

THE DIAL

August 1, 1912

p. 73

THE CONTEST FOR CALIFORNIA IN 1861. How Colonel E. D. Baker Saved the Pacific States to the Union. By Elijah R. Kennedy.

CHARLES RICHMOND HENDERSON

CALIFORNIA IN THE CIVIL WAR.

It is refreshing to the student now and then to read a book whose author has never been disillusioned, one whose faith in the absolute righteousness of his side and his party has never been shaken, and who is certain that all those who were on the other side from his heroes were wicked and treacherous, fit for conspicuous places in Dante's inferno. Such an author can write with certainty, with a conviction as to the moral values of past acts not readily to be found in the writings of the more skeptical historians of recent decades.

Mr. Kennedy, author of the work on "The Contest for California in 1861," is of the former class, and his book is a frank spirited eulogy of his hero, Colonel E. D. Baker, killed at the battle of Ball's Bluff in October, 1861. There are interesting chapters on early California history, on social and economic conditions on "the Coast" during the years just preceding the Civil War; and there are other valuable chapters on Senator Broderick, who lost his life in so tragic a manner, on the early life of Colonel Baker when he was a friend of Abraham Lincoln and a Member of Congress from Illinois, and on the efforts of shrewd Southerners like "Jim" Lane and William Gwin to turn over the Coast States to the Confederacy in 1860-61. In all of this, Mr. Kennedy is but clearing the ground for his real work—the portrayal of the truly noble

leader whose fame he intends to establish and vindicate; but to the historical student these preliminary chapters are quite as important as the main story.

The contention of the book that a large party in California and Oregon sought to deliver that region to the Southerners, and that the election of Colonel Baker to the Senate by the Oregon legislature in 1860 to oppose the machinations of Lane and Gwin was the beginning of a series of services which saved the region to the Union, is well maintained, although one is compelled to the belief that the author makes out as bad a situation as possible in 1861, in order to show how great was the work of Baker. No Confederate flag was ever actually unfurled in California, and no body of Confederate troops ever actually assembled in arms before any Pacific Coast city. How could the danger have been so great as it is here made to appear? When General Albert Sidney Johnston resigned the command of the United States Army in California, in April, 1861, it was with very considerable risk that he made his way back to the South to take command under Jefferson Davis; and Mr. Kennedy thinks that no great party of sympathizers followed him east—only a few officers, some of whom were in danger of capture.

The figure of Baker—genial, able, and eloquent; a lawyer of the very highest standing before 1860, a personal friend of Lincoln and a Republican of sturdy mould—is well portrayed, and the whole story is presented in a manner which holds the reader's attention. Despite some obvious limitations, this book is a decided contribution to the historical literature of "the Coast" about which so many Easterners know too little.

WILLIAM E. DODD.