

Schouler's "History of the United States." *

THE special *raison d'être* of Mr. Schouler's history seems to be that it opens to the general public a field which has hitherto been accessible mainly through the pages of historical magazines and antiquarian monographs. Its key-note is struck in a single sentence of the preface: "My main desire is to interest and instruct my countrymen in a period of American history which exhibits the primitive Union and primitive manners." Would the inquiring reader know the underlying cause of the heavy appearance of Washington's lower face; or the name of the person who once ventured to slap the Father of his Country upon the shoulder; or the name and story of the little Quaker boy, who, annoying Washington by an idolatrous and absurd pilgrimage in pursuit of him through a retired street of Philadelphia, was at last put to rout by a most profound and sarcastic bow from the great man; or a multitude of other like matters, not to be found in an ordinary library, and yet extremely interesting and valuable for the side-lights which they cast upon early American history and manners? He will find them in Mr. Schouler's work, lovingly culled from an evidently large collection of newspapers and tracts of the time; and, unless he has been a special rather than a general reader, he will gain from it a new and fuller notion of America and the Americans of the period covered by the volume.

The addendum to the title is, to some extent, misleading, as it marks the period, not the special subject, of the work. Political history is an incidental, not a fundamental feature, and it is perhaps accidental, but certainly characteristic, that, while two full pages are given to the rough-and-tumble fights on the floor of the House in 1798, between Lyon and Griswold, exactly the same space is given to the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of the same year—the most far-reaching legislative acts, excepting the Ordinances of Secession and the Reconstruction Acts and Amendments, in our political history. Political history is treated very much after the manner of Hildreth; but Mr. Schouler has evidently consulted Hildreth's authorities, and has been disquieted to find the lines in some of Hildreth's portraits, particularly in those of Jefferson and Hamilton, drawn too deeply in some places and too lightly in others. He has, therefore, been impelled to give us portraits from his own pen, in which he has dealt too lightly with the darker lines of Jefferson's character, and too heavily with those of Hamilton's; but his error in this respect is a useful exception to the general direction of much of our later historical writing. He has brought out more

clearly than either Hildreth or von Holst the existence of a British as well as a French faction in America at this time, and the reasons why each had a fair right to discredit the rigid political virtue of the other. His portraits of John Adams and his Cabinet, particularly of Pickering (though in this he owes much to Mr. Henry C. Lodge), are distinct and well done. If the line of absolute truth could be discovered, he is probably on the side opposite to both Hildreth and von Holst,—as near it as Hildreth and very much nearer than von Holst is during this period; and a consecutive reading of Hildreth, von Holst, and Schouler would, by a sort of chromolithographic process, leave on the mind of the reader a very distinct and true impression of the political history of the United States during the years 1789–1801. As a complement to Hildreth and a corrective, in its first volume, to von Holst, Mr. Schouler's history gives good promise of popular usefulness and life.

It is to be regretted that the author has not been fuller in citing authorities and in giving the pages, as well as the volumes, of his references. The reader must, in general, be content with the assurance that the matter and spirit of the original are correctly conveyed, as they certainly are.

* History of the United States of America under the Constitution. By James Schouler. Vol. I.: 1783–1801. Washington, D. C.: W. H. & O. H. Morrison.