

**THE PERSONAL  
NARRATIVE OF JAMES O.  
PATTIE, OF KENTUCKY**

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The Personal Narrative of James O. Pattie, of Kentucky by James O. Pattie & Timothy Flint & Reuben Gold Thwaites

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**JAMES O. PATTIE & TIMOTHY FLINT & REUBEN GOLD THWAITES**

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# The Personal Narrative of James O. Pattie of Kentucky

During an expedition from St. Louis, through the vast regions between that place and the Pacific Ocean, and thence back through the City of Mexico to Vera Cruz, during journeyings of six years, etc.

Edited by Timothy Flint (1833)

Edited with Notes, Introductions, Index, etc., by

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## PREFACE TO VOLUME XVIII

Upon the return, in 1806, of the Lewis and Clark exploring expedition, the first successfully to penetrate from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, the Western imagination was aroused by visions of wealth to be acquired from commercial relations with the Indians of the far Northwest. Fur-trading expeditions were accordingly soon dispatched up the Missouri and its tributaries; and, throughout several years, the equally rich opportunities for Southwestern Indian commerce and exploration were neglected.

Far to the Southwest lay the Spanish settlements of New Mexico, isolated islands of a sluggish civilization. Practically all of their imports were brought in by way of the Gulf of Mexico and Vera Cruz, thence travelling a difficult road of over fifteen hundred miles from the coast, making their cost almost prohibitive to the mixed race of Spaniards and Mexicans who dwelt in the valleys of the upper Rio Grande. Yet within easy reach of their frontier lay one of the chief commercial peoples of the age, to be reached over a wilderness road passing for the most part across level plains, watered by numerous streams — the upper tributaries of the great western affluents of the Mississippi. The common interests of these people and of the Americans lay in an interchange of commodities; but the government of New Spain looked with hostile suspicion upon the aggressive, vigorous race that was even then forcing its borders. Behind the prospect of profit for the overland Southwest trader, loomed the possibility of a gruesome Spanish prison, and confiscation of the adventured goods.

After Zebulon M. Pike returned (1807) with his account of arrest and detention in Santa Fé and Chihuahua, no



American trader appears to have sought this region for five years. A party then outfitting from St. Louis was seized at the New Mexican frontier, hurried to an inland dungeon, and kept in durance nine miserable years. News of this harsh treatment, and of the revolutionary movement which was upheaving the social structure of all New Spain, proved sufficiently deterrent to keep any organized expeditions from risking the hazard of the Southwest trade, until the third decade of the nineteenth century. More favorable reports being then received, several caravans were fitted out, and the real history of the Santa Fé trail began.

Among the early merchants of St. Louis, the name of Bernard Pratte, near relative of the Chouteaus and Labbadies, was connected with important fur-trading enterprises. In the summer of 1824 Pratte's eldest son headed a caravan destined for the Santa Fé, his party being rendezvoused at the company's post upon the Missouri, not far from the present site of Omaha. There, while waiting for its final equipment, the expedition was reinforced by four free-traders who had left their home upon the Gasconade River, the frontier of Missouri settlement, and with a small outfit had ascended the river to this point, bent on trading and hunting upon its upper waters. Barred from their enterprise by the lack of an authoritative license for dealing with the Indians, the little band were easily persuaded to join Pratte's party. Two of these recruits were the heroes of our tale — Sylvester Pattie and his son James Ohio.

For three generations the Patties had been frontiersmen. Restlessly they moved onward as the border advanced, always hovering upon the outskirts of civilization, seeking to better their condition by taking up fresh lands in untilled places, and remorselessly fighting the aborigines who disputed their invasion. They longed unceasingly for new adventures in the mysterious West, that allured them with its strange fascination. Brave, honest, God-fearing, vigorous

in mind and body, dependent on their own resources, for food and for defense chiefly dependent on the familiar rifle, the Patties belonged to that class of Americans who conquered the wilderness, and yearly pushed the frontier westward.

The career of the grandfather and father of our author, as in simple phrase he relates it in his Introduction, is typical of those of the founders of Kentucky, and the early settlers of the rich valley of the Missouri. To have early emigrated from Virginia to Kentucky, to have aided in the defense of Bryant's Station, and to have served under Colonel Benjamin Logan, and the still more renowned Kentuckian, George Rogers Clark, was unquestionable guaranty to the proud title of pioneer. It was typical, also, that the grandfather, having acquired some local fame and position, and attained the rank of magistrate, the father, tiring of Kentucky, should, like the Boones, join the stream of emigration to Missouri. There, history repeated itself. The War of 1812-15 breaking out, the frontier blockhouses must again withstand the assaults of savages. Lieutenant Pattie's relief of Cap-au-Gris, upon the Missouri, takes rank with Logan's Revolutionary exploits at St. Asaph's. The war ended, and the country filling up, "Mr. Pattie, possessing a wandering and adventurous spirit," once more removed to the utmost borders of civilization, and built a mill upon the rapid Gasconade. Here he was in a fair way to prosperity, when domestic affliction sent him forth into the wilderness, taking with him his eldest son, who "inheriting the love of a rifle through so many generations, and nursed amid such scenes, he begged so earnestly of his father that he might be allowed to accompany the expedition, that he prevailed." Thus began that long series of adventures, so full of hazard and suffering that their unvarnished narration would seem the invention of romance, did not one often find counterparts in the experiences of other Western wanderers.

Recruited to the number of a hundred and sixteen, Pratte's caravan advanced first toward the Pawnee villages of the Platte. Because of his long experience in border warfare, Sylvester Pattie was now chosen commander, and thereafter arranged the details of march and guard. The Pawnee were inclined to be friendly, their chiefs having recently visited the Great Father at Washington; but in rescuing an ill-treated native child, captured by them on a recent raid against a hostile tribe, the whites were nearly embroiled with these pirates of the plains. Securing the little waif, also some Indian guides, the Pawnee were left behind August 11, 1824, and the advance to the Southwest begun. Day after day the party toiled across the plains, their journey filled with stirring incident. Once, prepared to fight a band of from six to eight hundred well-mounted Comanche, the whites were rescued by a rival tribe of horsemen, who, "with a noise like distant thunder," swept in between the hostile lines, and won the battle for them. Again, amid a vagrant party of Indians, the father of the little captive suddenly appeared, and presented the captain of the expedition with tokens of his gratitude for the rescue. Upon the twentieth of August, buffalo were first encountered; and twenty days later, on the ridge between the waters of the Kansas and the Arkansas, young Pattie was introduced to that then formidable enemy, the grizzly bear. From that time forward, these fierce creatures attacked the camp almost nightly; on one occasion, a member of the party was caught and so maimed by a grizzly that he shortly after died of his wounds.

On the twentieth of October the caravan reached the mountains, and after a difficult crossing descended into the attractive valley of Taos, the New Mexican frontier. Pattie was surprised at the primitive life and customs of the inhabitants of New Mexico, of which in a few unadorned sentences he gives us a vivid picture. Passing on to Santa Fé, the