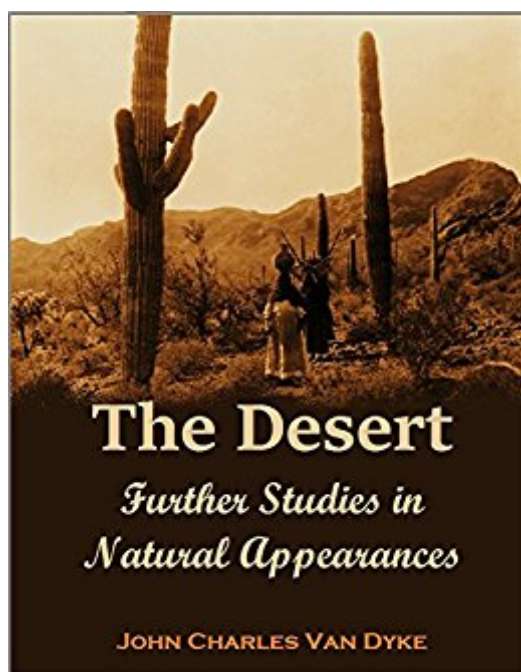


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The Desert: Further Studies In Natural Appearances (1902)



Synopsis

John Charles Van Dyke (1861–1931) was an American art historian and critic. Whoever has not seen the American Desert, in some part of it, under some of its aspects, will probably think this book a collection of extravagances or an extended idealization. At least, if the present reviewer had not often beheld portions of that remarkable region, this might have been his opinion. With a quickened mass of kaleidoscopic memories rising before him, it is easy to see more in these pages, than the mere beauty of description, for which Mr. Van Dyke should be commended, "Perhaps I can tell you something of what I have seen in these two years of wandering," says Mr. Van Dyke; "but I shall never be able to tell you the grandeur of these mountains, nor the glory of color that wraps the burning sands at their feet. We shoot arrows at the sun in vain; yet still we shoot. And so it is that my book is only an excuse for talking about the beautiful things in this desert world that stretches down the Pacific Coast, and across Arizona and Sonora. The desert has gone a-begging for a word of praise these many years. It never had a sacred poet; it has in me only a lover." But the lover almost insures the poet. To prove how nearly the poet asserts himself, one could quote many fine passages, describing color, and form, and atmosphere. The lover is a painter, surely; and often he becomes the philosopher, as instance this: "The accomplishments of Columbus, of Cortez, of Coronado, were great; but what of those who first ventured out upon these sands and erected missions almost in the heart of the desert, who single-handed coped with dangers from man and nature, and who lived and died without the slightest hope of reward here on earth? Has not the sign of the cross cast more men in heroic mold than ever the glitter of the crown or the flash of the sword?" So the desert can teach real truths; and this chronicler of it has learned them. The desert can supply much valuable information; and it does this through Mr. Van Dyke's book. Since its first publication, in 1901, the book has passed through several printings; and now this Kindle edition comes forth in eloquent testimony to the popularity of a work describing a region not supposedly popular.

Contents

THE APPROACH
THE MAKE OF THE DESERT
THE BOTTOM OF THE BOWL
THE SILENT RIVER
LIGHT, AIR, AND COLOR
DESERT SKY AND CLOUDS
ILLUSIONS
CACTUS
AND GREASE-WOOD
DESERT ANIMALS
WINGED LIFE
MESAS AND
FOOT-HILLS
MOUNTAIN-BARRIER

This book originally published in 1902 has been reformatted for the Kindle and may contain an occasional defect from the original publication or from the reformatting.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This review is regarding the Kindle edition, not the book. I was excited to find one of my favorite books in Kindle form until I purchased it. The text is all justified, with no line breaks, making for a very frustrating and unpleasant reading experience. Until a better formatted version is out, I suggest sticking with the paper version.

Before Mary Austin and Edward Abbey came John Van Dyke, an art history professor who was the first to write about desert appreciatively from an aesthetic viewpoint. Some of the passages of desert description in this book have never been surpassed. Van Dyke also tackles the questions of desert ecology and evolution, although his expositions of those are less reliable than his aesthetic observations since he wasn't a scientist or a naturalist. With an introduction by Peter Wild, a leading scholar of desert writing, this is the edition of Van Dyke's classic to have. And nobody can begin to understand the North American southwest desert without reading Van Dyke, despite his sometimes outdated science.

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with Sketches More Joel on Software: Further Thoughts on Diverse and Occasionally Related
Matters That Will Prove of Interest to Software Developers, Designers, ... or Ill Luck, Work with
Them in Some Capacity

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