

Belles lettres and bell ringers

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CHOCTAW REPUBLIC, by Angie Debo. The University of Oklahoma Press. 1934. \$3.50.

THE publication of this volume is indeed timely, in view of the projected reversal of governmental policy toward the Indian embodied in the Wheeler-Howard bill and of the Choctaw convention at Hugo June 5-8, wherein the Choctaws elected their chief for the first time since the dissolution of tribal government.

The history of the Choctaws is by no means a closed book. Their primitive institutions have been studied by ethnologists, particularly John R. Swanton. The early historic period, when their country occupied a strategic position in the contest between Spain, France, England and lastly the United States for control of the North American continent, is familiar to students of colonial history. The story of the removal to the West, the first generation of development there and the Choctaw participation in the Civil War has been told in Mr. Grant Foreman's recent scholarly volumes.

The questions which concern the Choctaw of today, however, have their origin mainly in the Treaty of 1866 and in the complicated series of events which led up to the passage by Congress in 1906 of the law providing for the final winding up of tribal affairs. Miss Debo's is the first study devoted to this period of Choctaw history; therefore, aside from its value as a historical treatise, it is a book of vital actual interest to every Choctaw, as well as to everyone interested—for whatever reason—in Choctaw affairs. The Leased District, the coal lands, the schools, private vs. tribal ownership of land—these are questions debated almost as acrimoniously today as forty years ago.

Miss Debo, '18as, '33Ph.D., has done her work painstakingly, with little attempt at stylistic embellishment and with remarkable objectivity. There is in her book little of that effusive sentimentality and unconsciously patronizing sympathy with past wrongs which make so many books on Indians irksome to Indians. The history of the Choctaws, she tells us, "records the life of a separate people with a sharply defined citizenship, an autonomous government, and distinctive social customs and institutions. It reveals a political, so-

cial and economic existence as active and intensive and as closely circumscribed as that of any of the famous small republics of the past. On the other hand the separate thread of Choctaw history is at all times closely interwoven with the larger fabric of American history as a whole. Choctaw law was a curious combination of ancient tribal custom and Anglo-American legal practice; Choctaw churches and schools were copied almost wholly from the white man's society; and Choctaw economic institutions represented an attempt to adjust the primitive custom of tribal control of property to the European system of individual ownership."

The Choctaws emerge from her pages as "a people strangely gifted in thought and speech but slow in action and practical judgment, deeply susceptible to religious feeling but inclined to violent deeds, withdrawing to themselves in clannish reserve and yet kindly and friendly to other races, loving their country but condoning official corruption, receptive to new ideas but clinging to their institutions with desperate tenacity." If any people can be characterized so briefly, I suppose that Miss Debo's description of the Choctaws is as good as any. She bears witness repeatedly (as must any commentator) to their remarkable ability as diplomats and constitutional lawyers, as for a generation they fought off the intrigues of the railroads, the greed of the white settlers, the pressure of the Federal Government, all of which were seeking to destroy their institutions. It was only in 1890, when the non-citizen population outnumbered the Choctaws three to one and the maintenance of tribal authority had become almost impossible in the face of the legal and political complications accompanying the racial situation, that the futility of further struggle became apparent to the more clear-sighted of the leaders.

Whether or not the present situation is prophetic of the future, a knowledge of the events before 1906 is essential for anyone who would understand the questions which agitate the Choctaws today.

The book is copiously supplied with footnotes, bibliographies and illustrations. The University of Oklahoma has gained a reputation for publishing books whose physical appearance is worthy of their contents. *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* is no exception. Miss Debo was awarded a Ph.D. degree last year at the University for her researches into Choctaw history.—TODD DOWNING, '24as, '28M.A.

June "Space" Released

A satire, "The Histrionic West," by Walter S. Campbell, associate professor of English and honorary alumnus, 1931, features the June issue of *Space*, monthly literary magazine, edited by Dr. Benjamin A. Botkin, of the English department.

Campbell, using his pen name, Stanley Vestal, writes a clever satire on the art and history of ballyhoo in the middle-west from Indian days until the present. Its biting humorous indictment has been widely discussed.

Merle Hoylman, student who several years ago had a poem appear in *Hound and Horn*, has contributed a piece of prose writing, "Body." Miss Hoylman's home is in Ponca City. Eugene Dyche, Oklahoma City student, answered the literary discussion contributed to the May issue by Paul Snodgrass, associate editor of *Books Abroad*.

Third Annual Writers' Forum

The third annual Oklahoma writers' forum is being held on the campus this summer with meetings scheduled each Thursday night in the Oklahoma Union.

The series was opened in June by Dr. Edward Howard Griggs, New York lecturer and author. T. H. Brewer, head of the University department of English, was the second speaker.

Speakers for July include Dr. Benjamin A. Botkin, editor of *Space* and *Folk-Say*; Kenneth Kaufman, co-editor of *Books Abroad* and literary editor of the *Daily Oklahoman*; Paul Snodgrass, associate editor of *Books Abroad*; and Norman Macleod, poet and author of *Horizons of Death*.

Callaway on Stage

Joe Callaway, '34ex, formerly of Ardmore, has been cast in minor speaking parts in six Shakespearean plays showing this summer at the Globe Theater in the English village at the World's Fair. Callaway has appeared in "Julius Cæsar" and "The Taming of the Shrew." He was active in Playhouse productions on the campus during the past year.

Delos Walker Quoted in Digest

The Literary Digest for June 16 quotes a number of prominent business leaders on their view of the college graduate and includes Delos Walker, '12ex, general manager of R. H. Macy & Company of New York. Mr. Walker is quoted as advising the college graduate:

"Self-confidence is indispensable to any one seeking a job. If the average college graduate were more liberally endowed with it, his chances of getting the job in which he is interested would be much greater. Young women graduating from college seem to have much more confidence than men. Perhaps that's because women reach a mature mental development at an earlier age than men."