

BOOK REVIEWS

The Cherokee Strip: A Tale of Oklahoma Boyhood. By Marquis James. (New York: The Viking Press, 1945. Pp. 294. Book end map of Oklahoma. Cloth, \$3.50. Special Oklahoma edition autographed, \$5.00.)

Marquis James writes of those impressionable years of his youth, first as a child, influenced by a Mr. Howell whose claim joined the red-hilled, ravined one hundred and sixty acres which the elder James had staked in the famous race for homes into the Cherokee Strip, September 16, 1893.

A lonely little boy of four years, he pictures himself living with rather elderly parents and no playmate except his dog Prince. Later Marquis' avid mind was fired by the exciting tales Mr. Howell related of his miraculous adventures with scalping Indians, gold seekers in California, cow-boys and desperadoes of The Old West, hand-to-hand conflicts with panthers, snakes and grizzlies wherein he was always victorious.

When Papa remarked that Mr. Howell must be at least one hundred and fifty years old to have done all the things of which he boasted, Marquis was quite hurt and incensed. Although he worshiped Papa and wished that he would talk more, he asked Mama if Papa could really mean what he said about Mr. Howell. Mama replied "Mr. Howell is a lonely man and lonely people always have great imaginations." This explanation did not lessen the boy's admiration of Mr. Howell.

Carpenters being scarce, even Papa took Mr. Howell at his word and employed him to construct a two story dwelling on the claim. When Papa returned from Guthrie, the Territorial capital, where he had been trying a law suit, he was surprised to find the house completed but without a stairway. Mr. Howell contended that Papa had failed to list that item in the plans and Papa said that he thought Mr. Howell should have known better. Papa purposed to build a stairway later and Marquis hoped it would be on the outside of the house, so that people would know the James had a stairway.

Papa was not a provident man. Each time he earned a sizable fee Mama urged him to buy cows and brood mares and raise stock as her people had done. He was of the opinion that since the Cherokee Strip was in the same latitude as South Carolina, it would produce tobacco of a fine grade. Accordingly, he planted tobacco,

but the crop was a failure. His next venture was the ice business. A Wichita, Kansas, firm was shipping manufactured ice into Enid and he decided to show them competition. He built an ice-house for storage on the claim and hired men to cut up the frozen ravine water. He bought a wagon for delivery and was ready for business. The Wichita firm lowered the prices of ice and told customers that Papa's ice was dirty creek water, which forced Papa out of business.

In 1901, the James family moved into Enid. Marquis was going to school. His hair, which had been worn long, was rolled under his hat except when in Mama's presence, since she liked to see it hanging. Ad Poak cut it first with the horse clippers and the barber finished the job. Mama cried. Marquis did not know how to play with other children and his natural shyness made him unhappy in school. He could scarcely recite and the adjustment was long and painful. English was difficult but history fell glibly from his lips as Papa had bought him several complete sets of historical works.

James tells of the memorable fight between North town and South town as Enid and North Enid were then called, the capture after being shot and the subsequent death in the county jail of Dick Yeager, the notorious, red-haired giant desperado. He and Mama visited him in jail as Papa was his lawyer.

There are accounts of the doings of Enid's "smart set" and of seeing the banker's wife milking her jersey cow. Mama said that although the banker's wife was a lady and the wife of the local Morgan, she was "not above milking her own cow." He relates his struggle to be accepted by the "right crowd" as he lived on the wrong side of town socially.

There is space accorded the politics of the day, wherein the whisky element played a prominent part. James states it would be in poor taste to inquire into anybody's background. Therefore he confines himself to that of his parents, who were both college-bred. His two sisters much older were well married and resided in Chicago. One brother-in-law, a corporation lawyer, often saved the James family from financial disaster.

As a lad, Marquis was fascinated by printers' itinerant ways, the typesetter's case, and the life of the newspaper man. His experience with editors and their influence on his subsequent career was equal to that of Mr. Howell. Here the young man learned the value of the personal element in the make-up of a daily paper. He credits a former Enid editor for his ultimate decision to seek wider and richer fields for the developments of his talents as a writer.

A word now about the author, who states in the preface that the book was written from notes mostly inscribed in Paris a number

of years ago, primarily to please his only daughter Gynthia, who said, "Why don't you write about those stories you tell instead of some of the things you do write about?" Twice a Pulitzer prize winner, Marquis James is possessed of a style charming and sincere, adroitly combining the lighter with the prosaic. His conclusion is that were he growing up again, he would choose no other spot than the Cherokee Strip.

The book covers a period of years from 1893 to 1919. The many episodes related in his struggles to attain a place in the business and social life of the community lend a decided flavor to the book. The fact that he uses the real names of people adds much to the value of the book for those who are mentioned and in no wise detracts from its charm for others.

Bess Truitt.

Enid, Oklahoma

Memoirs of Governor Murray and True History of Oklahoma Together with His Biography, Philosophy, Statesmanship, and Oklahoma History Interwoven. By William H. Murray (Alfalfa Bill). (Boston: The Meador Press, 1945. Volumes I, II, III. Pp. 1,708. Forty-four illustrations, maps, appendices, and index. \$15.00.)

For several years the people of Oklahoma and many Americans beyond the confines of this State, have looked forward with keen anticipation to the completion of this history by the ninth Governor of Oklahoma. Because of William H. Murray's broad, early, and close connections with all of the movements since early territorial days and subsequent history of Oklahoma, it becomes a work that is necessary to complete the annals of this forty-sixth State of the American Union. The subject matter is admirably divided into chapters and all section paragraphs are numbered serially as are the pages. Volume I contains the index of the whole history and the names of persons mentioned are also indexed; it also contains Books I, II, III, IV. Volume II, contains Books V, VI, VII, VIII. Volume III, contains Book IX and all the appendices.

The introduction to the history is offered by Mr. Melvin Cornish who was an intimate friend and contemporary. He says: "My acquaintance and friendship with Wm. H. Murray began some forty-eight years ago (we were both young men) . . . I have known him about as well as one man ever knew another man . . . Finally it may be said that the record and the life of public services of this 'First Citizen of Oklahoma' make up a precious chapter of the History of our State."

In Volume I Mr. Murray traces with excellent attention to detail, giving genuine local color to all of his composition, from

his birth to the time of his leaving home, becoming a chopper of wood and a farm hand; and lending himself to all good work by which to attain an education and on to school teaching until as a young lawyer he hung out his shingle in Fort Worth, Texas. He writes of his journey into the Indian Territory and his part in the life of the Chickasaws for he married into one of the controlling families of the Chickasaw Nation. It is fascinating to Oklahomans and perhaps to any general reader to read his story of the Sequoyah Convention and of the Constitutional Convention of which he was made President.

Volume II, relates the whole story of the Constitutional Convention and because of Murray's leadership and knowledge of every detail of that remarkable convention, it is a highly dramatic story.

His election and experiences as a member of the U. S. Congress, reflects strange light on congressional procedure and national events under the Wilson Administration.

The books would be worth reading if they offered nothing else except Murray's trek to South America where he took his family and a colony of Oklahomans in 1924. Book VIII, Volume II, discloses his return to Oklahoma and his race for election to the Governorship in 1930, and his subsequent service in that position.

Volume III presents the years of Murray's life since leaving the Governor's Mansion and contains such subjects as, "political campaigns, 1936, 38, 40, 42"; political manners and ethics; rowdyism in public life; social philosophy; when a man is old; Yaqui-Indian language; State Federation of Labor, ambitions and friends pleasing to remember; our twelve Governors, from Haskell to Kerr, etc., etc.

One can see that these volumes contain typical Murray stories from beginning to end. Alfalfa Bill Murray has been a law unto himself and that law has been one of honor, fidelity to what he conceived to be right, and unswerving courage. Some critics will call his story many names and some of them not so good. His style, his subject matter, and its arrangement are not of "standard variety." *Time* magazine, gave this Murray history of Oklahoma an extended notice in a recent number. *Time* derided some things in the history but concluded by telling its several million readers that they would find it interesting reading.

The binding is good, the illustrations of which there are forty-four are excellent and show the character and growth of the new state. All in all it is a good work to have upon the table of one who likes to read history.

Charles Evans.