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Howard Mumford Jones

THE HOPE of an earthly paradise commonly looks to the West. Thus Columbus assumed that the mighty current of the Orinoco, which kept the ocean fresh a good many miles from the mouth of the river, had its origin in one of the four rivers that, according to the Book of Genesis, had their source in Eden. Thus also Sir Walter Raleigh spent the last of his fortune in financing voyages to Guiana in search of a nation ruled by a king who, because he rolled himself in gold-dust whenever he bathed, was known as El Dorado. But the principal difficulty from the first venture of Columbus to the expedition of Lewis and Clark was that, the West being unknown, who could tell what to prepare for? The general failure of the several attempts of the English to establish "plantations" in the New World before any permanent settlement was attained arose from ignorance of distance, climate, and inevitably of the flora and fauna and the topography of the area chosen for exploration and settlement. Nor did they understand the Indians. In so simple a matter as housing, for instance, the log cabin did not become common on the American frontier until the Swedes brought this kind of housing with them when they settled New Sweden (Delaware); and at the other side of the continent even Josiah Gregg was perplexed by finding piles of sun-baked mud shaped into rectangular form, not for a time comprehending that these were the units of adobe construction.

Captain John Smith insisted on draping an imperial robe over the shoulders of Powhatan; by and by Indian traders discovered that glass beads and hand mirrors were more important articles of exchange. An expedition into the Connecticut Valley from eastern New England was one thing; an expedition like that of Lewis and Clark (1804–1806) required preparations, skills, goods, and articles for exchange of a quite different sort. Easterners tended to think that the Indians were naked savages; the grave dignity of chieftains who visited the White House in the early years of the republic surprised and pleased all beholders. The noble Indian, was not, as many literary people seem to think, an invention of James Fenimore Cooper; and in his

classic *Commerce of the Prairies*, one of the great neglected books in American literary history, Josiah Gregg is quite justified in objecting that the dearth of information that has prevailed on the subject of Indians, notably those of the Great West, "is my best apology for travelling out of my immediate track, and trespassing as it were upon the departure [*sic*] of the regular historian." [1] The Mississippi River, the Great Plains, the Rockies, the Southwest, the Pacific Coast each required not only new types of expeditions but also new types of men.

Among the literatures of the Western world, in variety, importance, readability, and in a general sense accuracy, one of the richest chapters in literary history is that of the literature of American exploration and travel. This travel literature has been explored by the historians, among them Reuben Gold Thwaites (1853–1913), editor of the 73-volume edition of the *Jesuit Relations*,[2] the 8 volumes of the *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (1904–1905), and 32 volumes of his library of *Early Western Travels* (1904–1907). (He also wrote books ranging in subject from the career of Daniel Boone to a history of Wisconsin.) All historians of North America are forever in his debt, though he and his work are apparently unknown to specialists in the development of American letters. And this fact brings us face to face with a perplexing and possibly insoluble critical problem. There exist innumerable histories, books of criticism, and theoretical treatises about such genres as American fiction or American poetry, but American literary scholarship seems unable to understand that no standards have been developed by which the literary virtues of books of exploration and travel can be judged. The resulting conflict of evaluation is sometimes serious and sometimes ludicrous. From the point of view of the historian the records of the expedition of Lewis and Clark to the mouth of the Columbia River and their return are sober, factual, and of primary importance to any understanding of the development of the Great West, but aside from clarity, this narrative has no special literary appeal. On the other hand, Josiah Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies* (1844) is more than a trustworthy chronicle, it is masterly in the same sense that Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* is masterly; that is, it is rich in dramatic episode, in human interest, in readability,

[1] *Commerce of the Prairies* (1844), ed. Max L. Moorhead (University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 81. I think "departure" is a misprint for "department."

[2] Thwaites did not personally translate all the numbers of this great library, but he was responsible for the whole.

in characterization, and as the expression of a rich, powerful, and often puzzling personality in the sense that Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* expresses the personality of Dr. Johnson (and for that matter of Boswell). At the behest of John Jacob Astor, Washington Irving published *Astoria, or, Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (1836), dismissed by many literary histories as "hackwork." It is supposed to be hackwork because J. J. Astor gave Irving access to its materials. There is, however, no adulation of the New York merchant in its pages. Why the feeble stories in, let us say, *Bracebridge Hall* are serious "literature" in comparison is beyond rational comprehension, especially since Irving's *Columbus* and his *Alhambra* are also classed as "literature," even though Irving would not have had access to the original materials for either title, had it not been for the benevolence of a rich book collector, Obadiah Rich (1783–1850), in whose Madrid house Irving lived while he was working up his *Columbus*. Again, on 18 April 1894, Mark Twain's publishing firm, Charles L. Webster & Co., went bankrupt. Twain's friend, H. H. Rogers, had taken charge of Mark's financial affairs, made worse by the failure of the typesetting machine in which Clemens had invested both money and hope. The humorist courageously set to work to write books and give lectures until his debts were paid, but the faults of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, and *Following the Equator* are not due to their being commercial hackwork, but to Mark Twain's temperament. Of *Following the Equator* Albert Bigelow Paine observes:

> It was the thoughtful, contemplative observation and philosophizing of the soul-weary, world-weary pilgrim who has by no means lost interest, but only his eager, first enthusiasm. It is a gentler book than the *Tramp Abroad*, and for the most part a pleasanter one . . . . Its humor, too, is of a worthier sort, less likely to be forced and overdone.[3]

I suggest that our literary historians would do well to read and ponder an essay by William Dean Howells, "The Man of Letters as a Man of Business," which first appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* in October 1893, and can also be found in *Criticism and Fiction and other Essays*.[4]

[3] *Mark Twain: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1912), II, 1054 (Chapter CC). I am aware that Paine has lost standing as a biographer, but in 1912 he was nearer the facts than we are.

[4] As edited by Clara M. and Rudolf Kirk (New York University Press, 1959), pp. 298–309.

There is then a vast library of travel books concerning the future United States, and particularly during the nineteenth century concerning the development of the Great West, so that the problem of choice becomes virtually insoluble. As history, for example, *The Discovery of the Oregon Trail: Robert Stuart's Narratives of his Overland Trip Eastward from Astoria in 1812–13*, etc.,[5] is from the historian's point of view a primary source. Stuart writes clearly enough. Nevertheless he makes no pretensions to art; and if one wishes to discuss the literature of travel, notably travel in the Great West, as a chapter in our literary history, one must turn elsewhere. I have chosen for this purpose four titles: Washington Irving's *Astoria* (1836); Josiah Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies* (1844); Francis Parkman's *The California* and *Oregon Trail* (1849); and Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872).[6] It is a little remarkable in the case of Irving's "hackwork," *Astoria*, that he had previously (1835) published his own "A Tour on the Prairies"; that Gregg's great book was not written until he had four times made the journey from Missouri to Santa Fé and/or Mexico; and that Parkman's record of his trip to Pike's Peak and other points of interest in the Great West has been edited by scholars four times between 1910 and 1943, the first of these reprints being undertaken by Mason Wade, Parkman's biographer (1942), who used Parkman's own notebooks — a fact that somewhat diminishes the force of the term "romantic historian."

[5] I omit the lengthy sub-titles. The edition before me is edited by Philip Ashton Rollins (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935).

[6] Original editions of Gregg are hard to come by, but the text has been carefully edited and annotated for the University of Oklahoma Press in 1954 by Max L. Moorhead, who also furnishes a succinct and valuable introduction. My copy of *Astoria* is found in volume VII of the Kinderhook Edition of Irving's *Works* (the author's revised edition), New York, 1868. Parkman's work has undergone various changes of title, is commonly referred to as *The Oregon Trail*, and forms vol. XII of the New Library Edition of Parkman's *Works* published in Boston by Little, Brown and Company; my copy is marked "copyright 1898," and contains Parkman's preface to an edition of 1892 and his preface to "a fourth edition" dated from Boston 30 March 1872. But this preface also states that "the following sketches first appeared in 1847 in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*." A slight haze seems to hover over the bibliographical history of this text. Pending the appearance of the definitive edition of the works of Mark Twain now being prepared from the California Mark Twain collections, I have perforce contented myself with the text of *Roughing It* in volumes VII and VIII of the Author's National Edition. The whole edition runs to 25 volumes, New York, 1907–1920, each volume of which is preceded by a facsimile of a note in Twain's handwriting, "This is the authorized Uniform Edition of my books. Mark Twain."

The first ambassador of letters from the New World to the Old, Washington Irving, like many another American writer, attempted to study law but gave it up for the superior charm of literature. He is so clearly the product of urban culture that it is, I suppose, natural for both critics and literary historians to think of him as an urbane writer principally influenced by the romantics and by the sentimentalism then current in the fashionable European world. Moreover, the German background of much of his work has been repeatedly noted. He was not as ignorant as many suppose, however, of the hardships of pioneering life and of the explorer. In 1803, with Ludlow Ogden and two others he struggled through the wilderness of upper New York and Lower Canada to Montreal, no easy journey by reason of an ox-cart apparently without springs, swollen rivers, and wretched roads or trails — an experience which, as he afterwards says, gave him an enduring impression of both the hardships and the fascination of the life of a pioneer. In Spain he rode a mule through the rugged mountains of that country;[7] and in 1832 he joined C. J. Latrobe, Henry L. Ellsworth (Jackson's commissioner to Indian tribes south and west of Arkansas), and one other, in an expedition to the land of the Osages and the Pawnees, a journey he wrote up in his *A Tour of the Prairies* (1835), a year before he published *Astoria* in 1836. *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* appeared in 1837. Since Irving had had these several experiences of travel in wild and unpopulated regions, I suggest that *Astoria*, with which we are here concerned, is something more than the "frank hackwork" his latest biographer dubs it. If one is looking in Irving for a prime example of frank hackwork, he had better cite *Mahomet and His Successors* of 1850, written without any knowledge of source material in Arabic almost a quarter of a century or so after he left Spain.[8]

As one who has just finished reading *Astoria* all the way through, I can testify that it is one of the most gripping as it is one of the best-organized travel books in the whole range of American literary history. How Irving managed to weave the crude original manuscripts that Astor placed before him is explicable, it seems to me, by two allied possibilities. The first is that these documents brought back to

[7] Irving seems to be the only American writer of his generation to have undertaken this hazardous journey.

[8] Irving's *Mahomet* is based on a German biography by G. Weil, *Mohammed der Prophet*, published in Stuttgart, 1843.

his mind his earlier experiences as a quasi-frontiersman. The other is that these memories created in the writer an empathetic attitude towards the experiences of the expedition (or, better, expeditions) that Astor sent out. Let me add that as early as page 10 Irving expresses his gratitude for the light thrown on the "Astor papers" by the published narratives of Lewis and Clark, Breckenridge, Long, and others.

The book falls into four main divisions. The first three chapters give the history of the Oregon trade, the creation of Astor's company, and some account of its rivals, the Russian Fur Company and the (British) Mackinaw Company, both already established and prospering. Says Irving, following the conclusion of this section:

> In prosecuting his great scheme of commerce and colonization, two expeditions were devised by Mr. Astor, one by sea, the other by land. The former was to carry out the people . . . requisite for establishing a fortified trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River. The latter . . . was to proceed up the Missouri, and across the Rocky Mountains, to the same point . . . (p. 73)

Further chapters narrate the voyage of the *Tonquin*, Astor's vessel, the establishment of Astoria as a fort and trading post, and the misfortunes and eventual destruction of the ship, treacherously invaded by Indians. Ship and savages and some of the crew were lost through the explosion of a powder magazine, when, the Indians having been lured on board once more, a wounded officer set off the explosion:

> Arms, legs, and mutilated bodies were blown into the air, and dreadful havoc was made in the surrounding canoes . . . Upwards of a hundred savages were destroyed by the explosion.

The five men of the *Tonquin*, all that remained, were of course done to death as well (pp. 165–167).

Chapters XIII to XXXVII, the heart of the book, give in graphic detail the hardships and horrors of the land expedition, which, when it could, used water transportation, commonly canoes. In these the men arrived at Astoria, but they had had to traverse on foot some 140 miles of wild, mountain country in the depths of winter. The final section (chapters XXXIX through LXI) narrates the necessity of reestablishing communication with New York City, the sufferings of an overland return party which loses the provisions that had been "cached" on the outward journey, loses its horses, and is beset by treachery and desertion. Here is a typical sentence:

> For a long summer day they continued onward without halting, a burning sky

above their heads, a parched desert beneath their feet, with just wind enough to raise the light sand from the knolls, and envelop them in stifling clouds. (chapter XLIV, p. 502)

I should add that the return party was broken into several bands, one of which was for three days without food. Cannibalism was proposed since "It was better . . . that one should die to save the rest." The very final chapters narrate the international complexities that ensued upon the establishment of Astoria as an American fort and trading post, urge that a line of trading posts be established from the Mississippi and the Missouri across the Rockies to Puget Sound, and dwell, but without puffery, on Astor's delight in living long enough to know that an American flag was once more flying over Astoria, which had been taken over by the British and renamed Fort George.

Irving makes no attempt to analyze the temperament or the personality of John Jacob Astor, but he presents in considerable depth and, as I think, with considerable artistic skill the leading personalities in this enormous and variegated panorama — from the steadfast leaders to those who were frightened and turned back, from Indian chiefs of all kinds to the unfortunate officers of the *Tonquin*. If his portraits are principally of the male animal, this is because few women except Indian squaws — at best a shadowy lot — were involved at any stage of the expeditions. I sadly realize that these few excerpts and transitory commentaries on character-drawing in the *Astoria* are much like sampling the water of Lake Superior with a teaspoon, but I have perhaps encouraged the reader to live for a while in the pages of Irving's remarkable chronicle of heroic men in an heroic age. Perhaps he will be inclined to exclaim with the Latin poet: such a struggle was required to establish the empire of America.[9]

In contrast to Irving, who had to fuse together innumerable sources and make the dry bones of history live, Josiah Gregg (1806–1850), in writing his classic account, *Commerce of the Prairies*, in 1844 (mildly revised in 1845),[10] had only to record his own experiences, based on four round trips on the Santa Fé trail, including deeper ex-

[9] "Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem" — *Aeneid*, I:33.

[10] I have used the admirable edition edited by Max L. Moorhead and published by the University of Oklahoma Press (Norman, Oklahoma: 1954). In addition to a succinct and useful biography of Gregg, this edition has a fine run of annotations, and a sufficient bibliography of Gregg's work.

cursions into Mexico. Gregg's personality was as complex as that of Byron's; he knew a little law, a little botany, a little geology, a little anthropology, a little mineralogy, and a little medicine; he was cranky and hard to get along with, but he possessed also an innate and mysterious capacity for leadership, and he pictures graphically and sympathetically various kinds of Indians, Texans, and Americans. He was a keen observer of the various cultures from which this motley collection of human beings sprang. He disliked cities and was never happier than in the wilderness. As for his capacities both as an observer and a writer, here is a typical passage about Mexicans from Chapter XIII of Volume I in Moorhead's fine reprint:

> No people are more punctual in their attendance upon public worship, or more exact in the performance of the external rites of religion, than the New Mexicans. A man would about as soon think of venturing in twenty fathoms of water without being able to swim, as of undertaking a journey without hearing mass first. These religious exercises, however, partake but seldom of the character of true devotion; for people may be seen chattering or tittering while in the act of crossing themselves, or muttering some formal prayer. Indeed, it is the common remark of strangers, that they are wont to wear much graver countenances while dancing at a fandango than during their devotional exercises at the foot of the altar. In nothing, however, is their observance of the outward forms of religion more remarkable than in their deportment every day towards the close of twilight, when the large bell of the *Parroquia* [cathedral] peals for *la oracion*, or vespers. All conversation is instantly suspended — all labor ceases — people of all classes, whether on foot or on horseback, make a sudden halt — even the laden porter, groaning under the weight of an insupportable burden, stops in the midst of his career and stands still. An almost breathless silence reigns throughout the town [San Felipe], disturbed only by the occasional sibilations of the devout multitude: all of which, accompanied by the slow heavy peals of a large sonorous bell, afford a scene truly solemn and appropriate. At the expiration of about two minutes the charm is suddenly broken by the clatter of livelier-toned bells; and a *buenas tardes* (good evening) to those present closes the ceremony: when *presto*, all is bustle and confusion again — the colloquial chit-chat is resumed — the smith plies upon his anvil with redoubled energy — the clink of the hammer simultaneously resounds in every direction — the wayfarers are again in motion, — both pleasure and business, in short, assume their respective sway. (pp. 179–180)

Here is another extract, this time concerning a Texas "norther" (the *Llano Estacado*, by the by, extends from eastern New Mexico into west Texas):

> On the 12th of March [1840], we ascended upon the celebrated *Llano Estacado* [staked plain], and continued along its borders for a few days [the caravan

had just fought off an Indian attack]. The second night upon this dreary plain, we experienced one of the strongest and bleakest 'northwesters' that ever swept across those prairies; during which, our flock of sheep and goats, being left unattended, fled over the plain, in search of some shelter, it was supposed, from this furious element. Their disappearance was not observed for some time, and the night being too dark to discern anything, we were obliged to defer going in pursuit of them till the following morning. After a fruitless and laborious search, during which the effects of the mirage proved a constant source of annoyance and disappointment, we were finally obliged to relinquish the pursuit, and return to the caravan without finding one of them. (Chapter VIII of Gregg's volume II; p. 321 of the Moorhead edition)

Like Gregg, Francis Parkman was an invalid advised by his doctors to go West to recover his health. He overstrained himself, however, and, despite previous short experiences in the New England wilds and elsewhere, he became the permanent invalid that history knows. He published his account of Western adventure in his great 1849 volume of *The Oregon Trail*,[11] originally serialized in the *Knickerbocker*

[11] Wilderness trails are hard to follow, frequently bifurcate, and sometimes develop in parallel. According to Ray Allen Billington in the most recent *Encyclopedia Americana*, the central or "genuine" Oregon trail began at Independence, Missouri (now not far from Kansas City, Mo.), swung north to the Platte River, followed that stream past Fort Laramie, thence through the wilderness to the Sweetwater River, turned west again over the Continental Divide by way of South Pass, and then divided. One branch went south to Fort Bridger; the other, and shorter route (Sublette's Cut-off), led directly to the Bear Valley, whence a short overland trace went on to Fort Hall, a Hudson's Bay Company outpost on the Snake River, thence over broken land westward and northward to a valley known as the Grande Ronde. The traveller had next to scale the Blue Mountains and descend at or near the Dalles of the Columbia. In descending that river settlers and others commonly built rafts out of their wagons for themselves while drovers guided the cattle overland to Fort Vancouver. Permanent settlers built homes by going southwest into the Willamette Valley. The trail was first opened by settlers and trappers in the 1820s and the 1830s, but an "Oregon fever" broke out in the early forties, and when Parkman made the trip, he was among about 1500 on the same mission in 1845–1846. It is notable that in 1836 Marcus Whitman and a small party are credited with opening part of the Western end of the Oregon Trail, but Whitman stopped at Walla Walla, Washington (later the site of Whitman College) and thence in the winter of 1842–1843 made his famous winter ride to Washington to "save Oregon," according to legend, for Protestantism and the United States. He returned with a small regiment of emigrants. In 1842–46 a hot dispute raged between Great Britain and the United States, known as the "Oregon question" — really a dispute between the Hudson's Bay Fur Company and American fur companies. The Democratic party in convention demanded "54.40 or fight" as our northern boundary, but a treaty between the United States and Great Britain then settled the present Canadian-American boundary in 1846.

Magazine beginning in February 1847. Parkman had not yet written a word of his classic *England and France in the New World*, but his biographers assure us that he was, as it were, unconsciously preparing for this series, which would embrace the history of political rivalry for a whole continent, and it is clear that he was already a scholar with a depth of historical learning that no other explorer of the Great West in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century could command.

Among other indications of this truth is that — and here only Schoolcraft either parallels or anticipates him — he was anxious to learn all he could of the history, character, migrations, and changes of policy towards the whites of all the Indian tribes he could encounter. He notes the transformation of the Delawares from "the peaceful allies of William Penn" into "the most adventurous and dreaded warriors upon the prairies," even though they dwindle every year as "their neighbors and former confederates, the Shawanoes," do not (p. 26). He contrasts the "log-huts of the Kickapoos" with the "*pukwi* lodges of their neighbors, the Pottawattamies" near Fort Leavenworth (p. 30). The Pawnees, having glimpsed two lone white raiders, went after them, then desisted when they saw the strength of the party of whites; the Pawnees, says Parkman, are "a treacherous, cowardly banditti, who, by a thousand acts of pillage and murder, have deserved chastisement at the hands of government," and he relates with admiration the retaliatory action of a "Dacotah warrior" who approached a Pawnee village at night, scalped all the inhabitants of a lodge, and when a child waked and screamed, "shouted his name in triumph . . . and darted out upon the dark prairie, leaving the whole village behind him in a tumult, with the howling and baying of dogs, the screams of women, and the yells of the enraged warriors" (pp. 74–75). "The Ogillallah, the Brulé, and the other western bands of the Dahcotah or Sioux, are thorough savages, unchanged by any contact with civilization. Not one of them can speak a European tongue, or has ever visited an American settlement" (pp. 134–135). He goes on to describe an Indian dog-feast, and the ministrations of "Old Smoke," a homoeopathic physician among the Ogillallah (pp. 136–137). Chapter X describes preparations for an Indian war-party, ending with a bloody conflict between the Crows and the Blackfeet. "The butchery was soon complete, and the mangled bodies lay piled together under the precipice" (p. 154), but Parkman nevertheless went to live for some weeks with a band of Sioux, and observed the

difficulty with which an Indian "chief" retained any sort of authority over his tribesmen. And as illustrating Parkman at his literary best, perhaps these excerpts from his description of Fort Laramie will serve:

> [Fort Laramie was built by the American Fur Company.] Here its officials rule with an absolute sway; the arm of the United States has little force; for when we were there, the extreme outposts of her troops were about seven hundred miles to the eastward. The little fort is built of bricks dried in the sun, and externally is of an oblong form, with bastions of clay, in the form of ordinary blockhouses, at two of the corners. The walls are about fifteen feet high, and surmounted by a slender palisade. The roofs of the apartments within, which are built close against the walls, serve the purpose of a banquette. Within, the fort is divided by a partition: on one side is the square area, surrounded by the store-rooms, offices, and apartments of the inmates; on the other is the *corral*, a narrow place, encompassed by the high clay walls, where at night, or in the presence of dangerous Indians, the horses and mules of the fort are crowded for safe keeping. The main entrance has two gates, with an arched passage intervening. A little square window, high above the ground, opens laterally from an adjoining chamber into this passage; so that when the inner gate is closed and barred, a person without may still hold communication with those within, through this narrow aperture. This obviates the necessity of admitting suspicious Indians, for purposes of trading, into the body of the fort; for when danger is apprehended, the inner gate is shut fast, and all traffic is carried on by means of the window . . .
>
> We did not long enjoy our new quarters undisturbed. The door was silently pushed open, and two eyeballs and a visage as black as night looked in upon us; then a red arm and shoulder intruded themselves, and a tall Indian, gliding in, shook us by the hand, grunted his salutation, and sat down on the floor. Others followed, with faces of the natural hue, and letting fall their heavy robes from their shoulders, took their seats, quite at ease, in a semi-circle before us. The pipe was now to be lighted and passed from one to another; and this was the only entertainment that at present they expected from us. (pp. 122–124)

But the entire chapter (IX) should be read if one is to appreciate Parkman's eye for detail, his understanding of the psychology of various groups meeting in the fort — Indians, emigrants, backwoodsmen, traders, and all the riffraff of a frontier establishment. Parkman and his companions went out of the fort to a dog-feast, "the greatest compliment a Dacotah can offer to his guest," smoked with his Indian acquaintances until the bowl was empty, then returned, knocked at the gate of the fort, and were readmitted.

Nearest us in date of these four travelers is Mark Twain, whose *Roughing It*, published by and for subscription, was sold by traveling

agents to the public at large in 1871 as by the wild humorist of the Pacific Slope. It irritated genteel critics of the type of Van Wyck Brooks because it seemed to them a betrayal of literary and therefore cultural values. But it pleased immensely in its time, and has pleased many since. It is, of course, a great, sprawling narrative, and Twain felt free to introduce any sort of tall tale or anecdote into its pages. But it has a solid structure — the trip of Mark Twain and his brother across the prairies to the new, Republican satrapy of Nevada by overland coach, Twain's misadventures as a miner and his description of life in the mining community of Carson City and of Western newspaper life in the Hawaiian Islands, and the beginning of his career as a public lecturer.

I assume that almost any literate American is more or less familiar with this volume. It contains virtually every sort of literary genre in miniature from a happy description of Mono Lake to the broad farce of the description of a cat named Tom Quartz, a shrewd analysis of Nevada society — a state where "for a time the lawyer, the editor, the banker, the chief desperado, the chief gambler, and the saloon-keeper, occupied the same level in society, and it was the highest." Every reader has, no doubt, his favorite passage; to my mind the most characteristic, or at any rate, the one I return to most often is Mark Twain's encounter with Joseph Alfred Slade (c.1824–1864), "division agent" for one of the worst sections of the road traversed by coach from Missouri to California, and, together with Henry Plummer (?–1864) of Montana and Idaho, the most distinguished, urbane, and well-mannered bandit the Great West has ever known. Here is Mark Twain's account of an encounter he never forgot:

> . . . we rattled up to a stage-station, and sat down to breakfast with a half-savage, half-civilized company of armed and bearded mountaineers, ranchmen and station employees. The most gentlemanly-appearing, quiet, and affable officer we had yet found along the road in the Overland Company's service was the person who sat at the head of the table, at my elbow. Never youth stared and shivered as I did when I heard them call him SLADE!
>
> Here was romance, and I sitting face to face with it! — looking upon it — touching it — hobnobbing with it, as it were! Here, right by my side, was the actual ogre who, in fights and brawls and various ways, *had taken the lives of twenty-six human beings*, or all men lied about him! I suppose I was the proudest stripling that ever traveled to see strange lands and wonderful people.
>
> He was so friendly and so gentle-spoken that I warmed to him in spite of his awful history. It was hardly possible to realize that this pleasant person was

the pitiless scourge of the outlaws, the raw-head-and-bloody-bones the nursing mothers of the mountains terrified their children with. And to this day I can remember nothing remarkable about Slade except that his face was rather broad across the cheek-bones, and that the cheek-bones were low and the lips peculiarly thin and straight. But that was enough to leave something of an effect upon me, for since then I seldom see a face possessing those characteristics without fancying that the owner of it is a dangerous man.

The coffee ran out. At least it was reduced to one tin cupful, and Slade was about to take it when he saw that my cup was empty. He politely offered to fill it, but although I wanted it, I politely declined. I was afraid he had not killed anybody that morning, and might be needing diversion. But still with firm politeness he insisted on filling my cup, and said I had traveled all night and better deserved it than he — and while he talked he placidly poured the fluid, to the last drop. I thanked him and drank it, but it gave me no comfort, for I could not feel sure that he would not be sorry, presently, that he had given it away, and proceed to kill me to distract his thoughts from the loss. But nothing of the kind occurred. We left him with only twenty-six dead people to account for, and I felt a tranquil satisfaction in the thought that in so judiciously taking care of No. 1 at that breakfast-table I had pleasantly escaped being No. 27. (Chapter X in Vol. I of the edition I earlier cited.)

I trust the reader will not be led to believe that I find "literary values" only or mainly in the four titles I have imperfectly analyzed. On the contrary, I am impressed by the excellent prose in many a book about the Great West. Here are some random instances: Nowadays among the general public, if he is remembered at all, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft is thought of as furnishing Longfellow materials for *Hiawatha*, a once popular poem, now regarded as the quintessence of sentimentalism. A less pretentious study by this anthropologist, *Scenes and Adventures in the Semi-Alpine Region of the Ozark Mountains of Missouri and Arkansas, which were first traversed by De Soto in 1541* (Philadelphia, 1853), with appendices on the mines of the region, the hot springs among the Ozarks, steamboat navigation, and Indian "antiquities," is a model of condensed observation. Despite its naive opening chapter, I find excellent writing in the two volumes of George Catlin's (I condense the title) *Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians*, illustrated with line drawings, and published in London in 1866. Though William E. Connelley's edition of *Doniphan's Expedition and the Conquest of New Mexico and California* (Topeka, Kansas: 1907) is about the clumsiest example of book-making I have seen, the central narrative, once the reader gets to it, by John T. Hughes (first printed in Cincinnati in 1847),

is clear, informative, and in the "action" part of the book a gripping example of narrative prose.[12]

In preparing a study of the "literary West" in the nineteenth century, I have had to struggle with a complex philosophical problem about the relation between history and literature. The historian values above all else fresh materials, however crude their written or unwritten form; the literary scholar, by no means unconscious of the historical setting of writers he studies and the books they produce, has to recur to some set of aesthetic values. Historical inquiry may be invaluable, even if it is not well written, just as its source material may be of the crudest form; writing that qualifies as "literature" may or may not be historically inaccurate and factually misleading, and the only guide of the scholar is likely to be subjective judgment or a vague reference to some theory of criticism in which he has been told a proper philosophy of aesthetics somehow lurks. This dilemma may be illuminated by the foregoing extract from the first chapter of my forthcoming *Out There the West Begins.*

[12] In the battle of Brazito (1837) on the banks of the Rio Grande, Doniphan's forces, inferior in numbers and scattered over a plain, were surprised and attacked by a much larger Mexican force under General Poncé de León, who grandly announced that he would neither give nor take quarter in the conflict. He was soundly beaten by Doniphan's little army, which suffered no loss by death and only eight men wounded (p. 375).

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