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PREFACE

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Handwritten notes: "Handwritten notes" and "Balmes C. L. St."

This is essentially a book of photography. It is the portrait of a river with a sequence of related subjects. To present the physical appearance of the river and the land through which it flows, augmented by glimpses of the life in its valley, or rather series of valleys, has been no easy task, but nonetheless a most challenging one. To find the right place and then to be there, at the right time of day under the right conditions of light and at the right time of year, has been difficult indeed. It is my hope that I have succeeded in finding the most important aspects and places, though I am sure that my sins of omission are many. The accompanying text offers only the backbone of the vast and interesting history of the Rio Grande, and as I am a photographer, not a writer, this book is "authored by the illustrator" rather than "illustrated by the author." Perhaps the greatest difficulty in selecting material, both as to the pictures and the text, has been in deciding what to exclude.

THE SOURCE of the Rio Grande lies in Colorado's most beautiful mountains, but the history of this region is comparatively recent and consequently short. The MIDSTREAM portion, flowing through New Mexico, holds without question the greatest historic and social interest; the Santa Fe area is a center not only of most of the oldest history of the United States, but also of the far older history of the Indians. THE BORDER portion of the river, separating Texas and Mexico, is high-lighted by the scenic grandeur of the Big Bend area, after which the river winds its way lazily across endless miles of flat country where interest lies in the natural and agricultural growth, and in the remnants of a past which, with one exception, is not so old as that of New Mexico. The part of Mexico along the border is the most arid and least productive area of this otherwise rich and picturesque country, and life in this region is scattered and sparse. Changes are coming rapidly, however, with the recent

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completion of El Azúcar Dam, and will increase with the completion of the International Dam designed to insure water for both sides of the delta area.

I have traveled the full length of the river three times, with many intermittent trips to important areas, in my endeavor to find the best selection of subject matter. There have been moments of great disappointment and moments of elation. The greatest handicap has been the weather. That I should have encountered two years of extreme drought could not have been foreseen. The work was begun at the close of the war in 1945, and therefore the difficulties of travel by car as well as ~~any~~ of the scarcity of photographic materials were added problems. The material included in this book represents my best effort for the greater part of three years, and it is my hope that it gives some impression of the scenic beauty and historic interest of the Rio Grande.

The cooperation I have met and the friends I have made along the whole of the river's length have been inspiring. Without such help, little would have been accomplished. From Mr. Carrol Wetherill, who took me on the horsetack trip to the source of the river, To Captain Stone who flew me over the mouth, I have met with the most generous courtesy and helpfulness. The list of persons who have so kindly shared their time and knowledge is a long one indeed, and to one and all I offer my most sincere thanks. The passage from the historic poem by Don Gaspar Villagr  was translated into English poetry for me by Pray Angelico Chavez. It is fitting that a Franciscan Padre, a descendant of the early Spanish settlers in New Mexico, should do this, and to him I am especially grateful.

Santa Fe, New Mexico

Laura Gilpin