

Oklahoma Books and Writers

The Old Santa Fe Trail, by Stanley Vestal. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939. \$3.00.

Stanley Vestal (W. S. Campbell of the University of Oklahoma English faculty), has a thorough understanding of the spirit of adventure and how it influences men. He has, too, a remarkable fund of information about the early days on the Great Plains and in the Southwest. These two factors, combined with an excellent writing technique for this kind of book, have resulted in an historical book that makes the things it tells about "come alive."

The Old Santa Fe Trail is the vivid story of that hazardous trail across a sea of grass, desert plains, and forbidding mountains, that was traversed a hundred years ago by the adventurous men who wanted to travel from Westport, in Missouri to Santa Fe.

Making this trip was more like a sea voyage over a boundless and trackless sea, than a journey on a well-marked highway. It was a route beset by the perils of wind and mud and blizzards and hot sun and hostile Indians.

But it was a wild free life for the men who wanted adventure.

Mr. Vestal has, quite properly, pushed his statistical matter back to an appendix and has devoted the book itself to recapturing the experience of those who traveled the Santa Fe trail. He recounts typical historic events to recreate the feelings, the sensations, the hopes and fears they knew.

This is a style of historical writing that is particularly pleasing to the general reader. It actually gives him a surprisingly large amount of information in a most diverting manner. In fact, it is so interesting that the reader is quite likely to forget that he is reading "history."

Perhaps, after all, the brave epic of the Santa Fe trail is a more important chapter in our national history than many of the battles and the political wars that receive prominent attention in the formal histories.

Mr. Campbell is professor of English in the University and is director of the University's courses in creative writing that were established last year. He is author of *Professional Writing*, published last year by the Macmillan Company, as well as a dozen other books and numerous short stories and articles.

The Old Santa Fe Trail should greatly enhance his already outstanding reputation as an authority on the old west, as well as a good teller of adventurous tales.

—R. C.

Ararat, by Elgin Groseclose, '20. Carrick and Evans, New York, 1939. \$2.50.

The action of Elgin Groseclose's second novel occurs in the land of the Garden of Eden, that cradle of ancient races lying between the Black and Caspian Seas, above which stands the beautiful and watchful mountain of Ararat. It is the story of the turbulent times from the beginning of the Twentieth Century until the close of the Russian revolution, in which the gentle people of Armenia fled their land under Turkish oppression.

Amos Lyle, a Texas cowboy, answering the call of his faith, had come to Armenia before the Turkish purge of 1895, and had led a handful of broken Armenians into Russia where they lived an insecure decade, relying blindly upon God for their well-being.

Concurrently, in St. Petersburg, Paul Markov drifted through the grandeur of Russian military life under the Tsar, finding no security in anything and becoming a thorough disciple of the theory that man's will was sufficient unto the day. Terror, intrigue, bloodshed, the firing squad, flight and constant peril accompanied him during many phases of his journey after the revolution, leading him eventually to Amos Lyle's refuge near the base of Ararat.

Lyle had gathered hundreds of orphaned children together in Kars, and was their protector and provider as far as his impractical methods would allow. Markov was able to supplement Lyle's work, and together—with the help of the beautiful Sirani's teaching—their children's community thrived. The conflict between soul and body, the mystery which had confounded Markov in his attempt to reconcile the will of man to the will of God, was discovered in the shadows of Ararat.

Those of us who know Mr. Groseclose's writing know that his prose is clear and beautiful, often poetry. There are several isolated passages—mass on Christmas Eve in the Russian church, the tenseness of the firing squad, the climb to the top of Ararat—which are as fine as any prose I ever read. The story is extremely well constructed; backgrounds, incidents of the past, and characters are fitted into the theme with a deftness that gives it unusual unity. Look for this book in best seller lists.

—MARGARET E. REDDING.



WILLIAMS-BREAUNE: Miss Ruth Virginia Williams, '39, and Joseph Breaune, law student in the University, were married June 23. The couple are at home in Norman.

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