

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Craig L. Symonds. *Stonewall of the West: Patrick Cleburne and the Civil War*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997. v + 322 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-0820-1.

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Patrick Cleburne has long been the darling of Army of Tennessee fans. The only ray of hope in an otherwise bleak story, Cleburne seemed to embody duty, character, brilliance, and courage in equal measure. The fact that the Confederate high command did not officially recognize his greatness, these same adherents would argue, proves the incompetence of Jefferson Davis, Braxton Bragg, William J. Hardee, John Bell Hood, and a host of other short-sighted bureaucrats. In fact, because of Cleburne's spectacular death (or was it martyrdom?) at Franklin, he has emerged in the popular eye as the perfect, sinless offering on the alter of southern nationalism. A foreigner, enraptured with the ideals of all that was noble and good in southern society while rejecting the evil and base, Cleburne's reputation is that of a heroic, tragic warrior who was unrecognized by lesser men in positions of authority.

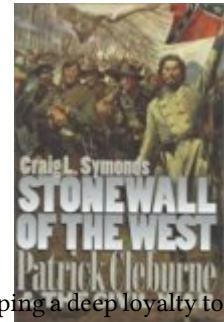
Craig Symonds has, in many ways, polished much of this image while blowing other aspects into a million pieces. The new Cleburne that emerges has more bravery, more character, more devotion to duty, but less brilliance and ability than the mythical character it replaces. The author starts his book by examining Cleburne's rather melancholy middle-class Protestant upbringing in Ireland. While a decent treatment of this formative period, Symonds does not seem entirely comfortable with writing about Ireland at mid-century. The author hits his stride, though, upon reaching the shores of Arkansas. Here, Symonds paints a fascinating and believable portrait of a second-string lawyer who slowly, and steadily, emerged from the shadows by serving as a loyal soldier of other men on the make, like Thomas Hindman. Cleburne even took a bullet for one such man, ensuring an undying gratitude from a clique of men who would soon be running Arkansas's Confederate appar-

tus. He returned the favor by developing a deep loyalty to the causes that these native-born southerners held dear.

When the war came, Cleburne, the converted southerner, parlayed these connections into rank. A favorite among the men, the Irish lawyer quickly earned command of a regiment, and then of a brigade, in Hardee's corps in Arkansas and Tennessee. In combat, he proved prudent yet brave, and displayed a keen grasp of the military art. He was not, according to Symonds, the one-man killing machine that a postbellum and twentieth-century public would make of him. Instead, he was competent and steady, and had the unrestrained loyalty of his troops, which made his organization one of the most reliable in the army. In that lay Cleburne's reputation. His loyalty to the army, too, marked his character, and he linked his fate inextricably to that of his command, in much the same way he had reacted to his friends in Arkansas. As events unfolded, he would take a bullet for this new devotion as well.

Symonds also makes a very convincing case that Cleburne was not held back from corps command solely because of his political beliefs regarding the arming of slaves. This episode, perhaps the best known of all of the bickering and backbiting incidents in the Army of Tennessee, certainly tainted Cleburne. But Symonds hints that Ol' Pat was just not that good at independent command. The author believes that Cleburne's superiors knew his limitations, and made promotion decisions accordingly. He was not suited for the rank of lieutenant general.

This is a solid, well-written biography. The maps are only adequate, and the author seems to have a decided, intentional disregard for the role and actions of Hiram B. Granbury's Texas brigade in Cleburne's division, but



these are minor issues, at best. Symond's Cleburne is not really the Stonewall Jackson of the West. In fact, this sobriquet is a lame contemporary attempt to smear a little of the glory of the Army of Northern Virginia on its suffering partner in the West. It also reveals a seeming need to frame all Confederate experience in terms of its most successful manifestation. Instead, Symonds has built a solid, believable character that, in many ways, is much

more approachable and noble than the Cleburne of earlier days.

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