

The Literary Campbells

Isabel Campbell's First Novel Meets Striking Success

By Sallye Little Brandt, DePauw University, '25

THE literary Campbells. Sounds like the booking name for a vaudeville troupe, doesn't it? Well, the phrase is apt in spite of the connotation it implies—certainly not because of the connotation, for the Campbells are anything, but show people.

In fact, when Professor Walter S. Campbell, associate professor of English in the University of Oklahoma, known by his writings as Stanley Vestal, and Mrs. Isabel Campbell, ex-'19 arts-sc., returned to the campus this fall after spending his sabbatical year in the east, the news of their accomplishments was slow in reaching the campus.

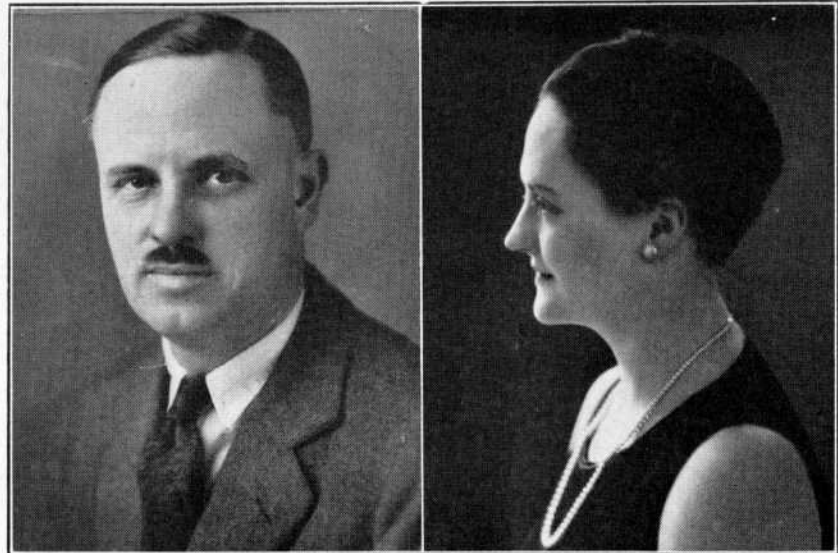
During that year, however, Professor Campbell had completed his widely-known, and widely commented-on biography of Kit Carson (published by Houghton Mifflin Co., and to be reviewed in *The Sooner Magazine* in the November (Homecoming) issue by Dr. Edward E. Dale), and Mrs. Campbell had had her first novel accepted for publication, not to mention the fact that she held contracts already signed for her next two novels.

The Campbells have both attained enviable positions in the literary world but their successes have not been cause for them to set themselves apart. He is just a member of the university faculty, albeit a very much beloved one, and she is in her home life—merely the wife of that professor and the proud mother of two lovely little daughters, Malory and Dorothy.

News of Mrs. Campbell's success with the eastern publishers, Coward-McCann Inc., this summer came as a distinct surprise to the few friends on the campus who have had the good fortune to be "let in" on the story, as yet almost a secret.

Though she had had poems published in *Poetry*, not even her closest friends had an inkling that the material for a novel had been, as she says, "simmering" in her mind for two years.

The novel "Jack Sprat" is a story of family life in an average, normal American home. The title contains the theme for the book—the hero, Jack



LIFE PARTNERS BUT RIVALS IN LITERATURE

When Stanley Vestal wrote "finis" to his "Kit Carson," he probably didn't realize that another member of his family was profiting by the sabbatical leave of absence granted him from the English faculty. But with romantic suddenness, Isabel Campbell's first novel was seen by publisher's critics, and accepted with dizzying speed. Really, it isn't fair to say that Prof. W. S. Campbell (Stanley Vestal) is a rival in literature of his wife, for both write in different fields; and anyway, for a rival, Professor Campbell is a kindly one, for he "tended" house while his wife completed "Jack Sprat." Mr. and Mrs. Campbell's photographs appear above.

Sprat, being a distant relative of the Mother Goose character who as you remember "could eat no fat." The Jack Sprat of Mrs. Campbell's novel is a dispassionate, unemotional, selfish individual. He loves his wife and two children—that is, he has a certain shallow affection for them—but he is utterly incapable of either feeling himself or absorbing the richness of his wife's love. Hence the title, "Jack Sprat"—for the hero emotionally could not feed upon richness.

"I had read numerous books on family life in the upper classes and in abnormal groups and it appeared to me the time was ripe for a novel of family life in the average home," the author explained.

Evidently her assumption was correct for in accepting the novel Mr. Coward of the Coward-McCann Inc., told her that the literary pendulum is now swinging back to the novel of family life and that her book, when it appears

on the publisher's fall lists in 1929 will be very timely.

The story of "Jack Sprat's" introduction to the publishers sounded like a fairy tale as Mrs. Campbell related it, reticent at first to tell it but when once started, carried into the story by the very thrill of living over again the exciting experience.

SHE HAD been jotting down notes for the novel for two years before she and Mr. Campbell left for the east last year. Her method is to keep index cards in drawers and on tables all over the house so that when an idea, an expression, a phrase, a bit of conversation passes through her mind she can jot it down at once.

"When I sat down actually to write the novel, I had the cards before me to shuffle and to sort at will and they were really the first draft for the work," she said.

She had completed 20,000 words of

the novel when she felt a desire for ready cash and decided to leave the novel for short story writing. She had published a clever, sophisticated short story in Harper's Bazaar in the June issue. A friend saw the beginning of the novel at about this time and through her a representative of the Coward-McCann Inc., was introduced to the 20,000 words.

Both of them urged Mrs. Campbell to complete the work and the publisher's representative had been so impressed that she insisted upon showing the work to her employers. After reading this much they offered to pay Mrs. Campbell \$100 a month for three months so that she would be enabled to finish the work uninterrupted.

She succeeded in completing it just before they left for the west and heard from the publisher's own lips that the completed work had been accepted without reservations.

Just how the book will be received remains to be seen next fall when it appears on the market and is met by the critics. At any rate so confident of its success were the publishers that they at once contracted for her next two novels, one of which she admits is already "simmering" in her mind and for which decoy cards will probably soon be placed about the Campbell house with handy pencils.

Although Professor Campbell's writings are in an entirely different field from hers and the two people have little in common by their material and writing methods, Professor Campbell deserves some credit for "Jack Sprat," for he admits quite frankly that he washed many a dish and dusted many a piece of furniture many a time so that the author of "Jack Sprat" could work unhampered by thoughts of household cares.

Professor Campbell has been somewhat neglected thus far in this article. This was not intentional—but his works are already so well known to most Oklahomans that his successes are not the surprise that his wife's has been.

"Kit Carson" published under his pen name, Stanley Vestal, by the Houghton Mifflin Co., has been front paged, praised and honored in the New York Times Book Review. Everywhere the book was received well by the critics as a valuable addition to the literature of that celebrated frontiersman. The New Republic said it was exceptionally fine. The Dallas News was warm in its praise and numerous other book review sections



ISABEL CAMPBELL AND
DAUGHTERS

This is a delightful informal picture of Isabel Campbell, Sooner whose first novel received enthusiastic praise from the publishers, who contracted for her next two novels. With her are her beautiful daughters, Malory aged nine years and Dorothy aged six years.

have given "Kit Carson" a splendid reception.

PROFESSOR Campbell has a vast knowledge of early day western life, of the Indians and their folk lore. Most of his poems, which incidentally first won him fame and which are now published in book form, deal with Oklahoma life and are picturesque, quaint sketches and fragments of the prairies.

Professor and Mrs. Campbell spent the first part of their year in the east at Montclair, N. J., but most of "Jack Sprat" was written in a little farm house near Falls Village, Conn., where they were guests of Professor Campbell's aunt, Mrs. Anna Campbell, formerly of Watonga, Oklahoma. She is the mother of Fleta Campbell Springer, whose short stories in Harper's Magazine are well known.

Though not a graduate Mrs. Campbell is a former student of the University of Oklahoma and she was graduated from the Oklahoma City high school. It was while she was a student here that she met her husband, who was then as now conducting classes in the English department.

They were married December 26, 1917, at the home of Mrs. Campbell's sister, Mrs. A. C. Plage in Dallas, Texas. He was at that time a captain in the 87th division and shortly after

their marriage left for France where he remained for the next eight months.

While he was abroad Mrs. Campbell made her home with Mrs. Plage, in Dallas. The novel "Jack Sprat" is dedicated to her sister, who is now living in Atlanta, Georgia. The novel is written under the name of Isabel Campbell.

Professor Campbell attended Southwestern State Normal school, was named an Oklahoma Rhodes scholar in 1907, attended Merton college, Oxford from 1908 to 1911, taking a second class in English Literature. He became assistant professor of English at the university in 1915.

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Building Program

Six new buildings for the University of Oklahoma will be asked in the budget submitted for the approval of the twelfth legislature. The total cost of the buildings would be \$1,070,000. The program is for two years.

Buildings and additions contemplated are:

A biological science hall, to cost \$250,000;

A home economics practice building, to cost \$10,000;

An addition to the geology building, to cost \$100,000;

The remodeling of the old library building for class room purposes, to cost \$100,000;

A journalism building, to cost \$200,000;

A home economics building, to cost \$250,000;

An addition to the fieldhouse, to cost \$150,000;

A home economics practice building, to cost \$10,000.

The last four items are to be built during the second year of the biennium.

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Don't Remain Lost!

The University of Oklahoma Association is making a strenuous effort to compile a complete and correct address register of all graduates. This service will be extended to former students as soon as possible. We want to know where you are and what you are doing even though you may not be a member of the association. In order that our records may be kept current it is requested that you drop us a card whenever your address or occupation changes.