

skirmishes of the war. Many of the questions raised in this book had a decided bearing on the military outcome of the struggle which might be even more important than who did what at Shiloh or Second Bull Run. In the mind of this writer, it is time that Civil War scholarship turned from an endless reconsideration of the military details of the war — as fascinating and heroic as they are — to a more balanced view of the contest in which all of the considerations of politics, economics, diplomacy and the military struggle are integrated into what appears to be their proper relationship.

However, the book is highly recommended to all Civil War “buffs,” and will help to underscore what we owe to the “blundering generation” which brought on this bloody conflict, but redeemed itself, and the nation, by its heroic conduct on the battlefield, and its efforts to bind up the wounds which lacerated the two sections.

*University of Pittsburgh*

HARRY R. BECK

*The Prairie Traveler.* By RANDOLPH B. MARCY, Captain, U.S. Army (by Authority of the War Department, 1859). (Privately reprinted, 1961.)

Deadly practical things can be, at the same time, delightfully fascinating, though it seldom happens that way. This rare quality is eminently exhibited by an informative little book that has come into the library of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. It is not a new book but a reprinting, in a very limited edition, of one originally published in 1859, entitled *The Prairie Traveler*. The “deadly” practicality of its content lies in the fact that the lives of many hundreds of immigrants, gold-rush fortune seekers, and adventurers of the 1860's and 1870's were preserved by the observance, just as the lives of many more were in jeopardy by the non-observance, of the simple guidance principles herein propounded. The book was designed as a manual of “prairie-craft” for the adventurous easterners intent upon hazarding their all upon successful crossing of the plains, deserts, and mountains to reach the “Promised Lands” of California and Oregon.

Although the necessity that engendered the little manual has long ago passed out of existence, the very obsolescence of its terminology gives it a ring of the new: surcingle, harnes, traces,

felloe, cantle, all call up associations of the days before mechanized transport.

The author of this erudite little volume was himself an interesting personality and a true product of the picturesque times. He was an army officer of thirty years' experience on the western posts, riding the plains, breaking new trails through the Rockies and up the Red River, fighting Indians, but nonetheless a gifted writer. Captain Randolph Barnes Marcy was a brilliant officer, a native of Massachusetts, West Point 1832, author of other works: *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border* (1866), *Border Reminiscences* (1872), and several reports published as Senate Documents. During the War with Mexico he served with distinction. In 1861 and 1862, Colonel Marcy was chief-of-staff to his son-in-law, General George B. McClellan, in the Peninsular and Antietam Campaigns. Later he became Inspector-General of the Army and received the brevet ranks of Brigadier General and Major General, retiring in 1873.

Those of our readers who may be acquainted with Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*, will find much in Marcy's book to remind them of the former, particularly in the anecdotes which he relates out of his own experiences with the Indians. Marcy's clear expression, vocabulary, and literary style remind one of a more modern writer and are surprising in one who had spent the greater part of his life in such active pursuits. In his own words, "It is our army that unites the chasm between the culture of civilization in the aspect of science, art and social refinement, and the powerful simplicity of nature."

*The Prairie Traveler* must have been worth its weight in gold to the immigrant wagon driver whose survival depended upon how he conserved the strength of his mules or oxen for the final pull over the mountains, or husbanded his food and water supplies, or selected and cared for his firearms, or especially how he should be able to prevent man or beast from drinking the poisonous water from alkaline springs. How he trailed Indians or avoided them was also a matter of self preservation. Such essentials as building shelters, fording rivers, controlling stampedes, and treating snake bites were worthy of special consideration.

Whereas the original publication was 12mo in size and in cloth boards, the present reprint is a much more pretentious item, being 8vo and bound in a most unique manner. Stamped in gold upon

the golden cream colored front cover is a California type saddle, with its long tree, seat and skirts covered with a single large piece of leather, high cantle and low pommel with a leather loop to serve as a sling for the frontier rifle or carbine. The black leather half binding is unique in that the spine represents a leather strap with an embossed harness buckle in gold. The whole book is unusual and fine, having been designed by Bradbury Thompson.

The endpapers, added in this edition and not in the original, have been reprinted, without giving credit, from a very good map depicting the old trails and old place names of the West. They add interest and the right finish to this piece to delight the true bibliophile.

Of course, the edition is printed by letterpress upon a fine book paper made by the publisher, the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company, with DeVinne type, a modified classical Roman style type face.

Few moderns' lives may depend upon a thorough knowledge of the content of this volume, but it is certain that a better understanding of the life of the perilous times of that past generation of hardy adventurers can be attained by a perusal of the work. The publishers are to be congratulated for having created a thing of beauty while, at the same time, preserving an item of our priceless heritage.

*Pittsburgh*

EDWARD G. WILLIAMS