

Belles Lettres and Bell Ringers

LEVEL LAND, A Book of Western Verse. By Kenneth C. Kaufman. The Kaleidograph Press, Dallas, Texas. \$1.50

AS most Sooners know, Kenneth Carlyle Kaufman is a professor at the University, where he has taught modern languages since 1929. Before that time he was a student there, where he took the M.A. and B.A. degrees, after graduating from Southwestern State Normal School. Kaufman is not only a teacher and a scholar, but one of the editors of *Books Abroad*, editor of the literary page of the *Sunday Oklahoman*, and a first-rate poet in his own right. To these accomplishments we may add that he is something of a gourmet, an excellent cook, a great fisherman, and a crack shot with rifle or shotgun. His boyhood was spent, like most of his adult life, in western Oklahoma. He grew up on the Short Grass, and the Short Grass country has its poet now.

Kenneth Kaufman knows that region, and intimately understands the life of the prairies and plains of Oklahoma, West Texas, and the Southwest in general. His poems have the unerring veracity, the sureness of touch, the inevitable grasp of the right descriptive terms which only a natural-born Sooner, who loved his region, could possibly have. He knows his Southwestern scene. His landscapes, his people, his plants and animals are all right, true, and significant. Only honest men write literature: *Level Land* contains some of the finest things in Sooner letters.

But *Level Land* is not only a book of sound verse about Oklahoma; it is a book with a new slant, a new point of view. In the past many have written of the West, written of its heroic and dangerous past, its epic actions; but these fellows, for the most part, were like the cowboys and forty-niners they wrote about—they loved the West for its adventures, not for itself. The proof of this is the fact that they never show any intimate understanding of the plants and animals, the people and the seasons. Kaufman appreciates these things, he treats Oklahoma with a lyric love for the soil and the climate and the creatures there. He shows traces of nostalgia for the Old West, but his real love is for the things that remain. He loves these things, he broods on them, and he etches unforgettable pictures of them. Some of his vignettes of childhood are perfect things.

But he has humor, fun even, as well. All the moods are present to him, and he reflects them all. He can be homely, funny, melancholy, philosophical, and tender by turns. One of his convictions is that the

pioneer, like other folks, had often an aesthetic appreciation—however inarticulate—for the beauty of the West. This he has brought forward convincingly in the ballad, "Big Lige," and elsewhere. As he sees it, even bad men found the West not merely wild and free, but lovely as well. The pioneers were often runaway boys. Some of them ran for their lives, some wished to avoid labor and dullness, some sought wealth, but not a few were animated at times by a mere love of the wonder and beauty of the unspoiled West. That is Kenneth Kaufman's belief, and he makes the reader accept it.

Level Land is not just another book of poems by a Western writer. It is an unusual book, as well as a good one. It was chosen (along with *Planter's Charm* by F. M. Yauger) from 197 competing entries in the Kaleidograph Fifth Book Publication Contest.—STANLEY VESTAL.

I gulped this thin volume of verse, at a maturer age, in the same avid way that I raced through *The Shropshire Lad*—and for the same reason. With a keener enjoyment, I do believe; perhaps because Kenneth Kaufman has written here, exquisitely, sparingly, with the comforting certainty that the right word and the vivid phrase will be used, about the things that mattered most to me as a writer—the rhythm, color, smell, feel of this Oklahoma and Southwest—has put it into songs, limpid and singable and lovely, and above all with the simple art of a true artist of words—has put into ballads that are compact and yet complete—has put it into poems of the farm that are as real as the half-scoured old gang plow which I used to ride after the oat harvest—has put it into the form and swing and slaver and dust of cattle passing the gate on which the farm boy leans and dreams he'll be a top hand in a year or two.

To say it all very briefly, Mr. Kaufman has translated, in a poet's mood, the vague impressions that a sensitive Oklahoma country boy or girl must feel. It is romantic, decently and restrainedly romantic. It is dramatic. Best of all, to me, it is music, the rhythm and lilt of the land he loves as I do.—JOHN M. OSKISON.

DESERTS ON THE MARCH. By Paul B. Sears. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma. \$2.50.

The important subject matter of *Deserts on the March* can be no better presented than by a man who has spent years in the study of the effects of climatic conditions on the plants from which man must obtain



Rivkin

David R. Milsten, '25as, '28law, Tulsa attorney, is the author of "An Appreciation of Will Rogers" which will be released this month by the Naylor Publishing company, San Antonio. Milsten's biography of the famous Oklahoma humorist has been praised highly by Sally Rogers McSpadden, Will's sister. She said of the volume, "I feel that it is the only authentic review of the life of my brother that has been written and I am anxious to see it published." The material appeared serially in the "Tulsa World." The next issue of "The Sooner Magazine" will feature a review of the book and its author.

his sustenance. Dr. Sears is head of the department of botany at the University of Oklahoma.

Civilized man, by his exploitation of the parts of the earth occupied by him, has so impoverished the soil and bared it of its natural vegetational cover that erosion by wind and water has progressed at an ever increasing rate. The result is the extension of the agriculturally unproductive desert far beyond its normal climatic bounds. Such phenomena as the recent dust storms serve only to call attention to processes that have been under way since the occupation of North America by Europeans. If the continent is to sustain even its present population during the coming decades, measures must be taken to arrest soil destruction and to restore an equilibrium favorable to man. This can be done only by the consistent application of scientific knowledge to the tilling of the soil and the management of range and forest, and the subordination of immediate profit to the future good of the community. *Deserts on the March* is written simply, in language easily understood by the great public which it should reach, and is yet thoroughly scientific.—A. O. WEESE.