

The Old Baltimore Spirit

NO MEAN CITY. By Theodore R. McKeldin. Published by the author in cooperation with the Maryland Historical Society. Foreword by Milton S. Eisenhower. 47 pages. \$2.50.

HIMSELF no mean man, Mayor McKeldin has set forth his philosophy of civic responsibility in a thin gray-bound volume that has the ring of a McKeldin sermon to a laggard public. Using the municipal contributions of Enoch Pratt, Johns Hopkins and George Peabody as his text, Mr. McKeldin stresses his belief that the continued greatness of a city depends on the willingness of its citizens to

dedicate their wisdom and time and money to civic enterprises.

Elected officials can provide a city with honest and efficient government, the Mayor writes, but they alone cannot make a city great. "The fact that a man has voluntarily entered public life," he says, "proves that he is ambitious, at least to the extent of wishing that his name may be remembered a little longer than it takes the pallbearers to return to their homes. I do not disclaim that ambition, and I do not deny that these pages are designed to further it."

'A National Example'

But what Mr. McKeldin seeks is a revival in the Twentieth Century of "the spirit that animated Baltimoreans in the Nineteenth Century," because only then will the greatness of the city and the permanence of the McKeldin place in its history be assured. The Baltimore of Pratt, Peabody and Hopkins set a national example in effective philanthropy and private dedication to public service, Mr. McKeldin says, and the community spirit of that era "is still capable of creating a new city, entirely different, yet one of which men can truly say that it is the school of the nation."

Possibly Mr. McKeldin gives Baltimore too much credit for producing Peabody, Pratt and Hopkins, since the first two were New Englanders and Johns Hopkins was raised outside the city limits. He may also exaggerate their role as the pace-setters of American philanthropy when he overlooks the contributions of, say, Peter Cooper (also a man

with Baltimore connections) who gave the working people of New York a free reading room, lecture hall, museum and college of engineering and art.

Cites Henrietta Szold

Mr. McKeldin, though, does not pretend to be passing final or exclusive judgment. On the contrary, he writes that "if we could look into the account-books of heaven, where the Recording Angel enters services to mankind in celestial, not earthly figures, we might find among Baltimore names the largest sum credited to no man, but to a woman, Henrietta Szold."

For the purposes of the McKeldin theme, however, Pratt, Peabody and Hopkins serve as exemplary material. All three, he writes, "poured time, thought and energy, as well as money, into their plans. Nor were they content to give themselves only; each of the three constantly took counsel of the wisest men he knew, enlisting them when possible in the project. They tried, and with marked success, to mobilize the intelligence—business, political, scholarly or what not—of all Baltimore in support of the city's cultural advance."

Describing himself as "a determined optimist," the Mayor believes that the spirit of the city's greatness did not die with Pratt, Hopkins and Peabody and needs "only the right stimulus to become as active and powerful as it ever was in the past." The McKeldin book is a personal and sincere effort to provide at least a portion of that stimulus.

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