

prisingly lucid, despite the facts and figures. This book is a "must" for agricultural historians, but it will also fascinate and stimulate anyone interested in farming. Iowa State University Press is to be commended for making this important manuscript widely available in its *Replica Edition* series.

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Confederate Women, by Bell Irvin Wiley. Greenwood Press, 1975. Notes and index. pp. xv, 204. \$10.95.

Bell I. Wiley has a long and solid reputation as an historian of the Civil War. In books like *The Life of Johnny Reb* and *The Life of Billy Yank* he ably demonstrated his skill as a researcher and writer on the Confederate period of American history. Unfortunately, *Confederate Women* is not of the same genre. It is a loosely-tied together collection of essays based on lectures Wiley first presented in 1971 in honor of Andrew David Holt, President Emeritus of the University of Tennessee, and on an article previously published in *American History Illustrated*.

When the reader proceeds beyond the striking title and the equally striking cover design, he/she finds that the bulk of the book is devoted to only three Confederate women: Mary Boykin Chesnut (as "Southern Intellectual"), Virginia Tunstall Clay (as "Alabama Belle"), and Varina Howell Davis (as "First Lady, Wife, and Mother"). Using these women's own letters, diaries, and memoirs, Wiley presents a detailed recounting of their biographical data, social affairs, family relationships, and inner thoughts. One hopes that he will finally reach the stage of analysis; the best offered, however, are some character assessments of their individual strengths and weaknesses.

A central theme of these chapters is the contributions of these women to their respective husbands. This in itself is not objectionable since Southern society of that period did view women as adjuncts of their husbands. But many women's historians would argue that it is desirable for the historian to study sexist society rather than perpetuate it. *Confederate Women* would be far more insightful if it could have cut through male values to female realities in Confederate society. How, for example, does

Wiley reconcile Virginia Clay's "belle complex," which he sees as the dominant force in her life, with her work for woman suffrage which he mentions only in passing? When her campaign to gain her husband's freedom from prison "released her from the narrow confines of public activity to which members of her sex normally were restricted" why does he feel it is appropriate to judge her "a relatively liberated woman?"

Perhaps Wiley needs to come to grips with the words and thoughts of the generation for which he writes; this is demonstrated by his constant reference to Negroes and even occasionally to "colored people." This of course, raises a serious dilemma for the historian. Historically, Varina Davis may have seen blacks as Negroes but to us they are blacks. Similarly, she may have "born him (Jefferson Davis) another son" but to most modern women child-bearing is a joint venture. The author's disregard of this problem gives the book a dated quality which makes it difficult to relate to the material.

In his last chapter, Wiley summarily views the various activities of Southern women as seamstresses, nurses, teachers, farmers, and factory workers. He maintains that "with few exceptions" Confederate women "rallied to the support of the Southern cause," an idea that clearly does not fit with the contention of many historians that the South itself was severely divided by the "cause." He argues that this was a "woman's war" because women even spied, informed, took up arms, and disguised themselves as male soldiers, but a quick check of women's history reveals that people like Deborah Sampson and Molly Pitcher pursued these same activities during the American Revolution. And he omits extended discussion of black women due to "the scarcity of pertinent records," a notion disproved by Gerda Lerner among others.

In his final paragraph Wiley asks the question that might well have given *Confederate Women* meaning and strength: "What effect, if any, did the Civil War have on the status of women?" He dismisses this with a brief reference to Anne Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* thus ending a well-researched descriptive narrative which is in the end result a disappointing book.

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