



HEFFNER

The Milburns—George, ex '30, and Vivien, '31 educ.—combine literature and school in idyllic measure at Norman. Mr Milburn writes for the magazines and is at work on a novel, while Mrs Milburn comes home from school to prepare the meals. Mr Milburn's new book «Oklahoma Town» has just been published

The Milburns

BY SALLYE LITTLE BRANDT

Love in a cottage—and a knack for turning an ironic tale—

Well, what, you may ask, has the love to do with the knack or the knack to do with the love?

The one provides the other, which ever way you may put it, according to George Milburn, ex '30, youthful writer and former student at the University of Oklahoma, who is rapidly making a name for himself with stories appearing in such publications as *Vanity Fair*, *American Mercury*, *Scribner's*, *College Humor* and with two books to his credit, one of which, *Oklahoma Town*, is just off the press of Harcourt-Brace and company, publishers.

But it isn't so much the "love in the cottage" part of this married life that links up with the knack for turning an ironic

tale as it is the bill part of the married life.

George's "break" came after his marriage to Vivien Custard, a beautiful irresponsible child of a co-ed. But the "break," which happened to be acceptance of a series of sketches by the *American Mercury*, just chanced to take place at that time. George Milburn has been testing his hand at the game almost since childhood.

The part that the marriage played was in his activities after the break, which activities have been one bit of writing after another and dead earnest persistence with his work.

The two youngsters play at keeping house, in a dream of a little cottage just off the campus and near the edge of Norman to the southeast. Vivien rushes

from a Greek quiz to her tiny, gay, yellow and green kitchen to pop a meat loaf into her green stove and then, after setting the heat, disappear into a bedroom such as one sees pictured in some house furnishing magazine.

In a few minutes out she dashes (Vivien always dashes, she couldn't walk slowly if she had to and she usually hasn't time to, anyway) out the back door and across to the barn where stands her second love. At times George has been positively jealous of Dan, the riding horse which Vivien keeps at school, and there have been times when it would appear that Dan was the first love. At any rate Vivien will tell you Dan is a love.

Home from her ride she is more often than not met by George at the back door,

with the message that so and so called and will be out for dinner—or so and so dropped in and he asked them to stay—and there she applies her best mathematics to stretch the meat loaf for a foursome when it had been prepared for a twosome.

For almost every night is "company" night with the Milburn's. The tiny living room with its rows of colorful books, its gaily decorative curtains, its quaint antique chairs and its open fireplace is just too inviting.

When Vivien studies, and when George writes is a mystery to those more mature friends whose well regulated routine lives, with a time for this and a time for that, have never permitted them to squeeze in half so much accomplishment or fun as these two young moderns.

But Vivien does study and she does find time between meat loafs and Greek quizzes and horseback rides to do a great amount of reading, and to write an occasional lovely bit of modern verse.

And George does write—to which fact can bear witness some twenty sketches in the *American Mercury*, nine in *Vanity Fair*, one in *College Humor*, one which has been sold to but not yet published in *Scribner's*, a collection of hobo ballads, *The Hobo's Hornbook* published by Ives Washburn in 1930 and *Oklahoma Town*, a collection of the sketches which have been appearing in magazines.

He is writing a novel and continues to write stories to the despair of the novel; in fact, for though this love in a cottage is all very nice, there are, George reminds one, gas bills and light bills and water bills and a regular Heinz 57 varieties of other bills to keep the cottage going.

George Milburn's friends of boyhood days must find it difficult to imagine him ensconced in the comforts of a warm, tidy, gay little picture-book house with a comfortable book-lined nook of a study aloof, high and quiet occupying the entire second floor of the house.

For his yet brief life has been that of the adventurer, the rover, the bum, the hobo, the carefree or whatsoever term you are accustomed to using for those delightfully independent souls who can fare forth and see things sans money, sans worry, sans all the hectic little ties that make the most of us akin to vegetables rooted to the soil.

At twelve he hopped a freight at his home in Coweta, Oklahoma, where he was born, and dropped off at Muskogee to attend the county fair.

In his junior year in high school at Linneus, Missouri, where he was wintering with an aunt, he made his first real hoboeing trip, which took him to St. Louis, where he went to visit a friend

who was then teaching in the river city.

After high school he worked a year and a half on the *Tulsa Tribune*. He gave a quart of blood for a transfusion operation and then spent several months ill in a Muskogee hospital. Well again, he developed a yen to attend the Dayton trial and with little besides the yen to go he started off walking to Dayton, Tennessee. This trip ended in DeQueen, Arkansas, where he decided to turn back for home. From home this time he went to Stillwater and enrolled as a part time student in the A. & M. college, his other activities included delivering papers, handling university publicity, writing a column for the school paper and editing the comic magazine.

While on the *Tribune* in Tulsa he attended the University of Tulsa and he wrote "A Closeup of a Christian College" which attracted the attention of Haldeman-Julius, publisher in Girard, Kansas. Haldeman-Julius gave him a job in Girard and for some time he edited little blue books for the Kansan.

The blue books took him to Chicago where he gathered much of his material for the hobo ballad book, spending much time "local coloring" with that particular type of human flotsam in their windy city habitats.

As always he started the trip to Chicago from Girard "hoofing it" with occasional rides and when too tired to walk and no other possibility of going presented itself, hopping a freight.

One puzzling thing about this remarkable youngster's career has been the lack of parental interference, and having been one of those sweet young things whose mother lay awake and often paced the floor until I was safely tucked away in my bed even after I had passed the age of twenty-one, I ventured on this question.

"Well, I guess they did worry about me a lot," he confessed, "In fact I know so now more than I did then. I did write and let them know where I was usually and once dad became worried about me in Chicago because I had not written and had the police look me up.

"On that particular trip to Chicago from Girard I had nearly frozen riding the blinds of a train out of Kansas City so I stopped off with relatives in Missouri. They were greatly distressed that I was without an overcoat and chancing it on rides. Before I left they insisted on providing me with an overcoat and a ticket with Pullman to Chicago.

"I'll never forget the porter on that train. I wore the most disreputable looking clothes except for the overcoat and I carried as baggage a canvas laundry bag. By the time I reached Chicago I was so put out by the looks from that porter that just to put him in his place

again and make myself think I was somebody I left him a very large tip."

George made one trip to New York City but stayed only a few days.

"I do not know how to describe it, but New York is the up-town for the hobo of the road. Country boys can go to Chicago and get by—it seems to be the in-between place for them. But you have to have polish, money, blase, experience,—I can't just name it but anyhow I am not taking in New York again until I have money with me," he said.

From New York he went back to Haldeman-Julius for a time, then home and then started for New Orleans.

This trip ended at Fort Smith and then he found himself at Mena, Arkansas and Commonwealth college, where he stayed for a time working on the building of a great stone fireplace, but not attending school.

Finally he made his way to New Orleans and there he lived for a year. He did typing for William Slavens McNutt and James Hopper, made the acquaintance of John McClure, '15 arts-sc., whose lofty writing ideals made a great impression. He circled the gulf on a fruit boat, he collected more hobo ballads, he saw the possibilities of a book, he met interesting people—and then suddenly he decided to come home and the next he knew he had come to Norman and enrolled as a freshman in the university.

When he came to the university it was to take a secretarial course in preparation for a job he hoped to get that would take him on more travels. But the job, a political one, fell through and with the purpose gone he still remained at the university, having met Vivien in the meantime.

The urge to write has been in him since childhood, when his greatest thrill was seeing his father come home with books under his arm. As a boy he was a voracious reader.

The urge to write became more urgent when he saw Vivien and the need to write became positively acute when they decided to marry. The first semester after their marriage they lived in a tiny apartment, the next year they kept house in an upstairs light-housekeeping place and took most of their meals out.

This fall George is devoting all of his time to his writing and has not enrolled in school. They have leased a four room new stucco house just at the edge of town where Vivien can have her riding horse and George can have quiet for his work.

The "break" into the big magazines came with the publication of two sketches in *Folk-Say, a Regional Miscellany*, edit-

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... snow or sand, and in winter an astrakhan cap may occasionally be seen on the heads of some.

When the elevated train has passed with its roar, and the sunlight creeps through in patches, the scene takes on an aspect far removed from Manhattan. The smell of charcoal brazier reaches the nostril, the eyes close, and in a trice the street becomes the crowded bazaars of the East. After all, Manhattan is but one remove away, and not so very different from Damascus or Samarcand.

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A PULITZER POSSIBILITY

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 211)

... stirred itself to produce it. But not so glad as Mr Riggs should be."

A two column article in the *Times* was headed "And Now Lynn Riggs. After Several Ventures in the Theater, He Arrives with *Green Grow the Lilacs*." It is a most favorable biographical sketch, in which it is revealed that Mr Riggs is at work on a new play, tentatively titled *The Cherokee Night*, dealing with the passing of the Cherokees. The article quotes Dr Isaac Goldberg in the *Transcript*: "It is a great man, indeed, who has the courage of his exaltations. This is the quiet but unshatterable courage that characterizes Lynn Riggs." The Newspaper Enterprise Association in its weekly drama letter from New York to its clients remarked: "Broadway will probably eat it up."

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THE MILBURNS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 208)

... ed by B. A. Botkin of the English faculty and published by the University Press. John McClure, who is one of H. L. Menckens's favorite authors, praised George's contribution highly in his "Literature and Less" department in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, and recommended George's work to the editor of *Mercury*. Vivien talks some of taking an M. A. next year after she has finished—George talks some of going to New York and taking up a newspaper offer which has been made to him—they talk some of going to Arkansas and living on a farm there (this being his secret ambition)—and they talk some of this and some of that—

But the responsibilities of life are not weighing heavily on either of their shoulders and since the future has always taken care of itself it may continue to do so and so—

Well, the possibility that Norman may keep them remains.



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