

*The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike to Headwaters of the Mississippi River through Louisiana Territory and in New Spain during the Years 1805-6-7. A new Edition from the Original of 1810. With Copious Critical Commentary, Memoir of Pike, New Maps, and other Illustrations and Complete Index.* By Elliott Coues. (In 3 vols. Francis P. Harper.)

Two things are suggested at the first glance over these three volumes—two of text and notes and one of index and maps. The first is that it is not yet a century since almost as little was known of the source and course of our great western rivers as those of Central Africa. The next is that the growth of public libraries must have been—as it has been—phenomenally rapid to have justified the reproduction of such a book as this of Pike's; or, rather, of Dr. Elliott Coues's notes upon Pike's Journals, for there are at least one thousand words of "notes" to two hundred words of text. As works of reference such books possess a permanent value, yet they are of so little interest to the "general reader" that probably the publishers would never be able to relieve their shelves of the load of even one small edition were it not for the public libraries. But as every self-respecting library must have at least one copy of a book which will never cease to be of high importance to students of American history and geography, the publishers will, no doubt, be well repaid for the handsome manner in which they have placed this edition before the public.

It is said that Pike's original journals have been made much clearer by the editor's rearrangement of them. What they must have been before it is difficult to imagine. The truth is, that while Dr. Coues is a faithful editor and Captain Pike a brave and ardent explorer, neither of them has the power to communicate to the reader any spark of the enthusiasm which inspired the explorer, or of painting scenes and telling adventures, so that the reader shall seem to see and partake of them.

Pike's early education was defective, and he did not possess the literary faculties which would have atoned for so much; but he had a training which well fitted him for the work he was to do. The son of an army officer, he grew up in a military atmosphere, and was taught by his father to write a good hand, to use the practical mathematical instruments of the time, to talk French (with a vile accent, but so as to make himself understood) and—what was of most value to him—the art of commanding men in such a way as to secure their prompt obedience and best work, as well as their personal attachment. By dint of this training and his natural qualities, Zebulon Pike became one of the most picturesque figures in the military annals of our country during the early part of the present century. His career was brief, but full of adventures and honors. The period from 1799 to 1815 was full of change, progress, turmoil and reaction in Europe; and even within our own borders there was a widespread feeling of unrest. The Great West was beginning to emerge, a vast possibility from the mists of the unknown. The purchase from the French, in 1803, of the immense domain then included in the Territory of Louisiana, had made possible the exploration and opening for settlement of lands hitherto undreamed of. President Jefferson had sent Lewis and Clarke on their celebrated expedition across the continent. General Wilkinson, without orders, sent Pike on what might be termed a counter-expedition, ostensibly to trace the course of the Mississippi and its chief tributaries from their sources.

Pike's first journey was simply from St. Louis northward, holding councils with Indians along his way, studying tributary streams, and spending the winter in the wild depths of Minnesota.

The second was in the opposite direction. Pike was undoubtedly innocent of any treasonable intent; but he was loyal to his commanding officer, and the latter was involved in Burr's plots. Of these Pike probably knew nothing; but he seems to have thought that a war with Spain, whereby New Spain, or a great part of it, might be secured for his country, would be a desirable sort of thing. In ostensibly searching for the sources of the Arkansas River, he manages to get and keep himself on the wrong side of the boundary line. Dr. Coues picturesquely says that

"Pike went about with a chip on each shoulder, for some Spaniard to please knock off; his coat tails were dragging all over the Rocky Mountains for some Spaniard to please step on, and he would rather have broken some Spanish heads than to have discovered the head of any river.

Perhaps Dr. Coues expresses himself too strongly; but Pike certainly was found on the wrong side of the line, and as certainly was not displeased to be there. Whatever the Spanish authorities thought about it Spain had trouble enough on hand in Europe without involving itself in a war with the United States about its distant possessions; so the authorities were content to accept discreetly the fiction that Pike was a United States officer who had lost his way and wandered upon their premises by pure ill-chance. He was able to conceal his journals; but the Spaniards captured his records and charts, and treated him as an honored prisoner.

Whatever may have been Wilkinson's design in sending his subordinate on this expedition, its outcome eventually proved useful to the United States. He had made what was equivalent to a military reconnaissance into the heart of New Spain, and he carried back with him valuable information. That he was not rewarded is not to be wondered at under the circumstances, but he was too energetic and able an officer to be forgotten. Wolfe had ever been his hero, and in the war of 1812 he expired within the limits of the modern Toronto, at the head of a victorious assault, like Wolfe before Quebec; and tradition declares that—also like Wolfe—Pike's head was pillowed on the captured colors of the enemy.