
PAPERBOUNDS

MARY CHESNUT'S CIVIL WAR. Edited by C. Vann Woodward. Yale, 1982. 886 pp. \$14.95

Those fascinated by the romance of the Civil War have long had recourse to *Gone With the Wind* (1936). Now those interested in the reality can turn to this rich memoir. Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut (1823-86), the wife of a wealthy South Carolina planter and politician, the book appears to be a diary dating from February 1861 to July 1865. It was actually an artful reworking of her cruder (and sometimes more revealing) wartime journals. After the war, Chesnut tried her hand at writing novels, but her fiction never found an audience. Nevertheless, the literary apprenticeship paid off when she decided, in the early 1880s, to re-create the diary. It abounds in vividly drawn scenes (the plantation on the verge of financial collapse, political dinners in Richmond and Charleston) and sharply rendered characters (her lordly, philandering father-in-law; President and Mrs. Jefferson Davis). Chesnut's perspective is interesting in itself: Though a loyal Southerner, she was both an abolitionist and an early feminist who yearned for a more active life. Parts of Chesnut's work appeared in magazines after her death, but Woodward, the noted Yale historian, has pieced together the whole diary, adding selected passages from the original journals.

THE OLD SOCIAL CLASSES AND THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS OF IRAQ. By Hanna Batatu. Princeton, 1982. 1,284 pp. \$27.50

This enormous volume is the best study yet to be written on the politics of a modern Arab state. Batatu, a political scientist at the American University of Beirut, first traces the transformation of Iraqi so-

ciety from the late 19th to the mid-20th century; he explains how the British (eager to hold the monarchy in check) helped the old tribal leaders become large and powerful landholders. Then he discusses the rise of the Iraqi Communist Party, including its ideological debts to early Arab levelers (the Syrian, al-Kawakibi, writing around 1900, argued that true Islam was consistent with communist egalitarianism) and its middle-class urban leadership. Finally, he analyzes the conspiracy that led to the overthrow of Premier Nuri as-Sa'id and the monarchy in 1958 and chronicles the many bloody twists and turns of Iraqi internal politics down to the early '70s. To the extent that any mortal can make sense of oil-rich Iraq's social and economic cleavages and of the resulting power struggles, Batatu has.

THE PORTABLE EDMUND WILSON. Edited by Lewis M. Dabney. Penguin, 1983. 647 pp. \$6.95

He was a child of Anglo-Saxon privilege, a brilliant editor, and perhaps America's most complete man of letters. Edmund Wilson (1895-1972) thought of himself as, above all, a journalist, a popular interpreter of important trends in politics and culture. He brought to all his subjects a probing curiosity, whether writing about his 1936 stay in a Soviet hospital or the American Civil War or an interview with Henry Ford. ("I don't like to read books," said Ford. "They muss up my mind.") Wilson complained that his fiction was little read. A pity indeed, because in such stories as "The Man Who Shot Snapping Turtles," which satirizes the excesses of idealism, he artfully confronted his own weaknesses. Editor Dabney has given us here a bright sampling of Wilson's achievement.