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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Coming Empire, or Two Thousand Miles in Texas on Horseback. (Revised edition). By Colonel Nathaniel Alston Taylor. (Turner Publishing Co., Dallas, Texas, 1936; 383 pp.; index, notes. \$2.50.)

The first edition of *Two Thousand Miles in Texas on Horseback* was published in 1877. The book in the present edition is the result of the insistence by friends and admirers of the volume for a new and up-to-date printing. The 1936 edition of this most interesting and curious work came at the auspicious time of the celebration of the Texas Centennial and of the one hundredth birthday of the author, Colonel Taylor.

The keen-eyed and mentally alert traveller and journalist usually signed his manuscripts with his initials N. A. T., a clever and truthful pseudonym. He was born August 28, 1835, at Wake Forest, North Carolina. In 1859, he "felt the call" to Texas and made the trip on horseback. The Colonel really loved the Southwest, bought a farm near Boerne, Texas, and engaged in newspaper work in San Antonio. He served with the Texas Rangers and Indian fighters, as well as in the Civil War.

N. A. T. was no ordinary journalist. He was highly educated and possessed more than a passing knowledge of botany, chemistry, and geology. His knowledge of the natural sciences came in handy on the long trip on horseback across Texas. Most of his many predictions in regard to oil and minerals are now established facts. The author was no less versed in the classics.

The Colonel was led to take his long trip across Texas by reading of a horseback trip through France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, taken by the great French essayist, Montaigne, in 1580. He wanted to write a living description of Texas which would serve future generations. He adds philosophically:

"Thus the dead centuries move in living forms before him, and he may, as he chooses, pluck a rose from the Present or put forth his hand and gather a fresh lily from the Past."

Interested tremendously in all men, animals and plants, he saddles his horse, takes knapsack, notebooks and pencils and sets out from Houston, Texas, on the second of January, 1876. This is the beginning of a journey which takes the Colonel all across Texas, into Old Mexico at Presidio, and back to Houston. Throughout the book, the reader never tires of interesting and detailed descriptions of Texas cities, men, women, and children. The great variety of the state's fauna and flora move through the pages in remarkable kalidoscopic views.

Mixed in with the keen and clever descriptions of men, mountains, and rivers, there appear popular songs, games, and the ever enjoyable folk tales, such as that of the inimitable "The Devil and Strap Buckner."

The book is a very valuable guide and authority for those who would see Texas as she was in 1876. The author's footnotes are profuse with explanation and prophesies, many of which have literally come true, as, for example, the future oil and wheat development in Texas.

All together the book is absorbingly interesting and readable. The faults are those of the journalist writing hurriedly his impressions. The author has the nineteenth century Southerner's romantic love of flowery speech and exaggeration. These crop out here and there, but instead of detracting from the book seem to lend quaintness, romance, and color. The sky, rivers, and climate of Texas are nearly always like Paradise to the soldier-journalist, and the grass is so fine and sweet "that the sheep grazing on it literally turn to animated suet-balls." The turkeys of Texas grew so fat on the fruit of the wild peach tree that their breasts burst "from excessive fat" when they fell from the trees after being shot and killed.

However that may be, the book contains enough sound thinking and shrewd and clever observation to throw much

light on the past, present, and future history and development of Texas. No one interested in the Southwest, and in Texas in particular, should fail to read the first-hand description of the Lone Star state, written in 1876 by a man who travelled "Two Thousand Miles in Texas on Horseback."

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The Newberry Library: manuscripts in the Ayer collection. Compiled by Ruth Lapham Butler. (Newberry Library, Chicago, 1937; 295 pp., index. \$5.00.)

The late Edward E. Ayer specialized in the archaeology and ethnology of the American Indian, and in collecting manuscript material along these lines it was only to be expected that he would gather much which is of the greatest value historically. The writer well remembers his delight, twenty-five years ago, upon finding at the Newberry Library source material which did not then exist in Santa Fé, at the Bancroft Library, or in the Library of Congress.

The library trustees are to be congratulated upon issuing this volume which will make research workers acquainted with the important contents of the Ayer collection. It is merely a check-list, but it gives the necessary leads.

The compiler has listed the manuscripts as 1766 numbered titles, grouped under seven main heads: North America, Spanish America, Philippine Islands, Hawaiian Islands, and Indian, Philippine, and Hawaiian languages. There are many entries in the last five groups, but more than half of them fall under the first two heads.

The index gives reference to many titles which are of interest to Southwestern history, but especial attention is called to title 1236, "Spanish archives." Thus indicated are 186,184 pages of transcripts, largely typewritten, relating to the history of Spanish North America from 1518 to 1835, and most of them secured from the Archivo General de Indias in Seville.

L. B. B.