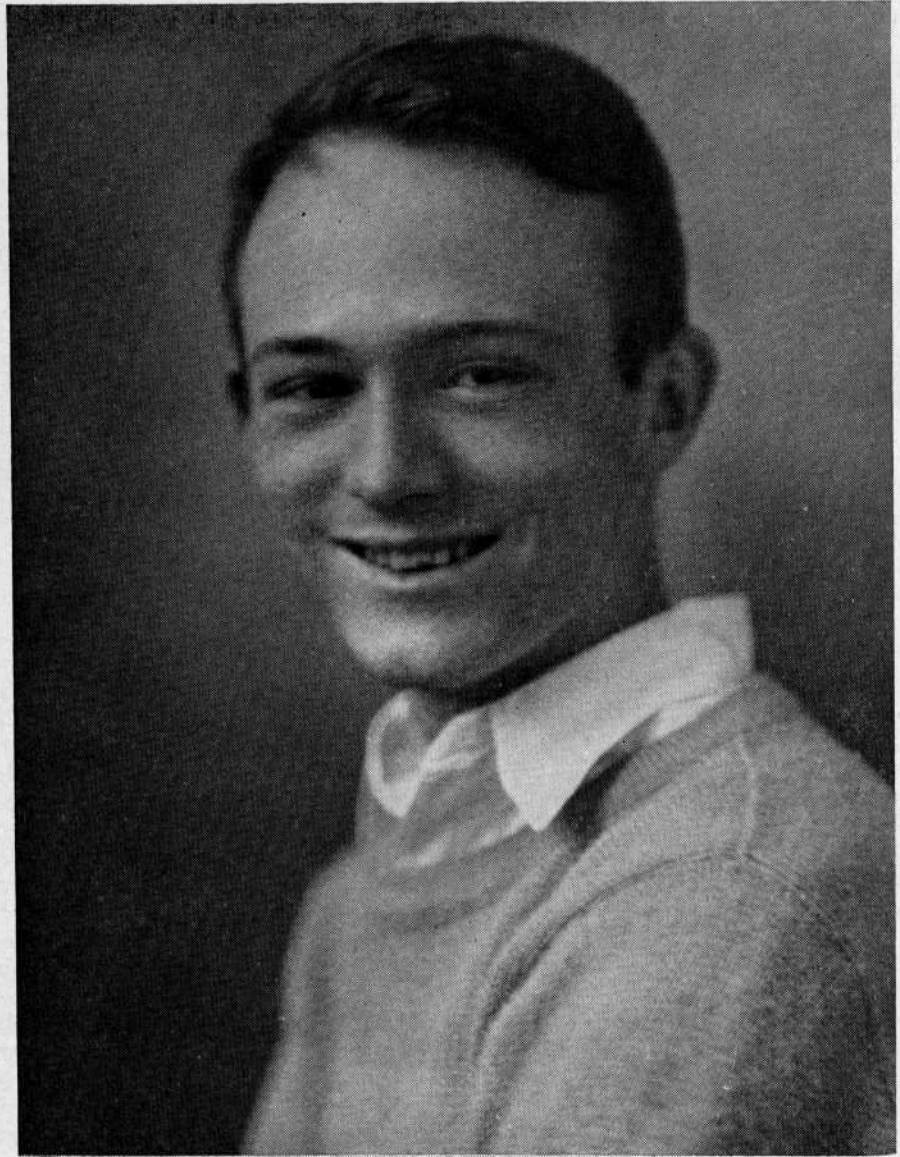


Smiling George Milburn recently was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship to study abroad. He selected the pleasant hills of England as the most ideal spot to work on a novel. Mrs. Vivien Custerd Milburn and their baby daughter will accompany Oklahoma's leading short story writer.



George Milburn

By SAVOIE LOTTINVILLE, '29as

ANY account of George Milburn's homecoming must be somewhat in the nature of "we knew him when..." And it was only six years ago next autumn that a small, slightly freckled-faced young man, dressed in white linens, made his appearance on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. He was from Coweta, a town which is rapidly becoming as well known to the world as Claremore—and for practically the same reason. It was his ambition to continue an education which had been interrupted by some months of work on newspapers in such widely separated places as New Orleans, Tulsa, Chicago, and Girard, Kansas.

Introducing himself to the editor of the *Oklahoma Daily*, Milburn ask for a job on the student daily. Asked if he had had any experience, Milburn replied that he had worked on several newspapers, and had recently been editing *Little Blue Books* for Haldeman-Julius.

The startled student editor, not very experienced himself, felt very much like the interior decorator who might have asked Michael Angelo if he knew anything about painting. However, there was not at the time an opening on the student publications for Oklahoma's young man from Coweta, so he made himself a general utility worker for the *Oklahoma Daily*, turning out features and news stories of much wit and vigor. In a short time the position of humor columnist on the Daily opened up for Milburn, and he took it over, much to the delight of the campus.

It was not many weeks before the students had labelled *Hear and Their* (the humor column in the Daily) their "morning bomb." The column was good—perhaps better than anything else in the paper—not only because Milburn liked the type of writing it permitted, but also because of the great freedom it gave him in selecting his own material. The

Wag of Coweta built for himself a nook which proved difficult for subsequent student writers to occupy.

Meantime Milburn was studying, not with a degree in view, but as an unclassified student. He preferred to take what he considered would be beneficial in his writing career rather than to take prescribed courses, and in most of his University work it could clearly be seen by those who watched his progress that he had a considerable advantage over most of those of his age in classes, due to the wide and interesting experiences he had before he came to the University. He had depended before coming to Norman on his pen for his living, and he continued to depend upon it after he arrived here. By day he dashed off pungent paragraphs for his *Hear and Their* column, and by night he read galley after galley of inky proofs in the composing room of the *Oklahoma Daily*. Milburn certainly earned his way through his

first semester in the University by the sweat of his brow and the cudgeling of his brain. In addition to the work just described, Milburn stoked the furnace for his room rent. So that between his daily work for his bread and the necessary amount of study connected with his courses he had very little time left for the type of creative writing in which he has always been interested.

Yet in those odd moments which he seemed to work into the hurried twenty-four hours of his days, he continued to work on short stories which he hoped to market with some of the large national magazines. He had rejection slips from the latter, but they were not the usual crisp kind. They indicated to him what he knew so well: that he needed more time in which to polish off his writing.

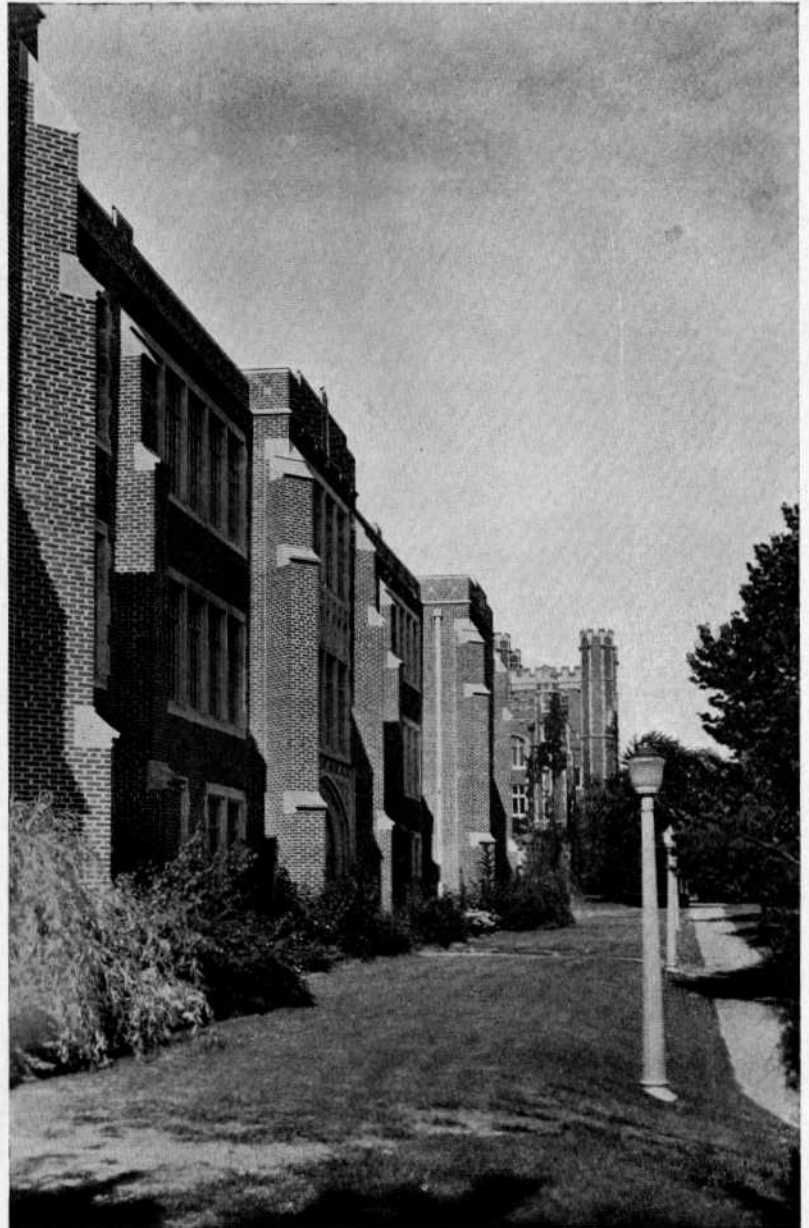
In the spring of 1929 came an offer from the *Cleveland County Democrat News* of Norman for Milburn to take over its weekly supplement for University students. The larger pay offer carried Milburn away from *Hear and Their*, and within two weeks' time he had everybody reading his new column in the supplement. When the semester closed he became proof reader for the University of Oklahoma Press. Milburn had meantime been married to Miss Vivien Custerd, and he began revamping what he had already written and writing new material with great vigor. In September, 1929 his efforts were rewarded, when H. L. Mencken, editor of the *American Mercury* and the one who really deserves credit for "discovering" Milburn, bought three of Milburn's Oklahoma Stories. This was his start toward national recognition, and from that time until this his efforts and his success have never flagged.

To those who knew him in his student days, he was an enigma. The fault was more theirs than his, perhaps. In those days of Hoover prosperity, few young people brought up in the "rugged individualism" of their fathers could understand one of their own years who complained of the injustice of poverty, the folly of war, and the smugness of respectability. Milburn was, perhaps,

what one of his friends called him, a vindictive sentimentalist. The assertion is partly true and partly false—if anything it errs on the side of severity. Milburn was simply, deeply and consistently humanitarian. If the past five years of adversity have done anything, it has been to indicate to his former student friends that Milburn's sentiments were more nearly correct than their convictions.

Milburn knew life from the under, toiling side, and he had experienced it deeply long before most of his student colleagues. More than that, he had in abundance the powers of observation and of thought. So equipped, it was almost natural that he should turn early to writing. In this field, he was even in those

years a technician. He studied the short story and he knew what was required to make a good one. His tremendous reading had given him a knowledge, moreover, which was not possessed by everyone of his age. But it can never be assumed that Milburn wrote merely because "he had the spark." His preparation for the national recognition that was to come was hard (even grinding, as in those months when he slaved at proof reading and routine writing for newspapers here and elsewhere). When he finally obtained the recognition of national journals, he was able to do what he had always wanted to do—to write, if not leisurely at least less hurriedly, good stories and good articles.



Honoring the late James S. Buchanan, former president of the University, the Liberal Arts building has been renamed Buchanan Hall. The name was made official recently by action of the board of regents.