

BOOK REVIEWS — By J. C. Martin, K.C.

DRIFTWOOD VALLEY, by Theodora C. Stanwell-Fletcher. Illustrated with photographs and sketches. McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto. Pp. 369 and appendix. \$4.

If Cowper were alive to ask

“O, Solitude, where are the charms

That sages have seen in thy face?”

he would find an answer in this book, for here are a young couple who sought solitude in the little-explored interior of northern British Columbia. And having found it, they found it charming.

They had two purposes, both of which they accomplished effectively—to get away from civilization, and to collect specimens of the flora and fauna of the region for the provincial museum at Victoria. The scientific side of their work has been covered in articles which both have contributed to various publications, but an appendix to this book contains an impressive catalogue of the plants, birds and animals which they identified.

The book is written by Mrs. Stanwell-Fletcher and is an account of their day-to-day life under conditions which were primitive, often difficult, and sometimes dangerous. She is keenly observant and writes well, sometimes with eloquence, of what she saw and experienced. Perhaps most important of all their qualities, both husband and wife have an engaging sense of humour which, many times, must have been a saving grace; indeed, one gets the impression that they broke their stay to come outside, less from a desire for the comforts of civilization than from a fear of becoming “bushed”.

Mr. Stanwell-Fletcher, who spent nearly three years as a member of the R.C.M.P., has contributed a number of sketches of birds and animals concerning which we cannot do better than quote and endorse this wifely comment:

“I think he has the gift of making animals live on paper, especially with regard to eyes and facial expressions”.

It was no part of their purpose to report on the economic possibilities of the region, although the author mentions prospectors who were understood to be making more than a good living. Yet when she tells of the tremendous snow-fall one cannot but

feel that it is a great, if not insuperable obstacle to settlement. Incidentally, if “Headless Valley” exists, the Stanwell-Fletchers did not find it.

I REMEMBER, by Major General the Honourable W. A. Griesbach. The Ryerson Press, Toronto. Pp. 353. Illustrated from photographs. \$4.50.

From the point of view of the R.C.M.P. it can be said that this book is a valuable addition to the already considerable literature on the history of the Force. The author's father was regimental number 1 in the North West Mounted Police, and he himself was born at its post at Fort Qu'Appelle in 1878, so that he is able, either from hearsay at first-hand or from personal experience in his own boyhood, to tell of it from its beginning. For the general reader it is equally valuable as an addition to the recorded history of the prairie provinces (with particular reference to Edmonton, which was a small but active and breezy community when young Griesbach first saw it).

The author did not follow his father into police work, but instead qualified himself to practise law. By his own account his preparation was rather sketchy, and he does not appear to have been much interested in the practice of his profession. His greatest interests were in politics and soldiering, both of which he followed with distinction—in the former rising to become a senator from Alberta, and in the latter, after experience in the Boer War and the First Great War, becoming Inspector-General of the Canadian Army in 1940. He died in 1945.

The book makes little pretension to literary style. It is patchy in parts, especially toward the end, as if the writer was in haste to get it finished. It ends abruptly when the narrative reaches 1914 with so much obviously untold that it seems probable that General Griesbach intended, had he lived, to follow it with another volume. Yet the book gives an attractive portrait of a very human personality who enjoyed life to the full. He is dogmatic at times, especially when he expresses opinions on military affairs; often he is humorous and tells good stories, tall and otherwise, of “the early days”; he is nothing if not candid, and does