

Belles lettres and bell ringers

John Joseph Mathews. *Wah'Kon-Tah*. The Osage and the White Man's Road, Norman. University of Oklahoma Press, 1932, \$2.50.

FOR three hundred years Anglo-Americans and Indians have lived side by side on the American continent without in the least understanding each other. To the American the Indian has been, according to circumstances, a ferocious, blood-thirsty savage, an opportunity for getting rich quick, a hopeless degenerate or a noble, though untutored child of nature. Many of these misconceptions developed as a result of the circulation of popular literature, which may be divided into three groups: to the first group belong books of the Fenimore Cooper-Longfellow school, whose Indians are possessed of super-human physical prowess and nobility of soul; to the second, the wild-west classics of the stripe of Colonel Prentiss Ingram (the Colonel will be remembered for having immortalized that noble sentiment "Bang, bang, another pesky redskin bit the dust"); to the third belong the realists who see or profess to see in the Indian of the present day a hopeless misfit, doomed to extinction by a civilization which he cannot understand and of which he is capable of absorbing only the vices. It is safe to say that even the Santa Fe group, who write with both intelligence and sympathy, have generally fallen into one or the other of these errors.

There are, however, four men in the United States who are engaged in giving to the world a new conception of the Indian, a conception which takes him at his own valuation, that is, as a man, a normal human being living, not only a normal life, but the only normal life possible in his peculiar environment, a human being no better and no worse than his white brother, but *different*. Three of these four men live in Oklahoma and it is due to their efforts that Oklahoma is rapidly becoming recognized as the center of the most interesting phase of the flourishing regional development of literature. The most recent of these additions to the list of authorities on the Indian is John Joseph Mathews, '20, whose book *Wah'Kon-Tah*, published in November by the University of Oklahoma Press, was chosen

as the Book-of-the-Month Club offering for that month.

Mr Mathews, whose career in the University of Oklahoma was interrupted by the World war, training for which earned him a lieutenant's commission in the air service (without however gaining him the longed for over-seas service) graduated from the university in 1920. After graduation he spent three years in Oxford, taking a degree from Merton college, and rounded out his education by considerable travel in Europe and North Africa.

He is himself, descended from the famous old trapper-mountain man, William Shirley Williams, better known as Old Bill Williams, a compadre of Kit Carson and Jim Bridger, who about 1820 married a member of the Osage tribe. On his mother's side his blood is Norman French. Thus he has behind him the tradition of the American frontier, of the haughty Osage and of the sturdy yet dreamy French. But he is also a scholar and a thinker, steeped in the culture of two continents, and he is in his own right a poet and an artist in the use of words.

From his boyhood he was imbued with a love for the greatness of his Indian kinsmen; it was their stories that he loved to hear by the campfire, it was their games that he preferred to play on the hills and prairies of the Osage nation. When Major Laban J. Miles, the gentle, fearless, capable agent of the Osages, died in 1930 he left his diary and notes, the result of fifty years of service to his Indian wards, to young Mathews, who proceeded to shut himself up in his ranch home and devote a year to developing them into this book. It will be remembered that Major Miles was an uncle of President Hoover and that Hoover spent some time as an orphan boy on the Osage reservation.

Here, then, is a book about Indians which is absolutely different from the ordinary impressionistic account, written by an Indian who is separated from his people far enough to have a sane perspective, yet who is near enough to maintain his perfect sympathy and understanding; a man who is, moreover, not merely educated but cultured. It has little to do with the spectacular phases of Indian life, it does not deal in battles, wild rides, or ferocity but in Osage religion, states of mind, spiritual greatness;

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WAH'KON-TAH

by JOHN JOSEPH MATHEWS, '20

University of Oklahoma Press, Norman

in one word it is the soul of the Indian which appears in these pages. It is the inward being of a proud and essentially noble race of human beings who suddenly find their culture destroyed, their roots torn out, who were faced by an outlandish civilization which they could not understand and which they felt with all the patient scorn of their race, to be in many respects inferior to their own.

And yet, it is neither a document of protest against the abuses of the white man nor a plea for sympathy. It has pathos but it is not pathetic. For these Indians, as Mr Mathews shows them to us, while they may be said to be uncivilized, had yet achieved the ultimate desideratum of all civilization—they knew how to live. Differing from the white man who is never content to accept his environment without changing it and thereby destroying in large measure not only its beauty but its utility, they had succeeded in living themselves into their environment so that they became a constituent part of it; they met life unafraid because they were a part of the universe; they met death unafraid because they were the children of Wah'Kon-Tah—the Great Mysteries—God.

All of this richness, this spiritual self-sufficiency which lifts itself so far above the pettiness which mars so much of our American civilization is brought to a focus in the life of Major Miles. He devoted his life to the problem of conserving what was best in the Osage character and culture, at the same time striving to impart to his proteges what is best in American civilization. But the great charm of the book lies in its approach to the character of the Indians themselves, a full and lucid interpretation of their mysticism, their uprightness, their essential manliness. Add to this, that the book is written in prose poetry, a style which is fresh, vigorous, capable of the utmost emotional stress, of majestic dignity and of an ethereal beauty. As *Wah'Kon-Tah* is a document whose authenticity cannot be impeached, it is also a literary monument which deserves a very high, if not the highest place, in the literature of the Indian.—KENNETH C. KAUFMAN.



Trend of business

Arthur B. Adams. *Trend of Business, 1922-1932: Causes of the Depression and Economic Reforms Necessary to Establish a Business Equilibrium*. Harper and Brothers. New York. 1932. \$1.75 and 75 cents.

The effects of the industrial revolution first attracted attention to the business cycle, and various explanations have been given of this ever recurring and changing phenomenon. There are those who have sought an explanation in a preced-

ing series of causes, invariably the same, which result in certain effects; depression, recovery, prosperity, a crisis, and again depression. In his disagreement with this explanation of the business cycle, Dean Adams is a pathfinder.

In the first place, he emphasizes the ever changing nature of our economic life. Each business cycle is entirely distinct in its fundamentals from all preceding cycles. After World war effects are reflected strongly in the economic conditions of 1922-1932.

In the second place, in his explanation of the business cycle, Dean Adams emphasizes a balance of production and purchasing power. A lack of balance, which results necessarily in business depression, may arise in two ways. When the part of the national money income going to workers is not large enough to enable them to buy at prevailing prices, the consumers' goods which are unsold tend to pile up in the market. When the part of the national money income going to the property owners is too large, these owners overexpand and over capitalize their industries.

Recovery necessitates a return to a balanced economic life. Increased real wages, reduction of profits, restrictions on corporate activities and changes in financial and other economic institutions in prosperity and in depression, are evaluated in the light of their effects upon recovery. The author sees the necessity for many governmental restrictions and regulations.

The study of business cycles is a highly technical one. All too frequently the reader is discouraged by finely drawn and usually meaningless distinctions. Dean Adams, however, has successfully avoided these pitfalls. The book is written in a simple style, but excellent factual material and logical statement crowd its pages. One student of the subject has said: "It is the best explanation of the cause of the depression that I have seen." The proposals for economic recovery, also, are of importance in the formulation of governmental policy.—FREDERICK L. RYAN, University of Oklahoma.



Shorter mention

That the second Mrs Wilson was the principal reason for the break between President Wilson and Colonel House is the theory advanced by George Sylvester Viereck in *The Strangest Friendship in History*, published by Liveright, Inc., at \$3.

Medics may be interested in the eighty-page pamphlet of the New York City Cancer Committee called *Cancer: Then and Now*. It is free and may be had of the Chemical Foundation, New York City.