

English biography published in 1955 called *The Life and Times of Alexander von Humboldt* by Helmut de Terras is largely a romantic psychological presentation. It rotates around an unknown homosexuality of Humboldt, and the Kellner book can help erase this impression. But I think that there is still the need to translate Humboldt's works into English to avoid any mistakes. The Kellner book has such errors. Humboldt's mother was not of the nobility (p. 5); Humboldt did not meet George Foster (who is much misunderstood) in Gottingen (p. 12f); but Humboldt received in Hamburg from Johann Georg Busch and Christoph Daniel Ebeling important suggestions and there he regularly undertook studies which the author totally ignores (p. 15). This reviewer does not want to make a list of errors. What is more important is the fact that the volume of geography, that from the traveling point of view cannot be ignored (it is basic for the research trips to America and Russia), has been neglected in favor of geomagnetic discussions with which the author, as a physicist, is more at home. In the end, this book is based on the antiquated Karl Bruhn biography: Alexander von Humboldt, *Eine wissenschaftliche biographie*, 3 vols., Leipzig, 1872 (see pp. 238-241). It is this that makes the Kellner book weak. In sum, the newest literature has not been used. The discussion of geomagnetism and the use of some English sources are noteworthy, but from an overall point of view take up too much space.

Bad Godesberg

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Prescott's Histories: The Rise and Decline of the Spanish Empire.

Edited by IRWIN R. BLACKER. New York, 1963. The Viking Press, Inc. Bibliography. Pp. 568. \$7.50.

This volume attempts to offer a balanced selection of the contents of Prescott's four histories, *Ferdinand and Isabella*, *The Conquest of Mexico*, *The Conquest of Peru*, and *Philip II*. Physically this means that what originally appeared in eleven volumes and exceeded 5700 pages of text has been sweated down, as Prescott would say, to less than one-tenth that number. With almost mathematical precision, approximately one-fourth of the selections is derived from each title.

Thematically the histories were many things, but nothing more frequently than biographical sketches and battle-pieces. Honoring the strong biographical bias in the four works, Ferdinand, Isabella, and Gonsalvo de Córdoba—indeed all the greats of that reign except Ximénez de Cisneros—receive their due, as do Cortés and Pizarro in

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the conquests, and Philip and Don John of Austria in the closing half of the sixteenth century. Here too are battle-pieces which have repeatedly appeared in works featuring Prescott selections: the battle of Alhama and the siege of Granada, the Italian campaigns of the Great Captain, Cortés' battle at Otumba and his siege of Tenochtitlán, the wars among the conquerors in Peru, the rebellion of the Moriscoes and the battle of Lepanto. Such high drama as the destruction of the fleet, the seizure of Montezuma, the debacle of Noche Triste, Pizarro's stern resolution, and the gathering of the Peruvian treasure crowd these pages. Finally, Prescott routinely gave attention to background, which Blacker neglects.

Compared with the most recent previous volume of Prescott selections, that by Charvat and Kraus (1943), Blacker's better illustrates the unity of each history. On the other hand, Charvat and Kraus' volume, including many items outside the four histories, better illustrates the thematic range and total nature of Prescott as writer.

Beyond the scissors-and-paste aspect of volumes of selections, the question emerges: what of the editor's introductory essay—his understanding and projection of the man Prescott? Whereas Charvat and Kraus, a literary critic and a historian respectively, commendably discerned the man behind the masterworks, Blacker, neither critic nor historian, has written an exceedingly pedestrian prefatory piece. Despite a spate of recent publications on Prescott, most of which he lists and comments upon in his bibliography, Blacker falls into numerous errors. For example: Prescott did not lose the sight of his left eye; Ticknor was not his classmate; he never revised his *Miscellanies*; and he was urged by politicians and military men, not publishers, to write a history of the war with Mexico.

On December 11, 1843, Prescott wrote his American publisher, Harper and Brothers, "I shall furnish the *Courier & Advertiser* [Boston newspapers] with proof sheets containing extracts from various parts of the work [*The Conquest of Mexico*]. As the most showy & striking passages are selected, it seems to me this must be one of the most efficient means for advertising the book." Admittedly Blacker, offering showy and striking passages, has utilized the Prescott technique. But he serves up bigger extracts than the historian intended for purposes of promotion. Indeed, it just might be that the present extracts are full enough for readers who are generally and genuinely averse to Prescott's wordiness that, instead of promoting, they will satisfy. As Prescott, in his notebooks, so often muttered to himself, "Nous verrons."

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