a summary of Mrs. Spencer's position on that topic. A full index enables the seeker to find additional passages on the subjects she discusses.

The first group, "Manners and Customs" portrays the lively interest in nature, charity, marriage and short trips as commented upon by a gentlewoman in the destitute post Civil War days. Under the topic, "North Carolina Attitudes and Backgrounds" Mrs. Spencer airs her views on the limitations of rights of the freedmen, her determination to "forgive" the Yankees, and above all her pleas to the women of her state to stir the men out of their "tain't no use" attitude. On "Social Questions and Institutions" Mrs. Spencer is a conservative who endeavors to be fair to other points of view. She recommends that women teach in the common schools, follow literary pursuits and even practice medicine in time, but she frowns upon women political aspirants, preachers, and judges. The Oxford Orphanage, the Insane Asylum promoted by Dorothea Dix at Raleigh, and a proposed old ladies' home all receive her able support in print.

"Education," the topic of the fourth section of the book, receives a great amount of attention from the Chapel Hillian. The writer urges her young Presbyterian women readers to obtain the best education possible even if they plan to marry citing examples of the many young widows who are left with children. She proposes a state University for women by the Centennial of the men's University in 1895. Although the reopening of the University (the last topic in the collection) is the subject of Mrs. Spencer's best known crusade, she feels that the establishment of common schools is more important. She urges high standards and better training for teachers and the organization of a teachers association with a journal in which to exchange ideas.

The papers on "Self-Culture and Personal Conduct" contain advice to her "girls" to visit the poor and sick and be generally useful, rather than to ornament the parlor waiting for "Mr. Goggle-Eyes." She states that "the influence a young woman exerts is strongest where it is passive," and that the wise woman knows "when to submit and when to resist."

"Books, Reading and Libraries" are important to Mrs. Spencer. Novel reading is considered least important and can be "managed" usually "at one sitting." "Good books," however are "not to be read straight through." She strongly recommends the organization of circulating libraries in every town, saying "We are all too poor to build up private libraries now." The organization of the "Pioneer Library" in Lenoir in 1875 is saluted as a good example of progress.

In the section titled "Woods, Flowers and Streams" Mrs. Spencer's writing is most poetic; and in "Religion and Related Subjects" most didactic. However, her love of nature and her strong Presbyterian principles are found all the way through the book.

The final part of the book contains writings about the University, and is probably the most highly "selective" part of the compilation. In Mrs. Spencer's letters and editorials is found the minutia of the story of the end of the Swain regime, the Pool "fraud," and the Battle renaissance. Her two series, "Old Times in Chapel Hill," and "Pen and Ink Sketches," reserved for future publication, will fill in the spaces. Much of this part of Mrs. Spencer's story is told in the biographies by Hope Chamberlain and Phillips Russell.

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By Mrs. Spencer's own criteria this collection of her writings is a "good book." She recommends dipping here and there in the writings of a single person saying, "You are conscious . . . of being in the same company all the time—the subject of discussion may be changed, but the style of conversation is the same." And it would be impossible for any reviewer of this book to be guilty of "extracting the pith and marrow" of this book by quoting a "half dozen taking passages." There is more, much more. The general reader will find this a good volume in which to dip; and the social historian will find useful source material in this collection of the writings of an educated North Carolina lady during the dark days of Reconstruction.

—ELAINE VON OESSEN