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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

New Mexico Triptych—Fray Angelico Chavez—St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, New Jersey, 1940—\$1.25.

Much has been said and written about regional literature in the Southwest. Yet most of the speakers and writers on the subject are individuals who were not born in the region, but have become conscious of its character by contrast with other places where they started out. They see the Southwest perhaps more clearly than people born here. Yet as creative writers they may not really know the psychology of people and place as does the native. As critics they may be tempted to prescribe what the Southwest should produce, given certain ingredients, skillful cooks, and proper recipes found in the annals of comparative literature.

I don't say one could have predicted Fray Chavez. No formula ever explains the genius for poetry or painting or story-telling, and Fray Chavez has a gift for all three. Yet one can explain and in part understand how the artistic tradition of Spanish New Mexico, the mysticism of Franciscan faith, and the folk-lore and fraternity of village life might, fortunately, join in a young man from Mora, New Mexico, educated at eastern schools of his Order, and stationed in a parish not far from the literary center of the Southwest.

During July, Fray Angelico spoke at the University of New Mexico, reading his poetry and presenting his point of view as a poet. He said that it was love of words that seemed essentially poetry to him, and curiously love of words in English, not all of them English words, however. One has to mine through the words of harsh tone and flat significance for the store of sensuous and meaningful words accumulated from the Classic and Romance languages and almost every speech known to the globe. This artistry in words is not confined to Fray Angelico's poetry. His prose is apparently simple, effortless, flowing, but I suspect that

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before he writes a word and after, he sits reflectively choosing to leave or eliminate on the basis of specific quality in sound and color and fitness every mark on the page.

"Hunchback Madonna," the last of the three stories in *New Mexico Triptych*, is my favorite. Mana Seda, the central character, is a pious old woman so bent with age that as she creeps about in her black shawl people sometimes whisper, "She is like the Black Widow Spider." Injured in her youth, she was never considered among the maidens who became queens of the Virgin when her festival was held in May. For many years, Mana Seda has gathered the flowers for the garlands which the girls were to carry in their procession. She remembers, too, long, long ago when an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe intended for the church at El Tordo had been lost when the pack train from Chihuahua was attacked by Apaches.

A reviewer, however, must not tell an author's whole story. After seventy years of providing flowers for the festival but never being chosen one of the flower maids, Mana Seda finally gets the reward of her piety. And in the meantime a santero has painted the Virgin on her shawl. "And so Mana Seda led all the queens that evening, slowly and smoothly, not like a black widow now, folks observed, but like one of those little white moths moving over alfalfa fields in the moonlight."

There are two other stories: "The Penitente Thief," with more of humor and yet the same naive pathos; "The Angel's New Wings," beautiful and moving. The illustrations have been done by the author, pen and ink sketches, harmonious in line and careful in detail. Fine literature and good reading lie in *New Mexico Triptych*.

T. M. PEARCE

University of New Mexico
Albuquerque

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My Life on the Frontier, 1882-1897—Miguel Antonio Otero—University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1939—\$3.00.

Miguel Antonio Otero, governor of the Territory of New Mexico from 1897 to 1903, tells in an interesting way his recollections of New Mexico from 1882 to 1897, in the second volume of *My Life on the Frontier*.

Few people were closer than the author to the trend of events, and to the events themselves, during the fifteen years covered by the book. Governor Otero's father, Miguel Antonio Otero I, had served as a delegate in Congress from New Mexico, had taken an important part in bringing the Santa Fe railway into New Mexico, and had been very prominently identified with business and politics in the territory for many years. His death, on May 30, 1882, passed on to the son a host of friendships and alliances, commercial and political, and but few enemies. Miguel Antonio Otero II tells what happened to him and to the territory and its people during the eventful years from the death of his father until the day he himself was inaugurated governor of New Mexico, on June 14, 1897. The author carries over into his recitation of events likes, dislikes, and prejudices held fifty and more years ago. It is obvious that he had but little liking for L. Bradford Prince, Thomas Benton Catron, Frank A. Hubbell, and other leaders of the eighties and nineties, who opposed him politically. Prince especially comes in for a good verbal drubbing. The author fails to give Judge Prince any credit for outstanding work in compiling and publishing the laws of New Mexico in 1884, or for Prince's excellent *Spanish Mission Churches of New Mexico*, or for his *The Stone Lions of Cochiti*, *Old Fort Marcy*, *The Struggle for Statehood 1850 to 1910*, and a bewildering outpouring of magazine articles and letters to the press of the nation on New Mexico subjects. Prince was governor of the territory for four years beginning in 1889, and died December 8, 1922, in his eighty-third year.

However, it is the story of Miguel Antonio Otero II that the author is telling, and he tells it in his own way, with

plenty of adverbs and adjectives, in vigorous style, no holds barred and no punches pulled. The book is well worth reading and essential to those who study the period covered and wish to be informed of the happenings of those years from the viewpoint of a writer who was undoubtedly at all times active in the machinery of business and politics. Governor Otero, apparently a very busy man in his prime, nevertheless had plenty of time left over to attend all the important social events of the day.

Now in his eighties, Governor Otero is reliving the days of long ago by writing his memoirs. He is doing an excellent job, considering the many years that have elapsed, and his forthcoming third volume, dealing with the years of his governorship, will be awaited with interest.

W. A. KELEHER

Albuquerque

Landmarks of New Mexico—Edgar L. Hewett and Wayne Mauzy—University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1940—\$3.50.

Although falling into a series with the imposing title of "Handbooks of Archaeological History," *Landmarks of New Mexico* is, in effect, and will probably find its widest use as, a guidebook to the state, valuable both for New Mexicans and visitors from other states.

It is a small book, 200 pages, and contains 114 fine photographic illustrations. Dr. Hewett and Mr. Mauzy are authors of most of the descriptive content, but others, Bertha Dutton, Hulda Hobbs, Marjorie Tichy, Hester Jones, Reginald Fisher, Albert Ely, Joseph Toulouse, and J. W. Hendron have contributed pages dealing with places with which they are most familiar. As might be anticipated, the writing is spotty as to style and pace, a factor which is of minimum importance in this type of book.

Since the book is the work of specialists in archaeology, and since most of it is devoted to archaeological and historical monuments, it may be accepted as quite authoritative. The principal authors are, by long experience in museum

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work, acquainted with the kind of questions people ask about places of interest, and this is reflected in the pointedness of the information presented. It has also made for greater condensation than would otherwise have been possible.

Leading historical and scenic landmarks of all parts of the state are treated, but the emphasis is upon the Pueblo Indian area of the upper Rio Grande drainage.

PAUL WALTER, JR.

University of New Mexico
Albuquerque

• *Navajo Omens and Taboos*—Franc Johnson Newcomb—The Rydal Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1940—\$2.75.

Mrs. Newcomb has succeeded in bringing together in this volume a large number of the fascinating regulations and beliefs which govern the every-day life of the Navajo. The taboos range widely from those which have to do with cooking and weaving to those concerned with life and death itself. The omens included are chiefly those having to do with natural harbingers such as the appearance and movement of certain birds. While making no pretense of being exhaustive, the material of this book is well chosen as representative of all major Navajo activities.

The authenticity of the information given is of particular interest, for it is with great reluctance that the American Indian will divulge matters of this type to strangers. The respect and esteem which Mrs. Newcomb won for herself among the Navajo is in itself enough to assure the reliability of her information. In addition, however, this volume has the expressed sanction of Chee Dodge, famous Navajo leader, who in a foreword has removed all doubts on this score.

The simple and direct manner in which these taboos and omens are set forth is in itself indicative of a fidelity to the Indian. Anyone who has taken notes or information from Indians will recognize immediately the fact that the Navajo is himself speaking through the pen of Mrs. New-

comb. Though many of the rules and customs recounted here may at first seem to us mere superstition, they are presented in a logical and matter-of-fact way which easily convinces us that they are the best wisdom of a great people, a wisdom which in many cases has as sound a basis as our scientific knowledge, even though the explanations be what we term "myth." Rules of conduct which govern the actions of individuals toward one another indicate strongly the fundamental human desire to be as considerate as possible. The moral customs here mentioned are those of a people who have developed a strong ethical sense of such propriety.

It is only to be regretted that this work could not have been of greater scope. Though realizing that the topics of more religious nature are considered by most American Indians as too sacred to be made public in published form, it is to be hoped that a proper spirit of appreciation upon the part of the American public will some day permit the appearance of a volume on the ceremonies and myths as frankly told as is this work upon less sacred subjects.

H. G. ALEXANDER

University of New Mexico
Albuquerque

Rocky Mountain Trees—Richard J. Preston—Iowa State College Press, Ames, 1940—\$2.00.

This manual describes all native and naturalized trees within the Rocky Mountain area—252 species, illustrated by 129 full-page plates. The treatise begins with a characterization of the six life zones of the region, supplemented by a zone map, and a frontispiece map of the forested areas of the region showing its major types of tree vegetation. Next is a description, supplemented by figures, of tree characters for purpose of tree identification. The main body of the book consists of keys and detailed descriptions of the genera and species of trees with clear-cut illustrations of many of their diagnostic characters. Most excellent features of the work are the check list of trees within each state of

the region, presented by scientific and common name, and insert maps showing the distribution of a large number of the species. There is a selected bibliography.

The author has done an excellent, well-organized, critical piece of work. However, the book was written for "trained foresters, students, and others interested in knowing trees," in which respect it falls somewhat short of the goal. Despite an effort to simplify the keys and descriptions of the genera and species, and to clarify them by good illustrations and a glossary, the author has not succeeded in rendering the work sufficiently non-technical to be of great value to the layman. It is a most difficult, if not impossible, task to write a manual of the flora or fauna of a region which will be at once of marked value to both scientist and layman. The author has succeeded as well as anyone could in attaining this dual aim.

E. F. CASTETTER

University of New Mexico
Albuquerque

Women Tell the Story of the Southwest—Mattie Lloyd Wooten, Compiler and Editor—The Naylor Company, San Antonio, Texas, 1940—\$3.50.

Most of the early printed records of life in the Southwest were by and about men, to be read by arm chair adventurers back East. The narratives of Gregg, Ruxton, Kendall, and Duval come to mind. More recently there has been an interest in pioneer women. Diaries have been edited: *At the End of the Santa Fe Trail*, by Sister Blandina Segale, and *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, by Susan Magoffin. Book length autobiographies have been written by such women as Sallie Reynolds Matthews in *Interwoven*, Mary Rak in *The Cowman's Wife*, Hilda Faunce in *Desert Wife*, and Louisa Wade Wetherill in *Traders to the Navajos*. Fiction has followed this interest: Dorothy Scarborough's *The Wind*, Conrad Richter's *Early Americana*, Lorraine Carr's *The Mother of the Smiths*, to mention only a few.

Mattie Lloyd Wooten has collected from periodicals and arranged in a substantial volume some of the vivid brief sketches by women of the settling of the Southwest. *The Texas Magazine, Frontier Times, Sturms' Oklahoma Magazine, The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association, New Mexico, Dallas News, Chronicles of Oklahoma, New Mexico Historical Review, Arizona Republican, Texas Outlook, New York Times, New York Herald-Tribune* are among the publications drawn from.

Most of the stories are by participants: Cora Meton Cross writes of trailing cattle to northern markets. She trailed twenty-two herds. Mrs. C. M. Neal in a letter to her family tells of Indian raids and the yards of blanket warp and knitting thread she had spun. Mrs. M. B. Anderson recounts her experiences in starting a school—seventy-five pupils of all ages in one room—in old Fort Davis. Other stories are by women one or two generations removed from the frontier, stories learned from old-timers or family records. Such are "Early Arizona," by Sharlot M. Hall; "A Great Texas Artist," by Bride Neill Taylor; "Sketch of Mrs. I. M. Williams," by Nina Kountz. But all of the incidents emphasize the hardihood of the pioneer woman and her desperate attempts to create for her family a good life physically and culturally in a new land.

The stories are arranged alphabetically according to titles (except near the end where the order breaks down). The book would have gained in interest by a topical or chronological grouping. An identification of the authors would also have been helpful.

It is fitting that this book should come from the Dean of Women at Texas State College for Women where a statue of a pioneer woman dominates the campus and a historical museum of costumes and household arts has recently been opened.

MABEL MAJOR

Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

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Hot Irons, Heraldry of the Range—Oren Arnold and John P. Hale—
The Macmillan Company, New York, 1940—\$2.50.

This is a book about cattle brands and branding; about plain, non-glamorous cowboys who rode the range equipped with a rope, a branding iron, and a keen-edged knife for the castration of young bulls. According to these authors, the ordinary day's work for the cowboy consisted mainly of smell, dirt, blood, and danger; the last being derived, not from six guns, according to the popular conception, but from the flying hoofs and twisting horns of the cattle.

The book contains a very thorough treatment of the brands emblazoned upon the flanks of countless thousands of cattle. The technique of the branding itself is explained in much detail. The meaning and appearance of such common markings as the "Walking Y," the "Lazy Two," the "Running M," and the "Flying U" are considered. Numerous well-known brands are identified and described. Branding is made a very exact and yet romantic science. The high point of interest in this treatment is found in the stories and legends the authors have collected, during a lifetime of research, that lie behind the creation and use of certain brands by many widely known, southwestern ranch and cattle men. These are a bunch of swell yarns and they delve deep into the history and the lore of the cattle business. To this reader they will give new meaning to the next hitherto prosaic scene he views on the hide of any four-legged critter grazing the wide ranges of New Mexico.

As a corollary to the branding of livestock the authors mention the use of numerals and letters by college athletic teams and the initialing of nearby mountains by college enthusiasts. Instances are given of the branding of slaves, children, wives and sweethearts,—man's desire to mark with his insignia those things that are his.

Mr. Hale has gone up and down the Southwest for many years with a hobby of collecting brands, branding irons, and good yarns about both. Mr. Arnold is the Arizona author of numerous books and stories about the region. Judging from

this book the two make an acceptable team. In their preface they set up the following "dual goal":

- "1. To establish a reference work, an 'Authority.'
2. To be entertaining about it."

In my opinion they have admirably succeeded in attaining both these ends.

Albuquerque

JAMES P. THRELKELD

The White Scourge—Edward Everett Davis—The Naylor Co., San Antonio, Texas, 1940—\$2.25.

In this vitally interesting book, cotton is characterized by the author as a gigantic parasite that brings to destruction all who participate in the production of this great money crop of the South. Although a sociologic novel built around the economic and psychological effects of the cotton industry, *The White Scourge* is a story of romance with an interesting plot built around living people.

The plot of *The White Scourge* is laid in Central West Texas where Isaac Hobson came in 1865 seeking opportunity not to be found in reconstructing the states of the Old South. There he established Clear Creek Ranch which he operated successfully for two decades before purchasing it from the state for the nominal sum of one dollar an acre. Six years later Hobson broke up Clear Creek Ranch into quarter and half sections, selling them for several times the original purchase price.

Because of his intelligence and feeling of responsibility, he tried hard to select the buyers of his land. He wanted responsible citizens, instead of the average tenant farmer, to people the community to which he gave schoolhouse, church, and other community buildings. In spite of his care, greed and ignorance, as well as filth and disease, crept in until what was once a prospering community became transformed into a decayed, poverty-stricken hamlet.

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W. H. BELL