

Hungry Europe • III



Leaves of Grass • X



Hats Off, A Winner!

By ELIZABETH ANN McMURRAY, '35

EARLY in November the University of Oklahoma Press released *Deserts on the March* by Paul B. Sears.

Joseph A. Brandt, director of the press, Savoie Lottinville, business manager, and a circle of Doctor Sears' colleagues and friends, who had read the book in manuscript, knew that reading it was an experience. That fact had to be proved to the rest of the reading public. Today, late in December, as this is being written the University Press is saying, "Hats off to those who picked a winner."

October 17, before the book came off the press, Henry A. Wallace, secretary of the Department of Agriculture, stated, "It impressed me as being an unusually thoughtful treatment of one of our basic problems."



The Book-of-the-Month Club News sent the following statement to its subscribers: "A very interesting and timely book, it is at once an historic survey, a scientific exposition—a warning. The author presents his facts with fine lucidity, and points the way to the measure which alone will stay the destruction man is wreaking upon Nature."

In a long detailed review the Scientific Book Club pointed out that "*Deserts on the March* deserves hosts of readers and is highly recommended to scientist and layman, educator and statesman, farmer and city dweller. . . . In this book he demonstrates the fact that a specialist in some small area of science may also have a broad and deep understanding of related fields and can occasionally apply that knowledge to the grim business and pleasant art of living."

November 6, Lowell Thomas wrote, "*Deserts on the March* is absorbingly interesting and a most important contribution."

In the New York Sun for November 7 Jerry Rand headlined *Deserts on the March* as the Book of the Day. He concluded his fine review with the statement that it was a very important book and very readable.

After reading Doctor Sears' book, Hendrik Willem Van Loon regretfully announced that he would be forced to break his promise never to boost any book over the radio. Sunday, December 8, he devoted his entire broadcast to the "marching deserts" of Paul B. Sears of the University of Oklahoma.

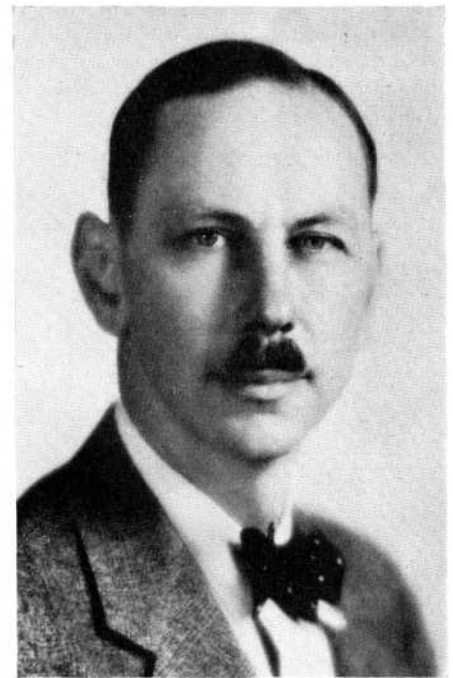
"Since I read Darwin Among the Machines of old Sam Butler I have read no book that has so completely upset all my preconceived notions about what was what," said Mr. Van Loon. The author of the famous *Geography* and countless other volumes spoke only praise of the book in his weekly broadcast. He advised everyone to read it.

"If you don't like it, I'll eat my words and an entire cactus plant." "When you read it," he went on, "you'll say 'why in the thunder' didn't they teach me this in school instead of all the stuff about John Smith and Pocahontas. This explains why we are what we are."

The *New York Times Book Review* section of December 8 began its comment of *Deserts on the March* with a quotable paragraph about Oklahomans. "Mother of Philosophers—by such proud title can Oklahoma soon name herself if her native and adopted sons continue to walk in paths they have begun to choose. Born in turbulence and social chaos and bred in lawlessness and materialism, she is nourishing, even in the youth she has not yet left behind, a line of writers who can see life broadly and write of it in the calm objective spirit of philosophy, perhaps in the homely guise of a Will Rogers, or concerned with material things, as in the case of this book by Paul B. Sears. Into *Deserts on the March*, a book that is just now timely and important, he has put the fused and highly significant results of extensive reading, study, and observation on the theme of man's incessant struggle with nature. . . . Mr. Sears has made a fascinating book, a book written out of wide and accurate scientific knowledge and in the philosophic spirit; a book, indeed, that deserves to be classed as literature as well as science."

In this discussion the *New York Times* reviewer emphasizes the importance in *Deserts on the March* of the presence of scientific accuracy and literary style. Concerning the same splendid combination Kenneth Kaufman of the *Daily Oklahoman* wrote, "While the scientific bases of *Deserts on the March* appeal to the scholar as entirely susceptible of proof, and to the intelligent lay reader as eminently reasonable (something to be expected) there is a pleasant surprise for both in the charm of Doctor Sears' presentation (something one has grown accustomed not to look for in a work of this sort). Doctor Sears is fully aware of the spectacular, the epic, the romantic possibilities, of his somberly gradiose panorama of slow world suicide. He is at once graphic, pungent, idyllic and matter-of-fact. The whole book is a series of dramatic climaxes, and it reads like an exciting novel."

The University of Oklahoma Press scores again with Doctor Paul B. Sears' "Deserts on the March," the story of dust storms and their implications. Doctor Sears, to the right, is head of the University botany department. It was his first book. On the other page is Joseph A. Brandt, director of the Press, who picked the winner. The book is a valuable addition to the many successful volumes brought out by Mr. Brandt. Its success may approach that of "Wah-Kon-Tah," which was a Book-of-the-Month club selection two years ago. Below, is the inimitable Hendrik Willem Van Loon, noted writer and geographer, who is extremely interested in the book. Mr. Brandt and Doctor Sears were guests of Mr. Van Loon in New York City early in January. On the opposite page, above, are two of the chapter headings which were drawn by the author.



That a botanist should have the literary style of a finished novelist is somewhat of a paradox. In Doctor Sears' case it is a development from some years spent as secretary to his father, a lawyer, whose very erudite legal opinions were dictated in fine striking prose. The author has always been a little critical of anyone, whether scientist, who wrote his findings in a dullish statistical manner. In his own reports, papers, and finally in *Deserts on the March*, Doctor Sears has written and re-written to avoid the platitudes he dislikes in any type of writing. His undergraduate work was in the liberal arts college, and his training in those years of unspecialized study fitted him to bring to the book a wider and more penetrating knowledge of the world of arts.

From two viewpoints, that of the scientist and that of the literary man, *Deserts on the March* has fully met the requirements for a noble work. One of the many comments made by scientific figures is that of Doctor A. Waller of the University of Ohio. "You are a real master of exposition and I salute you and your *Deserts* as a first class work of art. Not a chance for scientific cavil, and thoroughly human. The four elements, or dimensions, if you prefer, of ecology, the physical environment, the plant, the animal, and human life as a control, not a wildling, are presented in beautiful proportion."

Todd Downing, in New York, wrote his reaction which is that of a writer of novels. After praising the book for its ability to make him forget all else over

the week-end he adds, "I heard the book discussed last night by a group of hard-bitted literary critics. One critic repeated the same words he used in his review in one of the newspapers—the modernized swing and swell of biblical prose."

With reading and thinking Americans and especially Oklahomans and "Westerners" enthusiastic about his book Paul B. Sears has much to say from another angle.

"That the press saw fit to publish a book like mine in a definitely scientific field, which most people would say right off was dry as dust, is proof of the vision and imagination of Joe Brandt. Only imagination could have brought his realization of the possibility of making a success of such a book.

"I could say a lot about the book," he continued, "but it would have been out of the question without the encouragement and criticism of my friends. The aid of Mr. Brandt and my wife was invaluable. There are plenty of friends to whom I owe much. Doctor Charles Gould, Doctor Royden Dangerfield, Doctor Frederick Ryan, Doctor Warren Thornthwaite, Mrs. Ernie Hill, Margaret Kaeiser, my secretary, Doctor I. H. Blake, University of Nebraska zoologist, George Phillips, state forester helped me wonderfully."

To say that Doctor Sears finished the work on *Deserts on the March* when the last word was written would be to ignore the seventeen line drawings which he has used for his chapter headings. In their simplicity they are achievements, and bring to each carefully divided portion of the book a new delight.

