

NEW BOOKS:

FROM SOONERS AND THE O.U. PRESS

Reviewer—Carol J. Robinson

The Art, Humor and Humanity of Mark Twain with notes and commentary by Minnie M. Brashear and Robert M. Rodney, University of Oklahoma Press

ALL too often American readers breeze through their literary heritage with the idea that a boyhood survey of *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is knowing Mark Twain. If these readers go no further, they have missed one of the most delightful experiences in print.

This new book sets forth the "art, humor and humanity," yes, but the greatest of these is humanity. Mark Twain was no mere humorist. He was a judge of human nature, a keen and sensitive observer of life around him, always tormented by his ethical convictions and a strict conscience.

Humor was his weapon, the world was his battlefield.

Editors Brashear and Rodney have selected the most graphic of Twain's work, complete short stories, sketches and self-contained excerpts, arranged them in chronological order and woven them together with a piercing critical commentary. Each facet of the acclaimed author's constantly changing outlook comes to light in his own words.

The exaggeration and burlesque which marked his early life, marked his early writings—the boyhood in Missouri with its lingering nostalgia, the glamor of the Mississippi, the West where he found his literary proving ground. Gradually the gayer satirical vein with its timely barbs gave way to his indignation and bitterness at the follies of his world.

In many respects, Mark Twain approached life as young Samuel Clemens approached the mighty Mississippi. When, as a pilot, he learned to speak the great river's language, to learn all there was to know about its mysterious waters, he had lost forever the grace, beauty, poetry and romance that it had once held for him.

Twain was the most American of the American authors, yet throughout his life he was destined to be a wanderer, whether

roaming the country he loved or traveling abroad. He spent 12 years searching for his "ultimate" in European cultures and civilizations only to return home a disillusioned man.

Occasionally when his sensibilities were sufficiently offended, he took time out to strike at the evils he found in Europe. In the book's excerpts from *A Tramp Abroad*, *Europe and Elsewhere* and *Following the Equator*, Twain doesn't attempt to mask his disapproval.

Even in his beloved England, where he was accepted more heartily than he was in America, the Missourian launched attacks on the abuses of monarchy and institutionalized religion in *A Connecticut Yankee* and *The Prince and the Pauper*.

The editors, Minnie M. Brashear, retired from the University of Missouri faculty, and Robert M. Rodney, English professor at Northern Illinois University, are obviously fascinated by Mark Twain—and their presentation of his works should have the same effect on its readers.

As the book so aptly phrases it, "It is doubtful whether any other American writer creates in his reader, as a sort of by-product, such a sense of personal attachment as Mark Twain does . . . his readers carry away a sense not only of the joy of his humor, but also of the charm and gaiety of his personality."

RECOMMENDED: A boyhood favorite well worth revisiting.

Land of Milk and Omelets by Ken Kraft, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.

EVER since Betty McDonald reaped the harvest from *The Egg and I*, city slickers have been flocking to the farm and telling the tale. Even Betty McDonald couldn't write another *Egg*. Neither has Ken Kraft, '57, but his *Land of Milk and Omelets* is great fun anyway.

Kraft guarantees in his foreword that everything in the book really happened. If so, it's enough to discourage all but the young at heart from retreating to the peace of the country. But Pat and Ken Kraft were blessed with a healthy sense of humor



Westerners Bickham and Grove

—and they needed it.

The Krafts' homespun neighbors, the Brinkmeyers, may not have the widespread appeal of Ma and Pa Kettle, but they had more sense—at least enough to get the novices through their first year, but not without complications.

It was a year of government bulletin farming that left the native population aghast but never bored. Ken Kraft's orchard never took root while his "farm pond" grew to Tahoo proportions. The procession of city refugees tried to turn the Kraft farm into a weekend resort, and Pat Kraft's "improvements" completed the job.

But even if these babes in the woods didn't know what they were doing, they had a whale of a time doing it.

RECOMMENDED: For everyone who has ever had the urge to escape the city without the nerve to follow through.

No Bugles, No Glory by Fred Grove, Ballantine Books; *Feud Fury* by Jack M. Bickham, Ace Books, Inc.

THE paperback book is no longer a bad word in the literary world with some of the quality work being done today appearing first in this form. But the old dime western novel (inflated to 35c) is still very much in circulation. Two recent publications by O.U. alumni are good examples.

Jack M. Bickham's *Feud Fury* is of the old school with action substituted for everything—plot, characterization, style. The story is a familiar one to devotees of television the last few seasons—footloose saddle tramps jump into a range war for love of justice and the beautiful daughter of the downtrodden rancher.

No Bugles, No Glory, on the other hand, is pretty good fireside reading if you like Civil War westerns—and apparently many persons do. Veteran of the field, Fred Grove, has spun an entertaining yarn of undercover Union men caught up in the struggle among the Indian territorians.

RECOMMENDED: Grove's *Bugles* that is.