

BOOK REVIEW

Johnny Osage. By Janice Holt Giles. (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1960. End Maps. Pp. 313. \$3.75).

This book is a romantic novel with more than a few touches of realism in the author's treatment of the Indian problem at the time when the Osages were being moved north to Kansas away from their hunting grounds to make room for the Cherokee in Oklahoma. Union Mission has just been located on the banks of the Neosho, its purpose to minister to the Osages. Johnny Osage is a trader from Kentucky, a partner in his brother-in-law's trading post (Burke & Fowler), located within a few hours' riding distance of the Mission. Farther away is Fort Smith on the Arkansas River, commanded by Major William Bradford who hates his responsibility of keeping peace and order in this western part of Arkansas Territory.

The love story of Johnny Osage and Judith Lowell, the young missionary teacher from Connecticut, is an appealing one, although Johnny is more articulate, more clear-headed in his thinking than a real life, early trader might have been. His viewpoint that the missionaries are smugly arrogant to intrude into this land with their Gospel offering to a people with a highly developed religion of their own is a shocking idea to Judith, who is obeying the "command of the Lord to go into all this world and proclaim His word." The conflict between them finally shifts to the ethical question of whether murder is ever justified. To Judith, law and order are supreme; to Johnny, the demands of a society that tolerates massacres of women and children are those of speedy punishment in like kind. A description that minces no words tells of his killing of The Blade. But love wins out as it should in any romance.

As to the relative characteristics of the Osages and the Cherokees, it may be that the Osages are presented a little too noble, the Cherokees a little too treacherous and cruel. But every novelist has the right to tip the scale in favor of her heroes.

Gifted for characterization, Mrs. Giles deals skillfully with a large group of individuals, some fictional, some real. She has stayed very closely to her history from the glimpses that we know. She is evidently familiar with the "Journal of the Union Mission," and it is interesting to speculate whether her picture of Epaphras Chapman is nearer the truth than the picture which this reviewer has had of him: a somewhat delicate, dreamy, impractical sort of a man. Her Chapman is a stubborn, dogmatic, religious fanatic, never stopped in his path by any catastrophe

or difficulty. One has to admit that the Chapman of "Johnny Osage" is more consistent with the facts than the other picture. A man can be impractical and at the same time pig-headed. It is true history that someone certainly made some bad mistakes of judgment in the locating Union Mission almost in a stream bed where the floods could carry it away. And later records show that the Osage tribe for the object of ministry was a mistake. They were destined almost at the moment Union was founded to remove from this part of the country and leave the Mission behind. Mrs. Giles's Epaphras would locate the Mission as she has told it because he could not see beyond the narrow path of his own determination. Whether her pictures of Claymore (Chief Clermont), Nathaniel Pryor, William Bradford, Mark Bean are all true to life is a matter of speculation. At least Mrs. Giles has made her characters real and living people. It is an objective picture which she gives us of those troublesome times, thus making her book a good historical novel.

Mrs. Giles undoubtedly remembers her childhood in Oklahoma for she makes us feel the heat of the summer, the chill of the wind, the weight of the mud, the cottonwood trees casting their shade on the clear-running stream, the rippling grass of the prairies—all are there, scenes we have known. Oklahomans will enjoy this book, and perhaps learn some history of their state, even though colored a bit by the glow of a romantic story.

—Hope Holway

Tulsa, Oklahoma
