

# WONDERS OF THE FAR WEST.

George Wharton James's New Book on the  
Colorado Desert—T. Mitchell Prudden's  
"On the Great American Plateau."\*

Written for THE NEW YORK TIMES SATURDAY REVIEW  
OF BOOKS by  
CYRUS C. ADAMS.

**T**HESE books supplement one another in the sense that the regions they describe are contiguous. Mr. James's two volumes deal with the Colorado desert in Southern California, a part of which lies below the level of the sea. Mr. Prudden writes of the vast plateau rising above this desert on the east, with its famous cañons, its quaint aborigines, and the remarkable ruins left by prehistoric folk. The books differ much one from the other, but the story that each records is well told.

Perhaps no geographer ever expected to see a popular work in two volumes devoted to the Colorado desert. Although a remarkable part of the continent, it has been neglected both in scientific and

in popular literature. In the large volume of Réclus's "Nouvelle Géographie Universelle" on the United States the eminent author refers to the desert in only one sentence, which is both terse and inaccurate: "East of the San Bernardino Range the Mohave and Colorado deserts are rocky, clayey, or saline wastes, an absolutely barren land of death." The desert is not mentioned in the sixty-three pages given to the United States in "The International Geography." Our National Geological Survey has been too busy studying vast regions of greater economic importance to pay very much attention to the desert. To meet a sudden emergency which has called wide attention to this region—the invasion of a part of it by the entire volume of water of the Colorado River—the Geological Survey has recently issued a provisional map of that part of the desert occupied by Salton Sink.

The Colorado Desert covers most of the extreme southern counties of California and also extends into Arizona on the east and into Mexico on the south. The author has, however, studied only that larger part of it in California to which his book is confined. The name given to the desert long ago is unfortunate because it leads many to suppose that the desert is situated in Colorado. This mistake is excusable in the laity when we see one of the leading geographical reference books indexing the "Grand Cañon of the Colorado" under the State of that name, the fact being that no part of the Colorado River is in Colorado.

There are two reasons why Mr. James has been able to fill two volumes of description relating to this desert and to make them readable in every page. One is that he has gifts of observation far above the common and the literary art of vivid and picturesque description. The other is that the desert is really filled with fascination, surprises, and strange, wonderful, and beautiful things, and that he lived in it long enough to become fully acquainted with its many phases and to love his life of contact with them. His pages show

the same careful and minute study, the same grasp and mastery of the subject that made his book, "In and Around the Grand Cañon," published seven years ago, the best that has been written on that wonder of nature. His new work contains much science, but it is not a scientific treatise. It does not pretend to be wholly original for Mr. James quotes many extracts from the best writers on the manifold aspects of the desert. It is intended for the general reader, and Mr. James has rendered a service by placing before him so complete and so admirable an account of this remarkable region.

As we read the book we are impressed with the idea that the Colorado Desert does not conform with the usual definition of a desert—as a region almost, if not quite, devoid of vegetation and therefore uninhabited chiefly on account of an insufficient supply

\***THE WONDERS OF THE COLORADO DESERT**, (Southern California.) Its Rivers and Mountains, Its Canyons and Its Springs, Its Life and Its History, Pictured and Described. Including an account of a Recent Journey Made down the overflow of the Colorado River to the mysterious Salton Sea. By George Wharton James. Maps and Illustrations. In two volumes. Volume I, pp. xxxvi.-1-270; Volume II, pp. xiv.-271-547. 8vo, cloth. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. \$5.

**ON THE GREAT AMERICAN PLATEAU**, Wanderings Among Canyons and Buttes, in the Land of the Cliff Dweller and the Indian of To-day. By T. Mitchell Prudden. Map and Illustrations. Pp. viii.-237. 8vo, cloth. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The New York Times

Published: March 2, 1907

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of rain. In fact our definitions of a desert apply scarcely to any area of the earth's surface, and not at all to the Colorado Desert; and no one can tell us better than Mr. James why this big waste place is so unlike our preconceptions. He is a lover of deserts, has lived among them more or less for twenty-five years, and to him they give health and inspiration for work. Where else are sunshine, air, and soil so pure? Disease flees in the great health-giving laboratory of the desert.

The author takes us to his desert home, a rude lumber shack with one room and the most primitive of furnishings. His special pride is the bedroom, wonderfully capacious, for it stretches to the rising sun on the east and to the Aurora Borealis on the north, and, with the freedom of wild animals, he sleeps on the bosom of Mother Earth. Then he depicts the natural bathtub formed in the rocks only a few steps from his shack, where the water is always hot and always on tap; charged with gases and bubbling up from below, it makes you feel as though you were having a bath in hot champagne. Many persons are not fitted to enjoy the desert conditions, but those who are will agree with the author that there is such a thing as pure, unadulterated happiness in the waste regions.

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He finds not a few surprises in the desert. One of them is the clarity of the air, for everything, no matter how distant, stands out clean cut and clear. No other place gives such a revelation of the large, bright beauty of the stars. Rain is always a surprise, but showers sometimes come in the middle of Summer, and rain is not at all unusual from December till February. There is a peculiar charm and fragrance about the odors distilled from the numberless sages and other desert plants, whose influence upon pulmonary and bronchial difficulties is distinctly soothing and healing; and then the colors are a never-ending source of delight, for, the author asserts, such a mass of glowing tints as are revealed by the clays and other soils and rocks of various hues and the sombre shades of the mountain ranges is never witnessed away from the desert.

There are also a great many varieties of plant life, a wealth of desert flowers, and the gardens and orchards that spring up wherever artesian wells or other sources of irrigation may be tapped are marvelous. Of course, sand is abounding, but there are many regions in the desert where no sand is found. As we turn over the pages we are convinced that the desert, indeed, has wonderful variety, and that it may impart much pleasure and healthful influence; also that it may inflict great suffering and tragical death, and one of its perils is met among the sandhills.

The man unused to the desert risks his life if he wanders among these dunes. If he penetrates far among them he becomes utterly confused, for the wind destroys his tracks in a few minutes, and he knows not which way to turn. The only safe plan is to sit down and make no attempt to escape during the heat of the day, but to wait till night falls and then guide himself back to safety by the stars, and one who cannot travel by the stars or knows not the general directions in the desert should never venture away from camp alone.

Besides the long introduction there are thirty-nine chapters, among which nearly 600 pages of letter press are distributed. Every phase of the desert receives attention. Chapters are devoted to its physical features, its explorers, climate, mirages, plant and animal life, oases, tragedies, campfires, stage roads, and many other aspects. We learn that the horticultural prospects are great wherever irrigation may be provided; that the date palm is a brilliant success, and that twenty years from now we shall probably produce in parts of the Colorado Desert most of the 10,000,000 pounds of dates that are annually consumed in the United States.

Prospecting and mining make a prolific and very interesting topic, and we have here the best account yet written of the development of Paradise Valley and other oases, and of the recent destruction wrought by the truant Colorado, now happily restored to its proper channel with good prospects that it will be kept at home in the future.

The work has a good index, and its pictures are worthy of special mention. They are very numerous, most of them being black and white sketches that are graphic story tellers, for the artist has hit off admirably the characteristics of things, and that without waste of crayon. He is Mr. Carl Eytel, a self-educated artist, of whom Mr. James says that no other man knows the Colorado Desert as Eytel knows it, "and his sketches are faithful portrayals of objects he has seen and lived with."

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#### DR. PRUDDEN'S BOOK.

DR. PRUDDEN is a hard-worked professional man who many a time, after months of rush and turmoil in the great city, has sought the serenity and quiet of our vast plateau region west of the Rocky Mountains. This book, "On the Great American Plateau," is the result of these journeys. A part of it

had previously appeared as magazine articles. Dr. Prudden's familiarity with his geographical subject is due to many travels over these wide-spreading lands and to intelligent study of their wonderful cañons, their cliff dwellings and other relics of tribes that perished centuries ago. He has written a popular travel book, but it is not of the superficial variety. It is the work of a keen observer who reflects upon what he sees. The tendency of the book will be to induce other town dwellers to improve the delightful opportunities for recuperation which these inspiring solitudes afford. It will help those who go to choose what they wish to see and to see it to the best advantage; and it will give to many of the stay-at-homes glimpses of the wonderland of the West, of which all Americans should have an intelligent conception.

Dr. Prudden thinks that the part of the plateau which is most attractive is that lying between the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad on the north and the Santa Fé line on the south. Many parts of the plateau, however, are remote from the usual lines of travel, though the phases of Indian life and many of the finest of the cañons may be reached through established public conveyances, and the author gives an entertaining description of the longer journeys into the recesses of the plateau with pack ponies or mules, with a blanket for a bed and no canopy save the stars.

#### The Indian of the Great Plateau.

Dr. Prudden gives many a hint to the wayfarer in those regions that are

worth treasuring. He says, for example, that the Navajo will not tolerate mineral prospectors upon his reservation if he can help it, but if you can convince the Indian that you are no gold seeker in his land, and if you are mindful of his rights, you may drink of his springs and water holes, watch the women weaving blankets, and sit the night out at the dances. Any one who would really know the Grand Cañon must not hasten away, and the author tells of the interesting journeys along its borders that are feasible from the hotels. He who does not spend a night down at the water's edge in the depths of the cañon has not won his way to the inmost spirit of the place. One of the most charming chapters is that in which the author frames from the various things the cliff-dweller left behind him a conception of these early settlers, who are still the objects of eager research.

A part of the book is given to the excursions that are now made every year to the homes of the Hopi and Moqui Indians. The snake dances and some of the other religious ceremonies of the Pueblo tribes are now annually witnessed by a small though constantly increasing number of tourists, most of whom, of course, can but superficially discern the inner life of these remarkable people. This advent of the ordinary tourist is a little alarming, for he has his influence upon these children of nature; and all these peoples are passing away before the treasures of their folk-lore have been collected. Dr. Prudden expresses the hope that before it is too late more liberal appropriations may be made for the maintenance of anthropologists in these lonesome fields so that at least some part of the priceless knowledge of the primitive peoples of this part of the world may not be lost beyond recovery.

C. C. A.

New York, March, 1907.

#### DANTE.

MESSRS. G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS will publish this Spring "Dante and His Italy," by the Rev. Canon Lonsdale Ragg, who says, in his preface to the work:

The primary purpose of this volume is to present a vivid picture of life in Italy in Dante's day, based, so far as possible, upon original authorities. The author is conscious of omissions, imperfections, and inequalities; but he wishes it to be understood that the book is intended to be a sketch rather than a finished picture. Hence no attempt has been made to deal exhaustively with the history or the literature of the period, which are only treated in such a way as to supply what is necessary for the purposes of the general reader.

To prepare for his work, the author studied original historical sources in the libraries of Bologna, Florence, Milan, &c. This book is divided into ten chapters, the titles of which are: "The Year of Jubilee: Poet and Pontiff"; "Dante's Century: Kings, Emperors, and Popes"; "Dante's Century: The Legacy of Innocent III."; "Dante's Italy: The Sterner Side of Life"; "Dante's Italy: The Gentler Side of Life"; "Dante's Florence," "Dante's Literary Antecedents," "Dante's Literary Circle," "Dante's Hosts," and "Dante's Last Refuge."

#### Danish Tales.

Nine stories by Carl Ewald, author of "My Little Boy" and "Two Legs," have been translated from the Danish by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, who also translated the above-named two stories, and will be published this Spring by Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons. The stories treat of the secrets of nature in a manner calculated to entertain both children and grown-ups.