

## BOOK REVIEWS

*James Bridger: A Historical Narrative.* By J. CECIL ALTER. (Salt Lake City: Shepard Book Company, 1925. Pp. 546. \$10.00.)

The purpose of this book, as stated by its author in the preface, is to bring out of "comparative obscurity in widely scattered and unrelated references" one of the most interesting characters in the annals of the Rocky Mountain country. In order to do this Mr. Alter has taken the biographical sketch of James Bridger by General Grenville M. Dodge and has sought to "support and surround it with a superstructure of facts gathered from every known source." "Thus," he continues, "it may be that the future renown of this modest but most capable of early western characters will be a little more nearly commensurate with his importance in the history of the old West.

"He has already dwelt too long in the frontier cabins of books-out-of-print; in the tepees of tangled traditions; and in the open air of the fading memories of friends; and his character and activities have thus been exposed to the hoodlumism of disregard and misrepresentation. In this present work it is hoped that the old scout may find a certain sanctuary from the unjust designations of braggart, drunkard, polygamist or prevaricator; though it is further hoped that he will not be shielded from any just and proper characterization howsoever base."

To write a biography of James Bridger is a difficult task. He left behind him no letters; no written "thoughts" on this thing or the other. For he could neither read nor write. His life was lived in the open, principally on the backbone of the continent of North America. His young manhood was spent in trapping the beaver, in traversing the remote fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains for that commodity which spelt wealth to a few and destruction to many. His life from 1822 to at least 1839 was intimately wrapped up in the Rocky Mountain fur trade. In his activities as a trapper and Indian fighter, and later as guide and scout for the government, he came into contact with many persons of note. Several of these have left written records. To these and to the recollections of a few persons who in their younger days knew in a more or less intimate way the old trapper and scout, Mr. Alter has gone for his material with which to write a biography of James Bridger. He has produced an interesting and undoubtedly an accurate story.

To tell the life story of Bridger one must tell in brief the history of the Rocky Mountain fur trade. Bridger first went into the Rockies as an employe of Major Andrew Henry and General William H. Ashley. He continued under the partnership of Smith, Jackson and Sublette; then as a member of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and finally under the supervision of the American Fur Company. He saw every side of this wealth-getting activity; hardships he endured in plenty; he participated in numerous encounters with the savages, and he did not always escape unscathed; he witnessed the rivalry, often fierce, between trappers in these regions; he was present on more than one occasion at the summer rendezvous in the mountains where great quantities of "furry" wealth passed out of the hands of the trappers—where also these denizens of the forest gave themselves up for a little while to bacchanalian excesses. But beyond telling the interesting history of the fur trade his biographer can say little more than this: James Bridger was a part of all this.

With the passing of the fur trade James Bridger crossed over into another phase of his life. The first economic approach to the Pacific Northwest had ended by 1840. The fur trade had ceased to be profitable. Now the emigrants were coming across the plains. Fort Bridger was erected in 1843 and gave to this seasoned trapper an opportunity to earn a livelihood in a different way. He was now in a fair way to carry on a trade with the emigrants to Oregon and to California. Then after the emigrants came government activities. There were contacts with the Mormons and the Indians. A reliable scout was needed. Bridger with his intimate knowledge of Indians and of the West now proved to be of great service.

"Bridger's service as scout and adviser for numerous United States Army officers was well nigh indispensable," says Mr. Aiter. "When guiding a peaceful party across a river-hemmed or mountain-blocked country his word of advice became the law of the expedition, and very often its salvation; and his decisions, and often his mere opinions, when accompanying troops into a region infested with hostile Indians, were virtually the orders of a commanding officer, because of his unerring knowledge of the country, and of its wily inhabitants.

"But when the industrial wheel of fortune spread its spokes of heavy steel along the principal western thoroughfares, Bridger was carried forward and downward in its irresistible revolution.

Passing the apex of his usefulness and efficiency due to advancing years, to the permanency of the increasing white population needing no frontiersman's service, and to the need for younger men as army guides and scouts, his career seems to have rolled up suddenly like a scroll."

During his lifetime (1804-1881) James Bridger saw many transformations take place in the West. He entered the Rocky Mountains early in life and viewed them in their pristine grandeur; he probably first of all white men saw the waters of Great Salt Lake; probably also he was with the first party that went through the South Pass. He was in close contact with the great migrations which passed across the plains during the decade of the forties, the decade in which the ownership of Oregon was finally determined; he witnessed and participated in the subjugation of the Indians in the West, and even lived long years after the West had been united to the East with rails of steel. Before death overtook him the Northwest had been organized into its present-day political units and these were making rapid strides toward the goal of statehood. Truly these were wonderful changes for one man to view at close range.

As a part of this book there is included General Dodge's *Biographical Sketch of James Bridger*, which has for some years been out of print. This reprint, with annotations, is in itself a useful contribution to the historical literature of the Northwest; but the work is made still more valuable by the addition of a bibliography of one hundred titles and an analytical index. The bibliography is a list of the references which the author has cited. The edition consists of one thousand numbered copies, each of which has been autographed by the author.

In bringing together in one volume a great deal of useful material that has been buried in rare publications Mr. Alter has performed a distinct service to students of Northwest history. He has done his work carefully and thoroughly, and his publishers have turned out for him a very attractive volume.

J. ORIN OLIPHANT.

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*Paul Bunyan.* By JAMES STEVENS. Woodcuts by Allen Lewis. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925. Pp. 245. \$2.50).

When Dr. V. L. O. Chittick, in his review of Esther Shephard's *Paul Bunyan* for *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, stated his opinion that Paul Bunyan "is much too coarse and