

BOOK NOTICES

The Pageant of Middle American History. By ANNE MERRIMAN PECK.
(New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1947. Pp. x, 496.
Maps. \$4.00)

This book is the fifth in the Longmans, Green and Company "Pageant Series." The earlier volumes, the two last named by the author of the work under review, cover China, Japan, Canada, and South America.

The theme of this latest volume is the interlocking history of the peoples of Central America, Mexico, and Panama from pre-Columbian times to the present. The author describes the book as a "bold attempt to tell the story as a whole, in broad sweeps, picking out the highlights, following the threads that link them together. Details must be neglected, history telescoped into small space, but this is the story of peoples rather than academic history."

Thus intrigued by the author's laudable and ambitious objectives, the reader will be disappointed to discover that the book is a sketchy popularization of some of the academic works she seems to scorn, and that she finds, even for the colonial period, no better device for unfolding her interlocking history than to recount separately the events which transpired within the boundaries of the jurisdictions which emerged as the modern republics of the area. Her story of peoples is concerned almost exclusively with the exploits of individual conquerors, dictators, revolutionaries, filibusters, and foreign exploiters.

Concern with pageantry, rather than unfamiliarity with subject matter, may account for the apparent disproportion in space allotted to events. It takes, for example, 133 pages to get Middle America discovered, conquered, and colonized, and only forty pages to glide over the remainder of the colonial period. Mexican history since independence is covered in ninety-five pages. Even on the basis of pageantry, however, it would seem that the exploration and advance of the frontier of New Spain from the Valley of Mexico to New Mexico, Texas, and Upper California merit more space than the progress of Alvarado and Dona Beatriz from Puerto Caballos to Santiago de los Caballeros. And one would expect some mention of miners, as well as soldiers and missionaries, in even a cursory discussion of advancers of the frontier.

Contradictions in point of view seem to arise from following too assiduously several authors on the same subject without sufficient assimilation of the material to develop a consistent interpretation of events.

It is difficult to see, for example, how, if the principles of the New Laws were just and humane (p. 170), the *encomenderos* deprived of their privileges through the enforcement of those laws could be defrauded (p. 176); or how, if "the individualism inherent in their Spanish blood made it impossible for Central Americans to achieve national unity, or even to accept the results of so-called elections" (p. 306), the people of Costa Rica, the most Spanish in Central America, could have "built up a foundation of orderly political life on a democratic basis . . . and expect to choose their president in honest elections" (p. 453).

Wider, or more careful, use of academic history might have prevented such errors of fact as the statements that men of mixed blood are called *ladinos* in Guatemala (p. 378), that Jose de Valdes (*sic*) was the *visitador* sent by Carlos III to New Spain (p. 219), or that, in 1774, one year after the earthquake destroyed Santiago de los Caballeros, the English colonies of North America declared their independence of the mother country (p. 212).

Middle American history gains nothing, either as literature or history, in this retelling. Were it more careful and more accurate, it might provide a convenient summary for the general reader, or useful collateral reading for beginning students, in an area of great interest and importance to the United States.

WILLIAM J. GRIFFITH.

Tulane University.

The Horse of the Americas. By ROBERT MOORMAN DENHARDT. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947. Pp. xvii, 286. Maps, illustrations, and appendices. \$5.00.)

This brief account of the Spanish horse in the New World, although much of it has appeared in earlier writings of Mr. Denhardt, is a noteworthy addition to the knowledge of one phase of Spanish-American civilization. Commencing with a description of Spanish horsemanship and horses of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it moves on to the arrival of horses in the West Indies, their part in the conquest, and their spread throughout North and South America. These aspects of the story of the horse in the New World are emphasized by the inclusion of notable incidents related by early chroniclers.

The later chapters describe the various breeds and types of horses which are found in North and South America today, and which have descended from the Spanish importations. Only a brief mention is made of the horse in the non-Iberian colonies, and it seems that the work might be more properly entitled *The Spanish Horse of the Americas*.

The appendices contain information on a variety of subjects related