

*American Commonwealths: History of Tennessee.* By JAMES PHELAN. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1888. — 12 mo, 478 pp.

Mr. Phelan has done a very creditable and scholarly piece of work. He has written a state history that deserves to stand with the best of those in the *Commonwealth* series, such as Mr. Dunn's *Indiana*, and in pleasing contrast to some others, such as the rather absurd *Missouri*.

Tennessee, like Kentucky and Vermont, without being one of the original thirteen states, nevertheless dates back to revolutionary times. The year after the Stamp act a little group of backwoodsmen, clad in hunting shirts and carrying long rifles, settled on the banks of the Holston and Watauga, in what is now the northeast corner of Tennessee. With the characteristic race-aptitude for self-government, they formed themselves into an orderly community, abiding by the laws and regulations of an elective committee, which exercised legislative, judicial and executive functions. Thus the Watauga Association, as they styled themselves, formed what was really a distinct and independent commonwealth, the first to introduce representative institutions west of the Alleghanies. They lived in primitive frontier style, in stockaded villages, or "forts," as they were then termed, each cluster of cabins being surrounded by a loopholed palisade of upright timber, with block houses as bastions at the corners. They fought the Indians and made treaties with them, hunted elk, buffalo, bear and deer, and with their light axes made clearings in the forest, on which they built their cabins and raised crops of Indian corn. The adventurous hunters penetrated far beyond the mountains, through the countless leagues of sunless forest that covered the face of the land. After wanderings that sometimes lasted for years, they returned to inflame the minds of the restless settlers with tales of the beautiful country that lay along the lower Cumberland and the Tennessee.

Mr. Phelan traces the growth of the pioneer community, its annexation to North Carolina, the part its settlers took in the battle of Kings Mountain, the planting of the colony at the bend of the Cumberland river, from which grew Middle Tennessee, and the rise and fall of that curious product of post-revolutionary disorder, the state of Franklin. He pays special attention to the two great border heroes and shapers of early Tennessee destiny, John Sevier and James Robertson; and he is one of the few historians who have ever shown a proper realization of the

leading part played by the Irish Presbyterians in settling the West. His chapters on religion and schools are particularly good ; and he elsewhere traces briefly but clearly the continuity of the Tennessee institutions, and their derivation in direct and unbroken line from English laws and customs. His account of the political struggles in Tennessee during the first half of the present century has more than a passing interest, for they will serve to illustrate a peculiar and important phase of our forefathers' thoughts and prejudices long after the contests themselves have passed from memory. It reconciles us somewhat to the lack of dignity in our present party contests when we read of the extraordinary antics by which candidates secured the suffrage of electors a generation or two ago. The author, with equal good taste and good sense, stops on coming to the Civil war.

Mr. Phelan's style is generally fairly good. He deserves especial praise for his impartiality, and his total freedom from that florid braggadocio which was formerly the bane of most, and is still the bane of many, local American historians ; and he does not sin against good taste by the ridiculous use of such words as " knightly " and " chivalrous," in the manner still popular with a few of the more backward Southern writers.

He falls into one or two small errors. Thus he adopts the prevalent but unjustifiable theory of Lord Dunmore's treachery in the Indian war of 1774 ; and he follows a baseless tradition in putting Isaac Shelby into the Island Flats battle, whereas he was at the time hundreds of miles distant in Kentucky. But the book was well worth writing and is well worth reading.

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