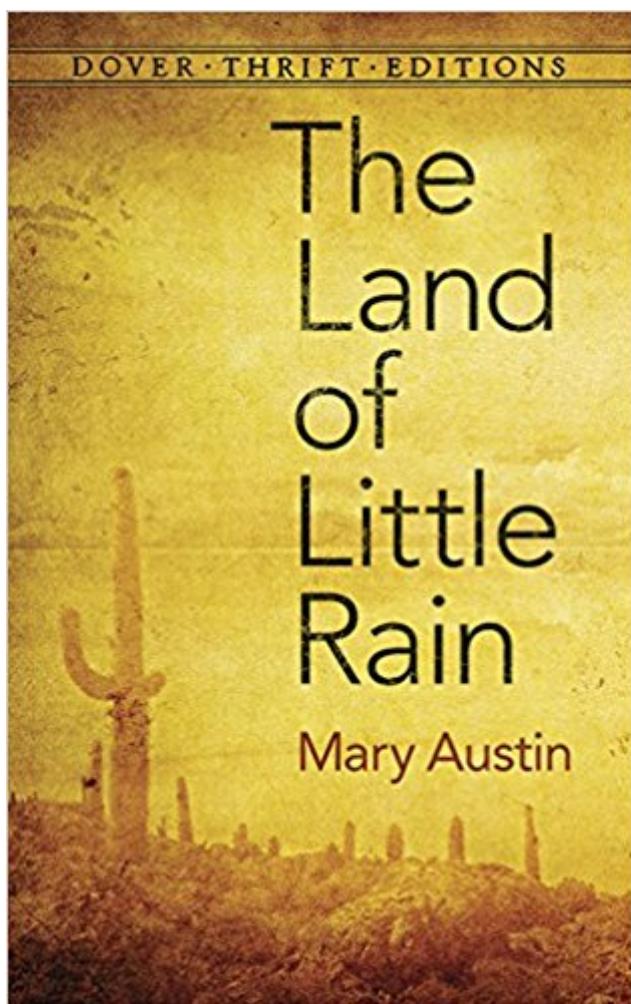


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The Land Of Little Rain (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

The enduring appeal of the desert is strikingly portrayed in this poetic study, which has become a classic of the American Southwest. First published in 1903, it is the work of Mary Austin (1868–1934), a prolific novelist, poet, critic, and playwright, who was also an ardent early feminist and champion of Indians and Spanish-Americans. She is best known today for this enchanting paean to the vast, arid, yet remarkably beautiful lands that lie east of the Sierra Nevadas, stretching south from Yosemite through Death Valley to the Mojave Desert. Comprising fourteen sketches, the book describes plants, animals, mountains, birds, skies, Indians, prospectors, towns, and other aspects of the desert in serene, beautifully modulated prose that conveys the timeless cycles of life and death in a harsh land. Readers will never again think of the desert as a lifeless, barren environment but rather as a place of rare, austere beauty, rich in plant and animal life, weaving a lasting spell over its human inhabitants.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Mary Austin was a poet, a pioneer, and a patriot." --Terry Tempest Williams --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Between the high Sierras south from Yosemite--east and south over a very great assemblage of broken ranges beyond Death Valley, and on illimitably into the Mojave Desert" is the territory that

Mary Austin calls the Land of Little Rain. In this classic collection of meditations on the wonders of this region, Austin generously shares "such news of the land, of its trails and what is astir in them, as one lover of it can give to another." Her vivid writings capture the landscape--from burnt hills to sun-baked mesas--as well as the rich variety of plant and animal life, and the few human beings who inhabit the land, including cattlemen, miners, and Paiute Indians. This Modern Library Paperback Classic is set from the original 1903 edition. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I recently read Karen Surina Mulford's "Trailblazers: Twenty Amazing Western Women (Great American Women Series)" which provided brief biographical sketches of the lives of twenty women of the American West. Regrettably, more than half I had never heard of before. And one was Mary Hunter Austin. Mulford's sketch contained profuse praise for Austin's classic historical, environmental and ethnological work, "The Land of Little Rain." The work is a result of Austin's insatiable curiosity and keen observations made during almost two decades of life in Independence, California, which is still a very small town of under a 1000 people. It is located in the Owens Valley, and lies between the mountains of the Sierra Nevada, and the very lowlands of Death Valley. As the title implies, it doesn't rain much there. Austin's work was first published in 1903, and Penguin deserves kudos for keeping it in print. In part, it recalls the naturalist observations of Thoreau's "Walden", but in a desert setting. She doesn't really say how she does it, or in what company, if any, but it was obvious that she did substantial hiking, long before the days of well-marked trails (or accurate weather forecasts). Thus we learn of the "streets of the mountains" written before the advent of the motor car. Her vocabulary is rich and dense, with the names of the plants and animals... and I did wonder how she learned them, prior to guide books. I still have difficulty knowing what a clematis is; it was simply different paths of knowledge in those pre-electronic days. Of the 14 essays, several are devoted to the human inhabitants of this area. There were two impressive ones on the American Indians. It was tough to be a "medicine man" in the Paiutes tribe. If three patients died, the "medicine man" would be executed. The very real paperwork travails of modern day doctors pale into insignificance by comparison. In her essay entitled "The Basket Maker" Austin described how Seyavi, of the Paiutes, made baskets that were so tight that one could cook in them... by dropping in heated rocks. Another excellent essay, "The Pocket Hunter" was on one of the (white) miners/prospectors that provided the initial impetus for the settlement of California. The "pocket" being the "sweet spot" in an ore vein that contained the most concentrated amount of the mineral sought. A few of her thoughts that resonated: she was into the "travel light" mode before it was popularized - "And here is a hint if you would attempt the stateliest

approaches; travel light, and as much as possible live off the land. Mulligatwany soup and tinned lobster will not bring you the favor of the woodlanders." Observing the natural world: "What one has to get used to in flowers at high altitudes is the bleaching of the sun. Hardly do they hold their virgin color for a day, and this early fading before their function is performed gives them a pitiful appearance not according with their hardihood." In terms of settling the often contentious battles over water "rights," Austin reaches back to the classics: "Jesus Montana...walked into five of Judson's bullets and his eternal possession on the same occasion. That was the Homeric age of settlement and passed into tradition." Today the small village of Independence is just a spot on US 385 through which so many residents of Los Angeles have to slow down a bit in, as they race up towards Mammoth Lakes, the Muir Wilderness and the "back door" to Yosemite, and such more "scenic" places. A read of Austin's classic work might convince the traveler that they had arrived at their destination before they reached the more "scenic" ones. 5-stars.

Neither of the boxes labeled "Predictable", "Some twists" and "Full of surprises" is applicable to this book. There is no plot, therefore no development. The book, written in the early 1900's, is a love poem of the deserts and mountains of the West--the "Land of Little Rain". It is a beautiful, poetic description of the land, flora, fauna, and people of the region in which Mrs. Austin lived and traveled. The places are fictitious, and probably the people, but this does not detract from the beauty of the descriptions, the love of the land she exudes, or the love and respect of the people she knew and met. A wonderful love-song to the land, animals, plants and people and to a time gone by. If you have ever visited such regions of the West, it will mean even more.+

The language was a little too archaic for my taste and the author seems to have gone to great lengths to obscure the locations she writes about in her essays. Still there were at least some of her descriptions/scenes that rang true if one is interested in the western US at the beginning of the 20th century. It doesn't take long to read.

This was a wonderful journey to places and times that no longer exist. It was narrated with a great voice that seemed to be painting tales in my mind. I felt as if I were actually there, with all my senses engaged. This is a wonderful book that I would recommend to anyone with a desire to be there and then. The writing pulls you into it.

I really enjoyed this one, but I am a desert native. I was thrilled to recognize my desert, even though

Austin's prose was written quite some time before I was born. She does a great job of making the flora and the fauna come alive, and giving the desert its own personality. There were moments of humor and sadness in it, especially the scene where she described a bobcat whose kittens drowned in its own lair due to flood waters. It was very well-done. Although I got it when it was a free daily deal, it's definitely worth paying for.

I was disappointed because of the cover art I thought it was about the Sonoran desert. Not where I wanted to read about. I don't believe they have Saguaro cactus in the area this is about. Very misleading

If you have ever travelled to the regions of the Southwest that Hunter writes about you can appreciate her vivid descriptions of these regions. She expresses a real love of the people, landscape and ecology of this part of America.

Not a story so much as a description of the lands of America. Good to listen to at night before bed.

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