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Morison: Turmoil and Tradition

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STIMSON EMBALMED

TURMOIL AND TRADITION. A Study of the Life and Times of Henry L. Stimson. By Elting E. Morison. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960, 686 pp.

Henry Lewis Stimson, Governor-General of the Philippines from December 1927 to February 1929, was a unique man whose public life, extending over almost half a century, has few parallels in recent American history. In addition to his service as Governor-General, Stimson had actively participated in Republican politics (initially, during the period from 1895 to 1906 at the District Ward level, and later, in 1910, running unsuccessfully for the governorship of New York). He had served as a "delegate at large" to the New York Constitutional Convention. He had also been a United States District Attorney, Secretary of War under President Howard Taft, and a Lieutenant-Colonel in the United States Army during the First World War. In 1927, just prior to his appointment as Philippine Governor-General, he had served as President Coolidge's special representative to Nicaragua. He left the Governor-Generalship of the Philippines to become United States Secretary of State from 1929 to 1933 under the Republican Hoover administration. Between 1940 and 1945, Stimson served as Secretary of War under the Democratic administration of Roosevelt and Truman.

The fact that he served his country under seven of the eight presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Harry Truman, and held Cabinet posts under four, is indeed remarkable. But even more noteworthy were Stimson's rare individual qualities which permitted him to move freely from politics to public administration, without ever losing his primary focus on the larger objective of perfecting the fundamental arts of government.

Elting Morison's book, in many ways a sequel to the autobiographical *ON ACTIVE SERVICE IN PEACE AND WAR*, canvasses the life and times of Henry Stimson. Unfortunately, neither the personality of Stimson nor the changing era in which he lived come alive in *TURMOIL AND TRADITION*. Perhaps the best description of the literary style of Morison is that he has overwritten his book—that he has included too much that is extraneous and peripheral and too little that places Stimson as a personality in the light of the times.

The canvassing of Stimson's period in the Philippines is particularly disappointing, although it provides a few interesting side-lights on Stimson's relationships with Quezon and Osmeña. The one

incident treated in some detail is Stimson's successful attempt to secure legislative approval of a system that would permit the chief executive to hire technical assistants at his own discretion—a move that was the genesis of the still existing "Belo boy" system in the Philippines. So strongly did he feel the need for technical assistance for the executive branch of the Government, and so firmly implanted in his mind was the need for having able and sympathetic staff assistance, that he told Osmeña that he would "withhold all future steps, including the appointment of Cabinet officers, until the legislature provided him with the money to obtain such advisors." Despite misgivings on the part of many Filipino legislators who feared that such technical assistants might wield effective political power, in fact if not in name, or that the system might merely be a patronage dumping ground, the legislature finally passed the enabling legislation. It is interesting to look at the more recent history of executive-appointed "Belo boys" in the light of Stimson's initial motivation, and also in the light of the fears of Filipino legislators in 1928, who correctly foresaw the possible abuses of the system.

Morison does extract from Stimson's diaries a number of points relating to Philippine-American relationships which have been largely ignored or overlooked in most historical treatments of the 1930's. One was the very strong desire on the part of Quezon, frequently expressed in private conversations, to secure Dominion Status for the Philippines, wherein free trade between the United States and the Philippines could be maintained. Quezon's desire for Dominion Status was frustrated by two factors. The first, which Quezon suggested in his autobiographical *GOOD FIGHT*, was the incapacity of America in the 1930's to think in terms of such a new (to the United States) political construct. The second was Stimson's own attitude. Perhaps because of his awareness of both economic and political forces in the United States that were aligned against any permanent political relationship with the Philippines, Stimson was anything but enthusiastic about the idea.

Henry Stimson certainly was not one of the great or even dramatic Philippine Governor-Generals like General Wood or Francis B. Harrison or Cameron Forbes, nor did his limited term permit him to sink emotional roots in the area. But he did leave his mark. This book is therefore not a 'must' for the general student of Philippine history, but it does offer the specialist dealing with the twentieth-century political history of the Philippines a few new miscellaneous facts and provides added dimensions of some known ones.