

Hands Up! by General D. J. Cook,
University of Oklahoma Press.

*Not a bark was heard, not a warning note,
As o'er to the calaboose we hurried;
Not a Thomas cat cleared his melodious
throat*

Where our hero in slumber lay buried.
—The Lay of the Vigilantes

I CANNOT for the life of me think when I last read about a lynching, but Lord knows the lynching did not occur in Colorado. So it may surprise you (as it did me) to learn that in the late 1800's the high living folks of the Great Divide were making whoopee with ropes like the Ku Klux Klan never dreamed of.

The proof of this morbid pudding is in *Hands Up; or Twenty Years of Detective Life in the Mountains and on the Plains*—the latest addition to the University of Oklahoma Press' Western Frontier Library.

According to the sales pitch on the inside cover, this reprinted manuscript (it first appeared for trembling hands in 1882) is about the extraordinary career of the fearless, flawless, indefatigable favorite of law-abiding Coloradans, General D. J. Cook—the fearless, flawless, indefatigable head of the fearless, flawless, indefatigable Rocky Mountain Detective Association.

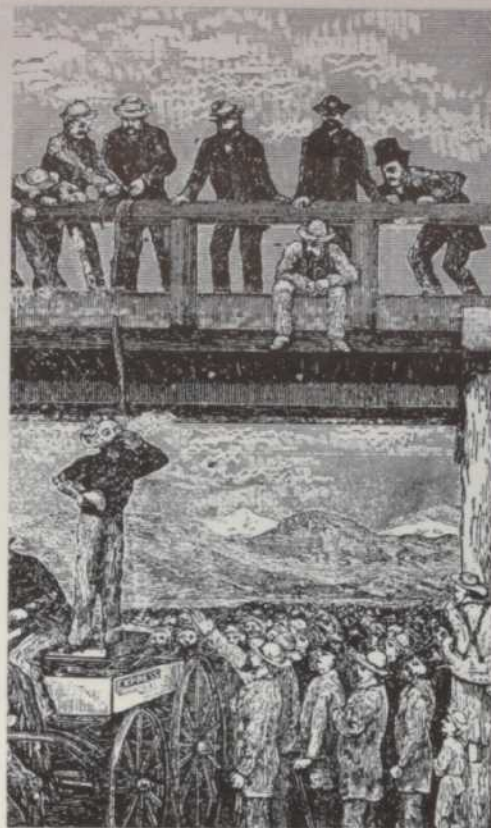
I am trying to imply that in the hands of his 1882 Boswell, General Cook and his dedicated band of *Eumenides* are about as fascinating as Gene Autry and The Boys.

However, a slick bit of fiction is hardly what the editors of the Frontier Library are after. Their goal is to get across to Autry fans a picture of what the Old West was really like. Ordinarily it is as hard to get a clear picture of the Old West from the potboilers of the 1880's as it is from the TV scripts of today; but what a wealth of Americana shines through the d—d euphemistic gloss of *Hands Up!*

The most shining memoir of grandpa's day is—like I say—the lynchings.

There are twenty-six crimes considered in this gory book, and I haven't counted, but push me off a railroad bridge with a rope around my neck if just about every chapter doesn't involve a lynching.

And what lynchings! They're beautiful. The impatient menfolk, bemasked and honestly indignant, line up like tombstones at the train station to do their solemn duty whenever the unsuspecting General Cook gets to town with a scamp in tow. The women and boys hang, that is, *lean* out of windows for a better view; and the expres-



a Colorado lynching

NEW BOOKS

FROM SOONERS AND
THE O. U. PRESS

Reviewer—Dick Smith

sions on their faces as they watch some ne'er-do-well being strung up beforetimes can only mean that Right will be rewarded and Evil punished for ever and ever and ever and ever—in Colorado.

And I suppose it will. But consider what things have come to in the highlands—and everywhere else in the United States for that matter.

Consider that only a few years ago Mr. Jack G. Graham of Denver, which is not only a city in Colorado but the capital—consider, I say, that this Mr. Graham blew up his mother, a United airliner, an innocent bird or two, and 39 assorted passengers who had the bad luck to stand between Mr. Graham and the Good Life; consider, mind you, that this man, this Mr. Graham, whose name and location during the latter part of his life were known to all in Colorado, consider that he was arrested, tried and executed (by the state authorities) without one—mind you—no, not one gath-

ering of an agitated, indignant, rope-totin' mob outside his prison window. And then speak if you can on what things have come to . . .

It was surely one of the most monstrous crimes ever committed by a civilian. A Colorado civilian, I shall point out once again. And yet no righteous committee from the Ladies Music Club nor the American Legion nor even the Boy Scouts—no one, I repeat, came to haul Mr. Graham to the nearest lamp post.

I am not, by any stretch of the imagination, trying my hand at rabble-rousing. My interest in this phenomenon of sociological flipflopping is purely academic. And I can only offer, after much reflection, that it is not enough to explain away this change in civic customs by saying that the wrathful Coloradans of today are likely to get the hell blown out of them by the better-equipped successors to the Rocky Mountain Detective Association if they begin milling about the Brown Palace preparatory to a raid on Civic Center. This matter is more exotic than it might first appear.

The change, it seems to me, has merely been a matter of entertainment accessibility. TV was the death blow for lynchings. I state it with all the certainty of a periodical alarmist showing the correlation of lung cancer to smoking.

Lynchings, as horrible as the idea might seem to modern Coloradans, were fabulously entertaining. To prove as much, I quote from the obviously enthralled author of *Hands Up!* Silence! Hats off! As we approach the mob, a monstrous butcher named Seminole is praying in their midst . . .

“During this prayer the vigilantes stood around with hats removed and heads bowed, in reverential listening. It was a sombre impressive picture. The moonlight shining cold and clear upon the scene; the fated man, with eyes turned towards the zenith, one foot upon the iron rail of the track, the other upon the tie to which was attached the rope that drooped from his neck; the swinging, twitching body of his companion in crime dangling in awful solitude below; the congregated men with uncovered and bent heads, and their faces hid beneath grim masks; the polished barrels of rifles and guns gleaming in the moonbeams and the grave-like silence alone broken by the earnest, feeling words of the speaker—a picture never to be for-

Continued on Page 24

WORDS WITHOUT MEANING

Continued from Page 9

or otherwise, presents a 1937 movie, shopworn though it may be, at least the picture probably has a story. Which is more than most modern movies boast. Even a comforting proportion of its live presentations has been clipped from books and magazines of yesteryear, from a vanished America where such words as subjective value, morals, religion, ethics were not—as now—mere empty cartons, discarded soap boxes for street corner neo-existentialists to kick around. Still more, when TV takes advantage of its unique ability to transmit non-verbal communication right into every living room, to use, that is, gestures, actions and sounds in lieu of words, why it wields there a tremendous weapon.

But unfortunately, when a culture begins to revert from the printed word to manual gesture, from language to sign language, it is taking a great step backward. Monkeys gesticulate. It is the sign of civilization that it communicates with the written word.

Alarming and unmistakable signs of degeneration in our basic communication system have been evident for more than a generation now, beginning, I think, about 1925, when, under the curse of so-called "progressive" education many of our elementary schools switched from the old, proven A, B, ab phonic method of teaching reading, to the new and completely idiotic "word-recognition" system.

Now nothing could be better calculated to make a nation of illiterates than this read-by-rote system which, fortunately for me, I am old enough to have escaped; but which you probably had to endure. As Dr. Rudolf Flesch says in his angry little book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, it just throws 3,500 years of civilization out the window and goes back to the benighted idea the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians and Chinese had of writing. It ignores the letters and, instead, makes of each word an ideograph, like a Chinese sign or an Egyptian hieroglyphic. These you have to memorize, since you are given no alphabetic key to unlock them and break them down.

By the time you have memorized five or six thousand of these stupid little curlicue signs (which is about the vocabulary of the average literate Chinese) you too are heartily sick of the whole business and turn instead to television, radio, movies, the comic books, or picture magazines for your entertainment and information, letting reading revert to what it was in remote antiquity, the exclusive prerogative of the learned priesthood attending the sacred cows in temple colleges.

Now, rather angrily and unjustly, perhaps, this is what I suspect some of our teachers and professors would like to have happen. It may be unconscious on their part. But the brutal truth remains, they have achieved a nation of non-readers, more and more and more they have herded "literature" into a sort of profane hieroglyphic language which the ordinary American will not read, largely because he can't; they have contributed alarmingly toward an impending Tower of Babel breakdown in our everyday ability to communicate even with each other.

The carrier current of communication is empathy. It is a subjective feeling, a first person quality transmitted by the writer, received by the reader. Without it there is no understanding, no communication, no matter how skilled with words, how admirably objective the transmitter is.

Words without worth (with apologies to Shakespeare) never to heaven go. And that just might have something to do with the accompanying semi-Shakespearean line: And Russian missiles soar, but ours stay down below.

CHARLIE AND HIS BOYS

Continued from Page 11

recently spearheaded the successful Speech and Hearing Clinic development fund drive.

The Coe boys show every sign of growing up to be as active as their parents. Chuck, the eight-year-old, might succeed his dad in the golf department. He recently came in second in the Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club's junior tournament.

Do the boys get any lessons from the National Champion along with their lawn chipping?

"Very little," said Coe. "I enjoy golf, but I wouldn't want to force that enjoyment on them. They all take lessons at the club and they have some special children's clubs. If they like the game, fine; if they don't—that's fine also."

Coe, who won his first National Amateur Championship in 1949 at the age of 25, thinks golf is becoming a young man's game—particularly after having to wrest his second Amateur's from Tommy Aaron, a Georgia college senior.

It's a sentiment the younger Coes agree with completely. Asked if he wanted to grow up to be a champion like his father, Ward's face lighted up in startling contrast to the traditionally solemn expression which his father sports on the fairways: "Sure," he laughed, "I'll be a champ'n, too. It's easy!"

NEW BOOKS

Continued from Page 15

gotten. And when at last the lips were closed, and the fatal push was given, even the stern executioners of inexorable law felt a tremor run through their stalwart, muscular limbs."

This picture, my friends, has nothing to do with justice. It seems quite obvious to me that the reason lynchings packed them in is an esthetic reason. It would be hard in those Cecil B. DeMille-less days to find a dramatic match for the demise of Seminole. Saturday night is the Devil's own when you've had a bath and there's not a decent movie in town.

Lynchings and the like are done so much better even on TV now that I seriously doubt if today's Coloradan would bother to look out his living room window if a modern Seminole were having the bad luck to be executed prematurely from a nearby elm. It is easy to see how something like that would pass out of fashion.

The Romans had the right idea: I am not at all sure about the bread bit, but there is no question in my mind about the value of a circus. What this world needs is a good nickel movie.

RECOMMENDED: To anyone who enjoys a good lynching—vicariously.

Mathematics in Fun and in Earnest, by Nathan A. Court, Dial Press.

My particular bent is against mathematics. The last time I ever had anything to do with the subject was back in my high school days when my trigonometry teacher proved to everybody's satisfaction that one equals two.

Many a mathematician finds his logic leading him to the land of one equals two, but not many can joke about it. Happily, Dr. Nathan Court, O.U.'s Warsaw-born Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, is a mathematician who, as the title of his new book implies, can work with figures either in fun or in earnest.

There are many facets of this comprehensive book on the history, foibles, and glories of mathematics which recommend it to a general audience; but the most prominent are Doctor Court's lucidity and wit. The book had its origin in Doctor Court's popular lectures, and, to use a phrase which Doctor Court ridicules, "it is obvious that" he still has an audience very much in mind.

RECOMMENDED: An ivory-tower man visits the rest of us in excellent style.