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E. W. Gilbert

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THE EXPLORATION OF
WESTERN AMERICA
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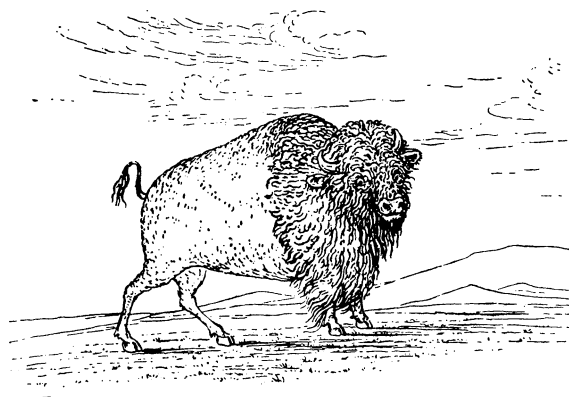
An Historical Geography

by

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of Reading*



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P R E F A C E

At the beginning of the nineteenth century a large part of the present territory of the United States that lies west of the Mississippi River was unexplored. By the year 1850, the main geographical features of this vast area had been revealed. This book is an attempt to reconstruct the geographical setting in which the explorers accomplished their work, and thus to estimate the influence of geographical factors on the history of the exploration of the region.

The first two chapters of the book are introductory in character. Chapter I is a brief historical summary of the exploration of North America before the nineteenth century, and shows that, in 1800, although the outline of the Pacific coast was known, inland exploration towards the west had not advanced far beyond the Mississippi River. Between that great river and the Pacific lay the Rocky Mountains and the interior basins, as yet untraversed by European explorers. The second chapter describes the purchase of Louisiana by the United States.

Part I is an analysis, in the light of modern geographical knowledge, of the region which remained unexplored in 1800. The geographical factors which influenced exploration have been emphasised. This part includes accounts of the physiography, climate, vegetation, animals, and human inhabitants of the area and correlates these geographical factors on a regional basis. The geographical conditions are illustrated by numerous extracts from the writings of the explorers themselves.

Part II is an account of the exploration of the region during the first half of the nineteenth century. This book does not attempt to give a detailed historical description of every expedition; it does attempt to draw a picture of the geographical setting of western America, as it appeared to the explorers of the time. The western America of a hundred years ago has passed away; the Africa of Livingstone exists no more. The systematic reconstruction of such geographical scenes, as they existed at given past periods of history, is the true function of historical geography.

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PREFACE

I hope that the maps of routes will be of assistance to the reader in following the text, but they should be used in conjunction with a good atlas, as this book does not contain a detailed map of the relief, and many places mentioned in the text are not marked on the maps. All unnecessary details have been eliminated from the maps, in order that the routes of the explorers may be made as clear as possible.

The book has been compiled with the help of printed sources only, but I hope that it can claim some originality in its method of treatment of historical geography. Much valuable geographical matter lies buried in the journals of explorers, and I hope that the references quoted in this book will encourage students of Geography or History to use this material as an aid to the study of regional and historical geography.

I am indebted to the following for permission to make extracts from their books in copyright:

John Wiley and Sons, Inc. for extracts from *Forest Physiography*, by I. Bowman;

Ginn and Company (Boston) for extracts from *Climates of the United States*, by R. de C. Ward;

The Carnegie Institute of Washington for extracts from *The Distribution of Vegetation in the United States*, by B. E. Livingston and F. Shreve;

and to Mr Paul A. F. Walter, Editor of *El Palacio*, for permission to reproduce a letter by J. L. Collins, which was first printed in *El Palacio*. Thanks are due to the Editor of the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, for permission to reproduce two articles printed therein, which here form the substance of chapter VII and part of chapter X. For any inadvertent omission to acknowledge my sources, I here offer full apology.

I must express my thanks to many persons who have given me their help during the preparation of the book, especially to the following: to the late Mr H. O. Becket, Reader in Geography in the University of Oxford, who advised me in the early stages of the work; to Professor R. McElroy, Harold Vyvyan Harmsworth Professor of American History in the University of Oxford, for much generous aid; to the late

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Mr James Cossar; to Mr E. Heawood and the Library Staff of the Royal Geographical Society; to Dr S. A. Peyton, Librarian of the University of Reading; to Mr V. T. Harlow, Keeper of Rhodes House Library, Oxford, and his assistants; and to Mrs Robert Aitken. My grateful thanks are especially due to Mr J. N. L. Baker, Lecturer in Geography in the University of Oxford, who read the whole of the manuscript with great care and made a large number of valuable suggestions. Finally I must record my gratitude to my wife, who has given me substantial help in the preparation of the maps, and without whose constant encouragement this book would not have been completed.

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ABBREVIATIONS

L. and C.: History of the Expedition under the Command of Lewis and Clark. Ed. by Elliott Coues. 4 vols. New York, 1893. In order to facilitate reference to other editions of the history of the expedition of Lewis and Clark, the date of each entry quoted from their journals is given in the footnotes.

Z. M. Pike, *Expeditions: The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike.* Ed. by Elliott Coues. 3 vols. New York, 1895.

J. C. Frémont, *Report: Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the years 1843-44* (28th Congress, 2d Session, Senate, 174). Washington, 1845.

J. C. Frémont, *Geog. Memo.: Geographical Memoir upon Upper California, in illustration of his Map of Oregon and California* (30th Congress, 1st Session, Senate, 148). Washington, 1848.

E.W.T.: *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846. A Series of Annotated Reprints of some of the best and rarest contemporary volumes of travel, descriptive of the Aborigines and Social and Economic Conditions in the Middle and Far West during the Period of Early American Settlement.* Ed. with notes by Reuben Gold Thwaites. Cleveland, 1904-6.

Full bibliographical references of all books quoted are included in the Bibliography at the end of the book.