



General William Clark

THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

By HELEN NICOLAY

Author of "Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln"

THE MAP AND THE SHUTTLECOCK PROVINCE

THE crowning achievements of Jefferson's term had to do with terra firma rather than with the sea; but they were equally picturesque and undemocratic. It was providential that his many theories neutralized one another. Although a lingering remnant of the old landed aristocrat's prejudice against trade made him

deplore commerce as "corrupting," his dislike of war bade him argue that in trade, not in guns, lay our greatest national weapon. Common sense also made him see how necessary trade was to the development of the country. He therefore planned to invade close-shut Asia with the American commerce that did not as yet exist, and he joyfully set out to find a road for it through an unexplored wilderness.

The blank spaces on the map teased him. They were still vast, despite explor-

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ing expeditions that had come to America in ever-increasing numbers since Sebastian Cabot's initial voyage of 1497. Such expeditions along the coast had been too numerous even to mention. Those that penetrated the interior fell into interesting groups as they multiplied with the centuries. The four principal ones of the sixteenth century were Spanish, and the territory they pierced was that of our Southern and Southwestern States. In the seventeenth century they were French, and their wanderings covered the region approached by the St. Lawrence and the great lakes. In the eighteenth century the names connected with such enterprises were unmistakably English. The area was smaller, but it was explored more in detail and opened up to permanent settlement. This was the fertile country drained by the Ohio and other eastern tributaries of the Mississippi. With the beginning of the nineteenth century interest was transferred west of the Mississippi to the wide spaces designated on maps of the day by three imagination-haunting names, Oregon, the Spanish Territory, and Louisiana.

Progressive Americans were convinced even then that some time in the future these must be ours "by law of nature." But conservatives, on the other hand, were aghast at the idea of annexing land, especially beyond the Mississippi. The country's chief danger, they said, was its unwieldy size. New England felt that such a course would justify her in withdrawing from the Union. But to all alike the map was an unsolved enigma. The Stony Mountains loomed large upon it as a barrier between Louisiana and the

other two tracts. The Missouri River, draining the eastern slopes of this vast range, was a well-established fact. Jefferson thought that indications pointed to a river of equal importance on the western side, flowing into the Pacific.

To a mind like his such speculations were irresistible. While he was minister to France he talked with young John Ledyard, the American traveler, then in Paris, and so worked upon his imagination that he gave up his project of Egyptian exploration to attack the mystery of his own continent. Together the two planned that Ledyard should cross Siberia far to the north, sail from Kamchatka to the coast of America, follow the coast southward until he came to the mouth of this un-

known river, ascend it to its source, and then, crossing the continental divide to the headwaters of the Missouri, sail down to the Mississippi and civilization. In his capacity of minister to France, Jefferson gave Ledyard a passport to St. Petersburg, that he might ask leave of the Empress Catharine to cross her territory. It was granted, and Ledyard had reached Siberia when the permission was suddenly revoked, and he was ordered out of the country on suspicion of being a spy.

Four years later Captain Gray, in command of the ship that

first carried the Stars and Stripes around the world, discovered the mouth of the Columbia. This confirmed Jefferson's theory, but the upper reaches of the river and its relation to the Missouri remained as mysterious as ever. At intervals, when his republicanism slumbered, Jefferson's mind played with the problem, and before he had been President many months the ex-



Meriwether Lewis

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pedition of Lewis and Clark began to take definite shape.

Its objects were threefold, as the President outlined them to Congress: to establish trading relations with the Indians of the Northwest; to search out a route for commerce with Asia; and to add to the world's geographic knowledge. On the map the transit of the eye and mind from the Pacific coast to densely populated Asia is instantaneous and inevitable. Asia spelled commerce, and so did a fur trade with the western Indians. Knowing the nature of Congress when it came to a question of appropriations, Jefferson was diplomatically practical and enlarged upon this point, though personally the scientific features of the expedition interested him more.

He placed at the head of it two young army officers who had between them ideal qualifications for the task. Meriwether Lewis had seen military service, and had been acting as Jefferson's private secretary. He had thus learned to understand thoroughly his chief's desires and habits of mind. William Clark was a man of less education who had served under "Mad Anthony" Wayne. With the exception of one negro servant, the whole party, numbering about thirty, was enlisted in the army before it set out in the spring of 1803 in a blaze of social glory. Mrs. Madison and the ladies of fashion provided every possible comfort, from that kindly impulse that prompts giving men doomed to execution a last good meal.

But the fear that "they might never return from the distant land of savages" proved unfounded. After a silence of years they emerged from the wilderness with their tale of adventure that makes pulses quicken even yet. How it must have moved those who heard for the first time of the marvels and perils of the Western region can be easily imagined. Both the commanders kept diaries. Lewis's trained style pales a little beside that of Clark, whose pen, like his sword, was coercive and drove panic-stricken letters into words perfectly intelligible to the sense, if not to the eye.

His account has in it the very ripple of the Missouri on that May morning when they set off up-stream in a "jente brease" past the huts of French habitants, "pore, polite, and harmonious." That jabbing pen of his had strange power to make pictures and draw character. Reading on, we seem to accompany the travelers into the unsettled country, rich in game, but purgatorial with all manner of crawling, biting insects. Camping with them on a sand-bar and watching while they sleep, we see the stealthy Missouri eating it away, piece by piece, above and below. We call out in horrified alarm, and the company has barely time to take to its boats before the last square yard of earth vanishes in a dizzying whirl of muddy waters. We stand beside brave Sergeant Floyd when he is "taken verry bad all at once with a Bilious Chorlick," and see him die "with a great deal of composure"; and we spend five winter months with the party inside a stockade at Fort Mandan, sixteen hundred miles above the mouth of the Missouri, where perils of flood and field are exchanged for a game of exciting diplomacy with the Indians and with French and British fur-traders.

Beyond this point, where they wintered, all was unknown. In the spring they set forth again to push on through a region of fantastic mountain grandeur, over ground whitened by alkali, or black with coal, or red and yellow, or all four colors at once. Monster animals invaded their camp at night. Rattlesnakes and mosquitos added effective torment by day. A worthless Frenchman and an infant three weeks old were taken into the party, vicariously welcome for the sake of the Indian wife and mother, who had been captured in childhood from a Rocky Mountain tribe and was relied upon as guide. With her baby pressed close to her heart and the welfare of the party on her shoulders, she slipped into her place on the march and "made good."

The dividing of the river left them at a loss which fork to follow. It split again, this time into three streams; and it was almost mid-August when Lewis stood at

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The United States after the Louisiana Purchase

last beside the icy spring in which the Missouri takes its rise. On the very same day a stream was found flowing toward the Pacific. Caching boats and surplus stores, the party began crossing the heavily timbered Bitter Root Mountains, where the whole world seems to be crumpled in a series of preposterous ridges. Sacajewea, the Indian mother, opened friendly relations with a band of Shoshones, who directed the party and sold them horses. But after this snow-storms came to blind them, game disappeared, and they were obliged to eat some of the horses and set the others free. Finally, after great hardships, they came into a region where Indians knew the commodities—and the wiles—of white men, and on November 7, 1805, Clark jubilantly wrote in his diary, "Great joy in camp—we are in sight of the ocean!" following this by a tale of seas that "roled and tossed uproriously" and made several of the party very sick.

They retraced their steps, and before the end of March, 1806, the principals made their report in person to the President. Neither of these young men did anything more that is noteworthy, which is perhaps not strange. They had done their full share by successfully piercing the continent from tide-water to tide-water. That a woman and a baby helped

them, and a negro and a dog loyally followed every step of the way, adds to the wonder and the human interest of their achievement. Yet it is disappointing that both gallant leaders faded from sight, one of them under a cloud. Made Governor of Louisiana Territory, Lewis died a year or two later in a squalid cabin either by murder or his own hand. The fate of Clark was not so dramatic. He, too, was Governor of the Louisiana region after it became Missouri, and later served as Indian agent, vanishing finally into total obscurity.

Their places were quickly filled by others. The march of the West was too rapid and buoyant to halt either to search or to mourn for those who served it and dropped out. Far-off Oregon was soon to claim the attention of the country, but now interest centered upon a West nearer home, the Louisiana Territory, which stretched between the Mississippi and the Stony Mountains.