BOOK REVIEWS

History of the Expedition Under the Command of Lewis and Clark.

A matter of grave concern to many of us, of late years, has been the plight of out-of-print, scarce and rare books in the libraries of America. Particularly do we lament the mortality rate of these treasured volumes through increased use brought on by the intellectual awakening we are presently experiencing. Furthermore, the number of libraries has grown at an unprecedented pace at every level of public and private schools, as well as university and public municipal libraries.

As the need for supplying these institutions with reference material becomes ever greater, Colonial Williamsburg has led the way to satisfying the deficit by the reprinting of rare old works relating to Virginia's history. Now we have placed in our hands a timely reproduction of that "national epic of exploration, conceived by Thomas Jefferson, wrought out by Lewis and Clark, and given to the world by Nicholas Biddle." Dover Publications have performed a signal service to the American public by their making available this saga of the westward march of civilization, History of the Expedition Under the Command of Lewis and Clark (1804-1806).

The original field notes, orders and journals were written with abbreviations that needed to be expanded and tedious descriptions that needed to be simplified for readability. At the express desire of President Thomas Jefferson, Nicholas Biddle of Philadelphia agreed to edit the journals after the untimely death, by suicide or other violence, of Meriwether Lewis. "It was Biddle's task to weave this mass of heterogeneous data into a readable paraphrase which should have a unity and a simple and forceful literary style: . . . nearly 1,500,000 words of manuscript he condensed into 370,000 printed words," wrote Dr. R. G. Thwaites. The narrative finished, Biddle was called away by political activities of his busy life, and he relinquished the project to the hands of Paul Allen for performance of the multitudinous labors appertaining to the printing and publication of the work. Although Mr. Allen's name alone appeared upon the title page of the original edition that was finally published in 1814, this paraphrased abridg-
ment of the journals has been termed by all later writers "the Biddle text." It is this text that Dr. Coues says he "gives with scrupulous fidelity"; and it, hence, has been denominated History rather than Original Journals.

Of all of the publications of the Lewis and Clark journals, this profusely annotated edition is the most valuable to students of all phases of the expedition, notably to devotees of anthropology and ethnology on the North American continent. Dr. Coues' personal geographical knowledge and intimate acquaintance with the Indians of the West, added to his authoritative understanding of zoology, botany, geology and mineralogy, made him perhaps the most competent man of his time, or of any time, to have become the expositor of the records of the most scientifically organized venture up to that time and seldom since equaled. He was close enough to the events to have known the original state of nature on the western plains and among the mountains, yet he wrote at a late enough period to identify Lewis and Clark's locations and sites with modern geography, place names and political boundaries. To read Coues' version of the journals is to become enthralled by the narrative and fascinated by the enlightenment offered by his critical notes.

The inquiring reader is tempted to look farther into the background of the adventurous expedition to spy out the vast potentialities within the unknown confines of the Louisiana Purchase; the intriguing story of diplomacy of Napoleon I, Talleyrand, and Barbé-Marbois, on the part of the French, and the rare good fortune of the Americans, Robert R. Livingston and James Monroe; the behind-the-scenes maneuvering with Britain, Spain and France, plus intense internal political pressures to obtain free navigation of the Mississippi for the citizens of the United States; the stealthy haste necessary for Lewis and Clark to cross the Spanish-held territory, beyond the vague bounds of the Louisiana Purchase, to reach the Pacific Ocean; President Jefferson's strategems to conceal from the American public's view the true cost of the expedition, after his profligate spending of 15 million for an unknown quantity of vast waste; contemplation of the fact that Lewis and Clark were not the first, by eleven years, to cross the Great Divide to the Western Sea (Alexander Mackenzie, whose journal also is a thrilling epic, had crossed the now Canadian wilds and returned, in 1792-1793). All of the foregoing considerations, although barely hinted at in Coues' notes, tempt one to further investigation in order to place this episode in proper perspective.
An able preface sets forth Dr. Coues' reasons for his reprinting of Biddle's text. Prefatory articles of great value also are Jefferson's Memoir of Meriwether Lewis and Coues' Memoirs of William Clark and of Patrick Gass, a sergeant who accompanied the expedition and who published his own journal. The Bibliographical Introduction by Coues is practically a definitive piece of work encompassing all Lewis and Clark material until 1892. It does not, of course, include Reuben Gold Thwaites' monumental eight volume edition of the full Original Journals and orderly books with full scientific data and the journals of two of the sergeants (published 1904, reprinted 1959), annotated but not copiously.

Eight maps are distributed through the three volumes. Those folded inside the back cover of volume II merit first mention in that one is a reproduction of the map sent by Captain Meriwether Lewis to President Jefferson from the first winter encampment at Fort Mandan (later North Dakota). The other is that prepared by Captain William Clark to accompany the 1814 edition of the History. Inside the back cover of volume I is folded a modern map (1893) prepared by Dr. Coues to an accurate scale better to identify the route of the expedition with place names recognizable to this day (1966). Five other maps appearing at the end of volume III were selected by the editor as most worthy of reproduction, representing the falls and rapids of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers and one of Indian fortifications.

The more particular reader may wish to study the full journals, but he cannot fail to be thrilled by the narrative achieved by Nicholas Biddle and vitalized by Elliott Coues' footnotes that illuminate the pathway blazed across the plains, rivers and mountains of an untamed continent.

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This book, in common with many other important writings of the current period of history, raises more questions than it answers. It represents a modern way of discussing men and events. Whether that