

BOOK REVIEWS

The Western Journals of Washington Irving. Edited and annotated by John Francis McDermott. (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1944. Pp. xiii, 201. Bibliography, illustrations, map. \$3.50.)

For more than a century, anything pertaining to Washington Irving has been interesting. While he was the first literary ambassador to the European Court of Letters, yet to America he has always been far more than that. His genius for extracting the beauty, joy and genuine worth of living out of all about him and putting these and more into all he wrote, said and did, made him the best loved writer this country has produced.

In recent months two books touching Irving's life have revealed a fidelity and almost worshipful attitude American readers have kept for all things relating to Father Knickerbocker. Van Wyck's "The World of Washington Irving," coming out in the summer of 1944 became the Book of the Month Club and rocketed so high it exhausted the printing capacity of a great publishing house.

The Western Journals of Washington Irving, edited by John Francis McDermott and put forth by the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma, is another 1944 contribution to Irving life and literature.

Mr. McDermott knows that the real words of a man taken directly from his note books, where they have been placed with eagerness, joyousness and with vivid color, are far more interesting and illuminating than sentences, paragraphs and books taken from these notes many years after. So he has placed all America under obligation by securing and publishing the note books of Washington Irving as he told the story of leaving Cincinnati at five o'clock, September 3, 1832, and making a journey through an almost unknown wilderness of Missouri, Kansas, and the great Indian country, the last now known as Oklahoma; this journey ending at Fort Gibson on November 9, 1832.

These notes of Irving given by McDermott without alteration or explanation, broken, often barely legible, a single sentence at times, then breaking out in to a flood of full paragraphs, are perhaps the finest picture of Irving, in the natural, thus far given to the press and public. "Better than Irving's books" says a critic, "his hasty notes evoke the freshness of that vanished time."

Sixty-six pages are given by the author to what he calls, "Editor's Introduction." With a style, genial and at the same time impressive with detail, the author furnishes a charming background

to the travels of Irving in the then unknown west. He uses copious footnotes and with telling interest and effect. He tells of Irving, the business man, minor diplomat and honored author returning to his native land after spending seventeen years in Europe; how he met, on the homecoming voyage, Charles Joseph Latrobe, tutor of the young Count DePortales; "Latrobe a man of a thousand occupations, a sportsman; Portales, sowing his wild oats, brilliant, frivolous, talented." Irving by instinct and birth a naturalist and traveler, went along with these adventurers to Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, up the Hudson, Niagara Falls, on to Buffalo and into Ohio.

In the conversations of these three, the Frenchman spoke of Colonel Chouteau of St. Louis, a trader in the Great Indian Country. "Ah, what a world of fun it would be to get in to that world of Indians, buffalo, bear, wild horses, strange forests," said one. Irving thought it might be well to look in to that and so they did.

Colonel Chouteau advised them he was just leaving St. Louis for his stores on the Saline near Fort Gibson and with him Indian Commissioner Henry Ellsworth and a company of United States soldiers under Captain Bean. Arrangements were made and the expedition to Fort Gibson and the Saline Country became a reality.

The book is rendered attractive by its illustrations, some nine in number including an excellent portraiture of Irving by Peale. An unusually good map, tracing Irving's journey from St. Louis by exact days and location showing for example, he reached Independence, Missouri, September 24, twenty-one days out of St. Louis, down to Boudinot's Station among the Osages, October 3 and reaching Fort Gibson October the 8th, 1832. Then out of Fort Gibson up the Verdigris and crossing it October 10 he reached the farthest point west in the Oklahoma country on October 24; turning thence south and keeping north of the South Canadian, he passes back to Cleveland and up through Hughes Counties as they are now and thence northeast, back to Fort Gibson, reaching there November 9. As the reader marks this winding, twisting arduous journey on horseback and a-foot, through an almost trackless region, in a space of a little more than one month, he is astounded at the physical powers of an Irving at the age of 49.

McDermott takes Irving from Fort Gibson down the Arkansas River to Little Rock; thence after a warm welcome and rest down to Montgomery Point on the Mississippi all by steamboat and joyous leisure, on to New Orleans; then in due time moving on to Washington, the capital, by way of Mobile up through South, North Carolina and Virginia.

It is an engaging volume and the Oklahoma University Press, noted throughout literary America for excellent workmanship, has

in its typing and format of the book increased its reputation for good book making.

The editor, John Francis McDermott, is now at present serving as a captain with the Army Air Forces. He is a native of St. Louis. Washington University kept him as a member of the English faculty for a number of years. He comes by a natural family trend into a deep interest of all things pertaining to the famous Chouteau family. He is a descendant of the House of Chouteau and his early books, *Private Libraries in Creole St. Louis*, a glossary of Mississippi Valley French, and as editor of *Tixier's Travels on the Osage Prairies*, all mark him as an entirely able mind, and competent to offer his last charming volume, *The Western Journals of Washington Irving*.
Oklahoma Historical Society. —Charles Evans

Diary & Letters of Josiah Gregg, Excursions in Mexico & California: 1847-1850. Edited by Maurice Garland Fulton, with an Introduction by Paul Horgan. (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1944. Pp. xvii, 396. Illustrated. \$3.50).

This is not a book about Oklahoma or Oklahomans, and reasons for including it in a section devoted to book reviews chosen especially for residents and readers of the Sooner State might at first be difficult to find. But Oklahoma bears a distinct relationship to the whole southwestern frontier and the author and central figure of this volume crisscrossed this magnificent region and was himself an important part of it and its development. In that broader sense, then, there is all the reason for bringing this volume to the notice of readers of this journal who meanwhile might have missed it.

This is the second volume of a set that brings to print the private journals and some letters of the man who was the first historian of the Santa Fe trail and the traffic along it. The first volume, published in 1941, covered those phases of Josiah Gregg's life from his retirement from the Santa Fe trade through what has been described by a discerning writer of today as "The Decisive Year." Gregg, early in 1847, rode horseback a thousand miles or more to join General Wool's army then invading northern Mexico. Being well acquainted with the customs and language of the Mexican people, Gregg had hoped to be of some service to his country in that campaign. The present volume, a continuation of the Gregg journals, opens on the eve of the Battle of Buena Vista, of which there is a good account by Gregg who covered it from various spots to which he rode on horseback and at great danger to himself. But Gregg's experiences with the American Army were brief and bitter. After a brief sojourn in the States, he was back in Mexico devoting himself to his old occupation of "looking at the country." He saw much of Mexico, crossed to the Pacific, and sailed up the coast to

San Francisco where the fever and excitement of the gold rush ran high. Subsequent events took Gregg through Northern California and on the epic march that led to the discovery and exploration of the Humboldt Bay, Gregg's life was claimed by starvation and exhaustion.

Gregg was a physician and at least an amateur botanist, geologist and geographer. He was also a mysterious man of many moods. Sometimes this reflects flatteringly on his memory; sometimes it does not; always, or nearly always, these deep feelings color his journals and letters, making necessary a careful reading of them. Some of the greatest contributions, however, have come from the brains and hands of impassioned men and those who labor under strain or abuse. Gregg, to some extent, was no exception. His *Commerce of the Prairies* (published in 1844) has long been acclaimed by students of western history, who are now under great obligation to the University of Oklahoma Press for its part in the discovery and presentation of this attractive sequel. The journals have been annotated and reproduced with letters and other explanatory material. There is an introduction that is classic in style and brilliant in description. The decision to reproduce the journals in their entirety was perhaps a difficult one, since there is considerable material that will appear monotonous and repetitious to many readers, who would have entrusted the capable editors with the task of making a satisfactory job of the elimination. But, as the editors point out, readers are free "to lift their eyes over the obstructions" and, as a result, the historian and reader with leisure have thus a fuller account by this important figure of the Greater Southwest.

The National Archives, Washington, D. C.

Gaston Litton