

## A SHORT AMERICAN HISTORY

For many years historians have been vainly trying to write the one-volume history of the United States that should be at once readable and reliable, that should be indispensable to the library of every thoughtful American, and that should resemble in literary charm the famous *Short History of England*, by John Richard Green. Professor Bassett's *Short History of the United States* is perhaps the best attempt at this, but since its predecessors have been either dull or unreliable this praise is not extreme. He has written a book with pronounced merits in good judgment and interest, tho. the latter is spasmodic rather than sustained; while the few errors of fact that have been found are unimportant. His demerits are those of his general scheme and point of view.

He is not in sympathy with social and economic history. He states in his preface his reasons—good reasons—for regarding political history as important, but in no instance does he use those results of modern scholarship that ground political movements in their economic antecedents. His events “just happen”; there is little “why.” In dealing with the revolution he fails to show the difference between British and colonial life that induced misunderstanding. In

handling the slavery problem he leaves unstated the economic analysis of the plantation system that is at the bottom of the deviation between the North and South. The Jacksonian period, where he ought to be most at home, being the latest biographer of Andrew Jackson, is covered without his revealing the significance of the victory of the West in the election of 1828. Neither the Greenback nor the Populist movement is sympathetically examined and described, as any forlorn cause has a right to be. The reaction of frontier life and conditions upon the national Government is almost ignored—the index makes no mention of the Proclamation of 1763, the Falls Line, pre-emption, the homestead act, reclamation, the Wilderness Road, or Cumberland Gap, and the references to these matters in the text are only casual. Out of the West came Jackson's party, and Lincoln's and Roosevelt's; and our national systems of land, finance and transportation have been shaped by frontier needs. No book that ignores these facts can be a complete success. Yet Professor Bassett's judgment is so good when he is handling matters that interest him, that we can only wish his interests were wider, and that he might be a greater success as a general historian. With all the limitations of his rigid adherence to the political and the traditional, his book is the best of its kind yet written.

*A Short History of the United States*, by John Spencer Bassett.  
New York: Macmillan Co. \$2.50.