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ZACHARY TAYLOR, by Brainerd Dyer, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1946. Pp. x, 445. Illustrated, \$4.00.

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pilation and brief analysis of the little legal material presently available. And this he does very well.

It is amusing to note that at least one city has refused a defense plant corporation contract because the provision against discrimination against employes, because of race, color, creed or national origin was held to be an alienation of part of the discretion conferred by law on municipal officials.<sup>2</sup> It is obvious, if such an attitude can be taken in the light of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, that Mr. Rhyne's carefully compounded materials are apt to serve as little more than pegs for decision handing. As such, however, they may serve many courts and municipal attorneys in good stead.

ALVIN B. RUBIN\*

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Except for a volume published in 1892 by O. O. Howard, Zachary Taylor, for ninety years, was passed over by biographers. Then in 1941 Holman Hamilton published the first of a projected two volume study. In 1946 Silas Bent and Silas Bent McKinley's *Old Rough and Ready* appeared. Now in the same year, comes another biography by Brainerd Dyer. And, if grapevine reports be true, the second volume of Hamilton's work will issue from the press in the not far distant future.

That biographers should steer clear of the twelfth president for nearly a century is not difficult to understand. Despite his catchy sobriquet of "Rough and Ready" won in the Seminole campaigns of the 1830's Taylor was a dull character. Not so easy to explain is this recent rush of writers to record his doings. Could it be that biographers are running out of subjects? Or is the answer to be found in a tendency of moderns to attempt the impossible? Whatever the explanation, "Old Zachary" has profited little by recent excursions into his history. Despite the worthy efforts of Bent and McKinley, Hamilton and Dyer, he remains, in war, in peace and in the hearts of his countrymen, plain, without glamor and unimpressive.

Reared in Kentucky on the Muddy Fork of Bear Grass Creek, Zachary's opportunities were better than those of the average frontier boy. His Virginia father, prospering on the

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2. Id. at 91.

\*Part-time Assistant Professor of Law, Louisiana State University.

plantation that he hewed from the Kentucky wilderness, provided competent instruction for his children. But Zachary's correspondence of later years indicates either that he was a poor student or that he did not take full advantage of his opportunity.

In 1808, owing mainly to the influence of family connections, Taylor received appointment to the regular army in the grade of first lieutenant. This was the beginning of a forty year service which ended only with his election to the presidency. With the exception of some fighting against the Northwestern Indians in 1812 for which he was breveted major, and in the Black Hawk War in 1832, Taylor's activities for the first twenty-nine years consisted mainly of routine training and garrison duties. During this period he attained the rank of colonel and the command of a regiment.

In 1837 he was placed in command of the field forces in Florida and given the assignment of subduing the Seminoles who were harassing the settlers. At Lake Okeechobee he overtook a large group of Indians and defeated them on difficult ground. Taylor was breveted brigadier general for this victory, but it was dearly bought. After about two years of campaigning against the elusive Florida savages, Taylor by his own request was transferred to Baton Rouge. The Florida experience, while only partially successful, served to publicize Taylor as a leader of patience, persistence, personal valor, and one who was willing to share fully with his men the utmost hardship of soldiering.

Taylor's great opportunity came with the Mexican troubles of the 1840's. In the summer of 1845, in anticipation of conflict over the annexation of Texas, he was ordered to Corpus Christi at the mouth of the Nueces River where he assembled an army of 4,000 men. Early in 1846 the War Department directed him to proceed to the Rio Grande. In May fighting broke out and Taylor won decisive victories against greatly superior forces at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, for which feats he was promoted to major general. Public enthusiasm for Taylor was enhanced considerably by the fact that the victories, owing to an impression of American weakness spread by the newspapers, came as a surprise.

In June 1846 Taylor won a hard but less decisive victory at Monterey. The terms which he granted the enemy were regarded as overly lenient by Polk, and much to Taylor's chagrin they were overruled. This, coupled with disagreements over other

matters, including supply, led to an estrangement between Taylor and the administration, which in the months following, flared into an open quarrel. With the appointment of Scott to lead the Vera Cruz expedition, Taylor's operations were reduced to the status of a sideshow. But "Old Rough and Ready" by a reckless move that narrowly escaped disaster made the headlines one more time with the victory of Buena Vista.

Professor Dyer treats Taylor's military activities with commendable objectivity. He does not hesitate to reveal the general's weaknesses—hypersensitiveness to criticism by his superiors, tardiness and incompleteness in estimating and requisitioning supplies, deficiency in engineer activities, ineptitude in strategy and tactics, failure to give ample consideration to terrain, and a tendency to rush into battle without calculating the risks. One shudders to think what might have happened had not the Americans been vastly superior in artillery, for as Professor Dyer brings out, the artillery pulled more than one fight out of the fire. Professor Dyer gives full recognition to what apparently was Taylor's only substantial claim to greatness as a combat commander: namely, his ability to inspire men to heroic exertion on the battlefield. This quality was particularly efficacious at Buena Vista.

Notwithstanding the fact that he had never voted in a presidential election, and despite the damaging effects of ill-advised statements made by him before and during the campaign, Taylor's war-won popularity was sufficient to place him in the White House in 1849. His sixteen months as President were full of unhappiness. Professor Dyer recounts Taylor's political experiences with the same calm and restraint that marks his treatment of the army career. Taylor emerges as an honest, well-meaning and hard-working Chief Executive, but withal one of distinctly limited abilities and achievement.

Professor Dyer's account is clear and well-balanced. It gives much interesting and valuable information about the life of the rank and file, a virtue frequently lacking in military biographies. It gives evidence of abundant and careful use of source materials. That the narrative is not more engaging than it is must be attributed in part, if not in the main, to the stodginess of its principal.

BELL IRVIN WILEY\*

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\* Professor of history, Louisiana State University.