

Belles Lettres and Bell Ringers

TODD DOWNING has done it again. With *Murder on the Tropic*, Crime Club selection, released December 6 by Doubleday, Doran and Company, he chalks up his fourth successful mystery novel. About *Murder on the Tropic* The Criminal Record, Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction says "Exotic background, deep-laid and devilish plot, interesting people, and denouement which is almost too unexpected. Verdict: Muy bien!"

The author of *Vultures in the Sky* and *The Cat Screams* again chooses Mexico for his setting. This time it is the lonely Hacienda Flores which attracts a rare group of Mexicans and Americans. These characters, which incidentally, are Mr. Downing's best to date, would amuse the reader were the book not a mystery novel. They do not depend on parts in the mystery for their success as diverting personalities.

Hugh Rennert, agent of the Custom Bureau or the Treasury Department who has solved other tangled mysteries in Downing crime novels is sent on a seemingly innocent venture into Mexico. At the hacienda he meets the caretakers, Senor and Senora Montemayor; the architect, Steve Tolman, and his pretty wife, Ann; the aviator, Esteban Flores; the real estate man, Telghman Falter; and Marck Arnhardt, stepson of George Stahl, who died of sunstroke while visiting the hacienda. Each is in a varying stage of anger at one or more of the other guests. With Bertha Fahn, the spinster owner of stock in the company, is associated her odd desire for 126 post-cards. With all the guests the nightly disappearance of a gallon of water is a concern. With Hugh Rennert many things have import, damp earth, a box of caramels, an empty whiskey bottle, in solving the most ingeniously plotted series of murders in his career as a sleuth.

Yellow death strikes twice during Rennert's first day and night at the Hacienda Flores. The belief "that yellow flowers—specifically yellow marigolds—mean death throughout the length and breadth of Mexico" colors the otherwise cold blooded murders. After the third murder and dangerously close to the hour which would mean his own death, Hugh Rennert comes through with a challenging, but convincing solution to the mystery murders. The novel is more polished than others of Mr. Downings. It is not

a super-thriller; there is no blood, but you'll like it.

An Appreciation of Will Rogers, by David Randolph Milsten, '25as, '28law, The Naylor Company, San Antonio, Texas. \$1.75.

Here is the Oklahoma angle on Will Rogers written by an Oklahoman, David Milsten, who was graduated from the University law school in 1928.

Unfortunately, Mr. Milsten's volume did not get on the market until after several other biographies of the great Oklahoma humorist already had been given wide distribution, but when these others are forgotten, Mr. Milsten's will live as the warmest and most intimate picture of the Cherokee Kid from Oologah.

Will's connection with Oklahoma and the Southwest are given special attention in this volume which has been called by Sallie Rogers McSpadden, sister of Will, "the only authentic review of the life of my brother that has been written."

Many of the photographs in the book were borrowed from Mrs. McSpadden, and she is frequently quoted.

The author is, quite evidently, a great admirer of the versatile humorist whose death was such a blow to the entire world during the fall of 1935. Yet, Mr. Milsten handles his subject objectively and in an interesting manner.

Particularly interesting are the comments of Eddie Cantor, Billie Burke, Tom Mix, Fred Stone and O. O. McIntire on their early-day relations with Will Rogers. From the synthesis of their comments, one is able to get a fair idea of the place Will Rogers holds in the hearts of his fellow workers.

These were his closest friends during his stage and movie days and they were the ones who watched Will come up from the ranks of the unknown to the position of eminence he held at the time of his death.

Of particular interest to Oklahomans and Texans is the space given to Will's visits to the Southwest after he had become an international figure. Full accounts of his addresses on the University campus and at Tulsa during 1932 are carried in the volume.

Also, of special interest are accounts of the dedication services of the Claremore hotel bearing his name, of his dedication of the statue of the Pioneer Women at



Although it is a little early for technical reviews, Doctor Nathan Altshiller Court's new volume, "Modern Pure Solid Geometry," is attracting wide interest in foreign countries. It was brought out by Macmillan company. The first review of the book was in a Spanish publication. Other favorable comments have been received from European countries. Doctor Court is a member of the mathematics department faculty.

Ponca City and of his visit with former Governor Murray in 1932.

Until one reads a biography of Will Rogers, one is apt to forget that a great part of his life was spent on the New York stage and with wild west shows. His California residence came after a vast experience which started with his education at the Willie Halsell school near Vinita and at Kemper Military academy and went through a period of wild west performances in Africa.

Mr. Milsten's book is admirably done and should enjoy great popularity particularly among those people who are closely associated with Claremore Will. It is full of names which the average Oklahoman and Texan knows well. Running through the course of Will's life were associations with Zack Mulhall, Pawnee Bill, Jim Minick, Dr. W. B. Bizzell, A. G. Carter, Pat Hurley and many others.

The book would be a valuable collection to anyone's library, anyone particularly who is interested in owning a library that is complete with Southwestern writings.

Someone along the line of bringing out this volume, however, should have caught more than a dozen omissions of quotation marks at the end of direct quotations.