

BOOK REVIEWS

The Osages. By John Joseph Mathews, (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1961, Pp. 786, \$7.95.)

On rare occasions, someone writes a book that is different—with such difference adding to the quality. Such can be said for *The Osages*, written by John Joseph Mathews. This book is a masterpiece in that a rare technique is used in weaving together tradition and folklore with well authenticated history to the end that a people's way of life is revealed in detail. Adding to the quality of the volume is a classic literary style all too rare among the writers of history.

In fact, *The Osages*, as written by Mathews, approaches what might be called a prose poem, partly fantasy and partly reality. Yet, who is to say where fantasy leaves off and reality begins. The author, being of Osage descent, has an insight into the Indian mind and soul that escapes most students and writers in the field.

Although the book may be considered a fine history of the Osages, its greatest merit is probably in its revelation of the Indian's character and his reactions to his environment. It is indeed a look behind the scenes of the stage on which the Osages have played. It has much of the qualities that were written into the *Old Testament* by those who told the story of the origins and development of the Hebrews.

If any basic adverse criticism is to be made of this splendid work of Mathews, it should probably be confined to pointing out that the author sometimes becomes slightly pedantic in his use of terms that are not well known to the general reader.

—Elmer L. Fraker

Oklahoma Historical Society
Oklahoma City

Bad Medicine & Good. By Wilbur Sturtevant Nye. (The University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1962. Pp. xxvi, 291. Illustrations. Maps. Chief Characters and Informants. Index. \$5.00.)

In this book a brief history of the Kiowa tribe serves as a background for the forty-four stories that follow. This prefatory history is a blending of material furnished to the author by the Kiowa Indians, and the stories were told in interviews with him by old members of the tribe who had participated in the events, or by some of the younger ones who had recalled them from the accounts of their elders.

In the native version of their history, the Kiowas originally lived in a country where "water shot up out of the ground." Evidently this was the Yellowstone country in the far northwest, from which the tribe drifted through a period of years in a southerly direction, finally reaching the Southwestern plains beyond the Mississippi river.

A nomad and warlike tribe, the Kiowas roamed with little restraint for years throughout eastern Colorado, western Kansas and western Indian Territory, making occasional raids into Texas and Mexico. During these years they were regarded as the scourge of the Southwest, and even after they were located on a reservation in the Indian Territory, they remained rebellious. Actually it was not until 1875 that they were completely subdued and laid down their arms for good.

It is not strange that events of their fighting days would have a large part in the memories of the old Kiowa braves and provide the favorite subjects for their stories. In addition, the author permits the stories to stand as spoken, with only limited comments of his own and with no editorial apologies for the more savage actions of the Indians. We learn, for example, that to kill and scalp an enemy was a deed the Kiowas delighted in boasting about, and not one to be disavowed. Of course, if Colonel Nye had been their advocate, he could have mentioned that the practice of scalping only grew after the steel knife was introduced to the Indians, and that the spread of the custom was not retarded by the bounties offered by the Colonial governments for scalps taken from the aborigines' heads.

Throughout these stories, the Kiowas' form of religion, impregnated with superstitious beliefs and fantastic customs, plays an important part from which the book receives its title. Brief biographies of the chief characters and informants add validity to the sources from which these stories emerge. Also excellent drawings by Nick Eggenhofer converge harmoniously with the spirit of the stories.

Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, a retired U. S. Army Colonel, is the author of *Carbine and Lance*, the story of Fort Sill and its encompassing army and Indian life. Unlike this earlier successful work, *Good Medicine and Bad* makes no pretensions to being a comprehensive history. It does, however, give glimpses of how the Kiowa Indians lived, fought, and died, and the stories which include this information are told from the Indians' point of view and were originally spoken in their own tongues. Colonel Nye's volume is entitled to be placed among the deserving books of Indian lore and history.

—Frank F. Finney, Sr.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma