

BOOK REVIEWS

Across the Plains in 1850. By JOHN STEELE. Edited with introduction and notes by Joseph Schafer, Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. (Chicago: Printed for the Caxton Club by the Lakeside Press, 1930. Pp. XXXVII+226.)

This attractively bound volume contains the diary of John Steele who in the company of other adventurers crossed the plains in 1850 to the gold fields of California. Steele's original journal was published serially in the *Lodi Valley News*, the initial installment appearing April 8, the concluding one November 18, 1899. Undoubtedly this record is one of the most complete of any of the overland expeditions to California during the gold rush epoch of the late forties and early fifties. Unfortunately the original journal has been either lost or destroyed. The Caxton Club, therefore, has performed a valuable literary and historical service in reproducing it in permanent and elegant book form. It is to be regretted, however, that only three hundred fifty copies have been printed. The journal has rare literary merit. The style of the author is charming; his characterization of life on the plains is remarkably realistic, his many descriptions are magnificently drawn. Although there were many thousands who crossed the plains in 1850, there were very few who possessed a definite knowledge of the road, and as a consequence there was great suffering. A detailed recital of these many misfortunes gives the narrative a life-like though melancholy cast. The account is replete with thrilling tales of adventure and the saddened experiences of the courageous travellers of the plains—the constant vigilance against menacing Indians; the terrors of the hungry, parching, murderous desert; the frequent stampedes of plain buffalo and camp oxen, the fording of swollen streams and the scaling of difficult mountain ravines and passes; the anxious search for water and grass for rapidly tiring teams; the thrilling ascent of some monument of the plains, such as Independence Rock, Devil's Gate, or Pilot Peak; the ravages of the fatal cholera and mountain fever which so terribly thinned the ranks of disheartened companies; the compulsory abandonment of property; and the sad parting of friends who either turned back or died on the way.

Dr. Schafer, the editor, has aimed to preserve as far as possible the language of the original. He has taken the liberty of re-divid-

ing the text into about half the former number of chapters and has supplied short chapter heads in place of the long, detailed ones appearing in the *Lodi Valley News*. Obvious typographical errors have been corrected and explanatory foot notes have been added to clarify the context.

John Steele, son of Alexander and Martha Loretta Steele, was born in Middleton County, New York, March 22, 1832, and was therefore eighteen when he entered upon his adventurous journey across the plains. "An apt, industrious, and serious pupil, at the age of sixteen he was prepared to teach country schools but the California trip made an interlude in his career as a pedagogue." (Introduction, XXIX). Upon his return from the West in 1853, Steele spent about two years in advanced study after which he taught in Missouri until the outbreak of the Civil War in which he took an honorable part as soldier in an Illinois regiment. In 1867, he joined the West Wisconsin Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and began preaching. "He held, successively, charges at Womewoc, Kilbourne and Prescott, Wisconsin; he spent seven years as missionary in New Mexico, and returning, preached at Menomonie, Mauston, Montfort and Ironton, all in Wisconsin. Broken in health, in the year 1894 he made his home in Lodi, Wisconsin, where he died October 6, 1905. (Introduction, XXXIX-XXX).

Dr. Schafer has prefaced his edition of the Steele journal with a very suggestive introduction of twenty seven pages which summarizes very adequately the major explorations and reconnoissances of the Trans-Mississippi West from the Lewis and Clark Expedition to the Mormon Migration of 1847. This well written essay provides the necessary background and is quite indispensable for one who would read with greatest profit the interesting, romantic account of John Steele. The volume contains an excellent map of the overland routes from the Missouri River to California and six very unusual sketches of scenes along the Overland Trail drawn by Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Lindsay, who travelled as far west as Soda Springs in 1849 with the Mounted Rifle Regiment then en-route to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia.

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Zimmermann's Captain Cook. An Account of the *Third Voyage of Captain Cook Around the World, 1776-1780.* By HENRY ZIMMERMANN, of Wissloch, in the Palatine, and Translated