

# Book Reviews

FIFTEEN DECISIVE EVENTS OF CALIFORNIA HISTORY, by Rockwell D. Hunt. (*The Historical Society of Southern California*, Los Angeles, 1959.) *Introduction* by Gustave O. Arlt; *indexed; bibliography; illustrated*. Pp. xxii, 91; cloth; two-color pictorial jacket. \$5.00 (discounted to Society members and Society Book Club members).

Fifty years ago the *Historical Society of Southern California* ANNUAL (of 1909-10) published Rockwell D. Hunt's article, "Significant Events in California History." Since Dr. Hunt was, and is, a historian in the true meaning of the term, and not a prophet, he could not then have included at least four of the events he now has chosen for his latest work, *Fifteen Decisive Events of California History*. Thus the course of our State history, and the unfolding of the life and times of this grand old man of California letters! No living writer of the history of the Golden State is better grounded than he to evaluate the crucial events in its history, for a few of this or any other generation have studied this history longer or actually witnessed a greater span of it.

The reader of this review should not allow it to be a substitute for the study of the book. Let the reader have the pleasure of discovering from the volume itself what Dr. Hunt's fifteen selections are. Yet let him understand here, as the author says in the *Preface*, that the number selected is not intended as either a magical or a final sum total of pivotal events, but as simply a selection large enough for variety's sake and small enough "to avoid the pitfalls of particularism." Suffice to reveal here that the time period covered extends from Discovery in 1542 to the United Nations meeting in San Francisco in 1945; that eight of the events chosen fall in the drama-packed 19th Century; and that four fall in the present century but do not include such occurrences as the development of the citrus, motion picture or airframe industries, the population explosion at mid-century, or the struggle for water in Southern California. Three of the fifteen events did not even occur *in* California. Nor is there a military battle among them, although two have military connection and others are predominately political, religious, social or economic. Finally, for his fifteenth selection, Dr. Hunt ventures boldly into the difficult area of contemporary history and, out of the experience and wisdom of his ninety-two years, writes a heartwarming essay of faith and hope. In this he bends — some would say

breaks — the rules of history writing; who in his field has a better right?

In further analysis of Dr. Hunt's selections one may say that they are not necessarily the most interesting or most surprising or most controversial events, although such qualities abound. Rather, they are as announced in the book title: decisive. One need not expect, therefore, any discoveries based on new research. What one can expect is interpretation, boiled and simmered and finally distilled into the essence of the veteran author's evaluation of the story and the destiny of his beloved California.

Readers of the *QUARTERLY* have had the opportunity of reading these chapters as they appeared serially, but every student of the State history will want to have the collection in one attractive volume. Brought together thus, the essays arch over the full expanse of California's story in a surprisingly satisfactory manner. For the young student they serve as a good introduction, whetting his appetite for broader searching. For the more experienced reader they provide a good refresher course, and possibly a new point of view. For both categories of students the carefully done, chapter-by-chapter bibliography is a valuable addition. Dr. Gustave O. Arlt's thoughtful *Introduction* and the fifteen plates contribute to the pleasure and utility of the volume.

This is Volume 4 in the *Society's Special Book Publications* Series. Again Lorrin L. Morrison has designed and produced a book to satisfy those who are proud to own worthwhile literary works in enduring editions finely crafted.—*Robert W. King.*

DESERT VOICES, *A Descriptive Bibliography*, by E. I. Edwards. (The Westernlore Press, Los Angeles, 1958) Pp. xxviii, 215. \$12.50

E. I. Edwards, writer, book collector, business consultant, does not belong to that band of timid bibliographers who describe their compilations as being "selective" — a word that serves as a shield against the shafts of critics who find favorite books missing.

Instead, out of his twenty years of following desert lore and literature, he boldly states that his purpose in *Desert Voices* is to present "all the known books on our California deserts with sufficient comment on each to stimulate the urge for exploratory reading."

While no one man could quite achieve that aim, the book Edwards has produced is a magnificent achievement.

*Desert Voices* is no mere listing of books. It is an assemblage in one fat, happy, and handsome volume of one man's reactions to