

Belles lettres and bell ringers

Contemporary Oklahoma

Oklahoma Town. By George Milburn, ex '30. New York. Harcourt, Brace and Company. 1931. \$2.00.

Oklahoma has been an appealing background in recent years to certain American authors.

Courtney Ryley Cooper among the outsiders began the Oklahoma movement with his novel *Oklahoma* published in 1926. Mr Cooper interviewed Pawnee Bill and from that derived a story of the opening of Oklahoma.

Several years ago Edna Ferber swept through Oklahoma and pencilled notes about the glorious old days we like to call "pioneer" in this state. From the many interviews came *Cimarron*.

Lynn Riggs, ex '25, through poetry and drama, has been reproducing the old Indian Territory scene more or less regularly for the past five years. Mr Riggs is authentic. But even he takes Oklahoma of a score of years ago for his setting.

Mr George Milburn is different. He is the first of the modern group who treats of contemporary Oklahoma, who finds in the Oklahoma community the same basic traits of human nature that actuate people in New York.

Mr Milburn has been shrewd enough to appreciate the possibilities of his native state while living within it. He does not use telescopic lenses to photograph the scene; he uses close-ups. His view is not softened by iris tints; it is the natural hue, as he sees it.

And since it is contemporary Oklahoma, opinion will differ as to the fairness of the portraits in *Oklahoma Town*. Some Oklahomans are hyper-sensitive to criticism of the state. Others demand glowing descriptions. Certainly, no chamber of commerce would use Mr Milburn's book as propaganda. But out of the reams of literature about the state, I venture that there is none as interesting as *Oklahoma Town*.

Many of the stories in the book have appeared in *Vanity Fair* and the *American Mercury*. They have been harmonized in this book, though, and there is a continuing thread of interest from the first story to the last. There is the town doctor, Boyd; Earl Abernathy, the mortician; Cobb, the owner of the Kentucky hotel; Jud Spafford, the town marshal. They

are people you would meet with as readily in an Indiana town as in Oklahoma. But there are some deep seated prejudices that you would not find in Indiana, that characterize the Oklahoma town. And most of the people in the town are individualists; and Oklahomans are individualists, more so than in almost any state. What Mr Milburn has done is to photograph some of the principal individuals of the town; and he has done an extraordinarily good job of it.

That is made possible by Mr Milburn's smooth, incisive style that reads itself. His style is close-clipped, neat as a newly sheared sheep. Few writers of today write with the measured economy in the use of words that characterizes Mr Milburn's style. That very frugality of utterance that gives the style its charm has led to the criticism sometimes heard, that Mr Milburn lacks sympathy for his characters. There is a powerful lot of sympathy in this book, but it is sympathy restrained sometimes by indignation that wells up like tears but is kept back perforce, and sometimes by pity at social injustice, that would be rebellion. Only once does Mr Milburn unloose at all the measured restraint, for there is a slight chuckle in "Yellow Paint."

The closely-cropped sentences of *Oklahoma Town* make each of the mosaics in the book effortless to read, and *Oklahoma Town*—a novel in short, short stories—will find you reading it in one sitting. The book is a brilliant performance. And there is a note of pathos in the final story, "Hail and Farewell" that epitomizes the small town in our day—when the gayer life of Tulsa, Kansas City or New York beckons, the ambitious youth of Oklahoma town runs for the train all eagerness to bid farewell to the sheltering village.

J. A. B.

A portrait of Lizzie

The Lore of the Lizzie Label. By B. A. Botkin, editor of *Folk-Say, a Regional Miscellany*, and member of the department of English of the university. Reprinted from *American Speech*. Thirteen pages.

Almost everyone who owns an automobile has a pet name for it. The "Ford Jokes" have long been the best single piece of advertising media in America. Mr Botkin has collected an extraordinary num-

ber of these labels which indicate that the Ford has become a part of folk-speech through the multitude of the characterizations of people throughout the country. "The Lizzie label is a special form of the Ford joke, which is as much a part of American humor as the rube joke, the doctor joke. . . . the psychology of the Ford joke is likewise the psychology of the defense mechanism. In a world of cars with more distinguished pedigrees, and more money in the bank, with less kinks and knocks in the motor and more speed. . . . Lizzie had to be on the defensive—like the dog with the tin can tied to its tail." The "flivver marathon" between Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Aggies is mentioned. Mr Botkin's paper is most interesting and exposes a national weakness with thoroughness and amusement.

Overproduction of oil

Developments in the Petroleum Refining Industry as Related to Overproduction of Crude Oil. By Edward C. Petty of the College of Business Administration of the university. With seven tables. Thirty-two pages. Norman. University of Oklahoma Press. 1931. Price seventy-five cents.

To be reviewed later. This is the first of the University of Oklahoma Business Studies and is an exceedingly valuable, though condensed, study of overexpansion of the refining industry and its relation to crude oil overproduction. Particularly valuable to oil men will be Doctor Petty's chapter "Recent Geographic Changes in Refinery Location."

A great tribute

Oklahoma—Youth's University. By G. B. Parker, '07. Foreword by Irvin S. Cobb. Linoleum blocks in two colors by P. J. Conkwright. Facsimile page of opening page of Mr Cobb's foreword. Sixteen pages. University of Oklahoma Press. 1931. Free on application to the registrar of the university, as long as the edition lasts.

Mr Parker, editor of the Scripps-Howard newspapers, has reached into his memories and produced the finest short tribute to Oklahoma and to its state university that we have seen. Mr Cobb's tribute is one that should thrill anyone: ". . . I may say of him (Mr Parker) and for him that he amply fulfills my ideal of what a properly rounded-out newspaper man should be. He has energy, public spirit, vision, initiative, daring, honesty and enthusiasm. . . . He has a conscience, which to any man and notably a man engaged in his calling, is worth more than rubies. . . . He is one of America's outstanding journalistic successes. And he is more than that: He is a grand success as a human being, because he has sweetness, sanity and compassion."