

stored. The notes appended to this volume should be particularly commended, as they represent a marked advance in craftsmanship over some of the former volumes in this series. So far as the reviewer is aware, there is not a single reference, allusion or incomplete statement in the narrative, which would otherwise be obscure, which does not have a supporting note, skillfully selected and compactly worded, to supply the facts which are essential to a complete understanding of the text. If editorial skill, persevering industry, and a professional grasp of the subject-matter are essential to acceptable historical compilations of this character, the reviewer ventures the prediction that this volume has "arrived". In conclusion, it should be stated that the volume is supplied with a very satisfactory and usable index.

CHARLES KETTLEBOROUGH.

*Annals of Benton County*, By Elmore Barce. The Benton Review Shop, Fowler, Indiana, 1925, pp. 134.

Readers of this magazine know of Elmore Barce as a painstaking delver in local history whose offerings in this field for the last ten years prove his interest to be more than ephemeral. Some of his productions during that period have been contributed to these pages, and others have taken the book form. His latest is the *Annals of Benton County*, a neat little volume of 119 pages, which is announced as the first one of a series to follow on the same theme.

The first expression of appreciation of the work of Mr. Barce and of a very few others like him (notably Mr. J. W. Whickcar, of Attica) should, I take it, be of that abiding love for historical inquiry that persists regardless of its thanklessness, so far as the public is concerned. The county history which is frankly that and nothing else does well if it pays the printer, hence the great majority of such productions are hooked up with cheap commercial ventures which use history as a peg on which to hang biographical puffs that are of little interest to anybody except those puffed. Shelves of books of this character prove that history compiled under these conditions is apt to be of limited value, and they are but an aggravation to the person who goes to them in search of worthwhile information.

From such superficial manifestations of the history exploiters one turns with a feeling of thankfulness to a sincere piece of work like the *Annals of Benton County*. Obviously, the author's foot is on his native heath, or at any rate he betrays a familiarity with his subject equivalent to that, and he handles his material with a zest that shows it inspires him. Every section of Indiana (as of every other place) has its distinctive features—it is a separate environment that more or less modifies the history of which it is a part. Whoever penetrates to the spirit and character of a community through the facts of its history and physical environment is making a genuine contribution to history in the sociological sense, and I think Mr. Barce apprehends this inner meaning of his theme. The physical surroundings with which he has to deal were markedly different from those of a forested country. Benton was a prairie county, so devoid of natural drainage that spots dry enough to be cultivated were little better than islands in the swamps, and oftentimes the farmer could not get into his fields for the wetness. The prairie soil, from lack of aeration, baked hard when it was dry, and broke up in great clods, yielding poor crops in spite of the great fertility locked up in it; the sod was tough and hard to work. One of the standing menaces to the pioneer in the dry weather of early autumn was the dreaded prairie fire, which might on short notice sweep away his home and garnered crops, and even imperil human lives. The art of fighting those fires was one he had to acquire. Thus, the plainsman, like the woodsman, had to adapt himself to his own peculiar problems, and in this case he did it so well that Benton County was, in time, converted from a bog where every crop was of doubtful growth to the richest agricultural section in all Indiana. This inherent agricultural value has given a character to the county, which is largely rural and homogeneous, and various other modifications arising from the same source may be traced through Mr. Barce's text, either directly or indirectly.

The author is aware of the picturesque aspects of his subject and gives some graphic descriptions of the face of the county as visible from its few elevations, with its wide exhibit of growing crops, and also, by contrast with these, of the old-time sea of waving prairie grass which grew so rank that it

would hide from view a horse and its rider. The prairie fires and the curious "tumble weeds" that could be seen rolling across the plains by tens of thousands after the first frosts of fall, also make good reading. Not least interesting is the account of some seven hundred acres of primeval forest, presenting gigantic specimens of Indiana's typical trees, which, by some strange ordainment of nature, stood in the midst of these wide prairie spaces.

Having given us thus much of Benton County as a beginning, it is to be hoped Mr. Barce will continue his intensive study and complete the proposed series. In the writing of our county histories, generally considered, much remains to be desired, and every one that aims at a higher standard should be accorded an appreciative welcome.

GEO. S. COTTMAN.

*Literature of the Middle Western Frontier*, By RALPH LESLIE RUSK. Columbia University Press, 1925. Two volumes, pp. xiii, 457; vi, 419.

The student of early middle-western literature who has heretofore had to search for the information he desired in Coggeshall's *Poets and Poetry of the West* and Venable's *Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley*, or through the accessible newspapers and magazines of the early days of the Middle West, will welcome R. L. Rusk's *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier*, which has just come from the Columbia University Press. Dr. Rusk was for some years a member of the English department of Indiana University, going recently to Columbia University, so his book has an added interest to Indiana readers.

Dr. Rusk sets 1840 as the limit to the period of which he writes. He does not attribute any great literary achievement to any of the Western writers whose work he chronicles, but he considers that the work, both of the more obscure writers and of the more outstanding, has value because in it is written the history of the growth of civilization during a unique epoch, the epoch in which the territory known as the Middle West was settled and took on, in a sense, the form it now has.

Naturally, the first literature of the Middle West, the Middle West toward which the emigrant from the eastern