

# Oklahoma Books

DR. RONALD B. SHUMAN, associate professor in the College of Business Administration at the University of Oklahoma, was visited by Santa Claus.

On December 26 his book *The Petroleum Industry*, an economic survey, was published by the University of Oklahoma Press. A few days later he was appointed senior economist with the National Resources Planning Board for southwestern states. Within a week he was being called upon by chambers of commerce and trade associations for speeches.

In one sense he reversed the political policy: He wrote the book first, then got the job; usually political appointees write their books after they have been bounced off the job!

But Dr. Shuman's holiday activities are not the subject at the moment. It is his book, the result of more than two years' research into the history of the 80-year petroleum industry; tedious digging and scratching for minor details which had grown into important factors of an industry that aided in revolutionizing society in a short span of time.

In Oklahoma and other southwestern states, the oil industry greases the wheels of progress and stimulates the life of every community. In non-oil-producing states, this industry still is pictured as a giant capitalistic octopus that destroys and kills. In the southwest the oil man is regarded pretty much as any other man who has amassed a fortune or has experienced the ups and downs of business. In some other states, the oil man is an extravagantly rich plutocrat who stamps rough shod over the little fellows who cross his path.

Dr. Shuman holds no such views with either group. He sees the oil man as a shrewd business executive, who has contributed his share to a huge industry, with activities extending throughout the world. So, he reviews the work of the oil man and the industry in a cool, appraising manner.

His style of writing is not quite orthodox for the economists. Realizing the importance of a study of petroleum which could be read and understood by those outside the cathedral, he cast out technical terms and even sought to "humanize" the language of the economist.

His survey might better be styled a detailed diagnosis of the petroleum industry. Unit by unit he explains the subject, then discusses it pro and con, citing his authority as he goes along. Into some of these discussions he even digresses slightly to add a bit of gossip and romancing that has been bantered about within the closed oil circles.

Once his arguments on a subject have been presented, he leaves the conclusions

to the reader. His diagnosis is complete, but he does not prescribe treatment. In a number of instances he injects his opinions, and frequently his reasonings, but these are relatively minor and not of sufficient importance to lead one to believe the author is doing the thinking for the reader.

(Some will disagree with this writer, but after listening to countless speeches and reading more treatises by so-called "petroleum economists" it is a pleasure to visit with a writer who doesn't try to cram down one's throat a lot of pet panaceas.)

Particular stress is laid on the subject now uppermost in the minds of the layman and industrial officials—not to mention the politicians.

At a time when President Roosevelt is urging national regulation of the industry under the guise of defense—having failed to plug the wells in the past seven years—Dr. Shuman gives particular attention to conservation and the prevention of waste of natural resources, to state regulation, and the operation of the interstate oil compact. In covering these subjects, the author views them through the eyes of the historian and economist. Many similar surveys approach these subjects from a legal standpoint, economy being secondary.

The cold logic of the economist gives way when Dr. Shuman discusses labor and personnel management. His research on the subject convinced him that many of the oil executives today started as common laborers in the fields when out of grade school, or as back-benders and "iron-wrestlers" when just out of college. So the understanding between labor and management lacks that hostility which is apparent in many major industries.

While the press of the nation, and particularly that of the southwestern states, emphasizes conservation of the petroleum reserves, Dr. Shuman brings the marketing division well into the picture. Rightly, too, because a majority of the people of the United States and Canada form their opinion of the petroleum industry by the service they receive at the corner filling stations. But the author does not view the man at the pump as the public relations factor he might prove to be; Shuman, the economist, looks behind the scene of operation and views the dirty details of "price wars," the ravages of the "battle of gallonage," and the treacherous tricks that enter into the gasoline competition.

Since Dr. Shuman has no axe to grind and has done an admirable, unbiased job on a subject that has been torn to threads by so-called experts, *The Petroleum Industry* may be classed as a real contribution to industrial literature.—CLAUDE V. BARROW.

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