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## THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WILD WEST



I HAVE often wondered—and so, probably, have you—how false a picture of life in the "Wild West" the average "Wild West" author paints.

Were the hombres nearly as tough as Clarence Mulford had them—or was it all a part of a Big Spoof Literary to keep children, young and old, amused after homework? If it was, then surely the spoof was as big as anything of its kind since Sir John Mandeville claimed to be the Rosita Forbes of the Thirteenth Century. There are few people these days who doubt that hell really popped in the mining towns of the south and west 50 years ago.

To my satisfaction, at least, Dan de Lara Hughes, latest of the autobiographic horde, has cleared up the whole question very nicely. If you are to believe him, the Wild West was just as rough and tough as it was painted—but not half so concentrated.

If, as I did, you once read "westerns" to while away a wet week-end—and then gave up the habit when the palate could no longer respond to heroes who shot seven rustlers dead without refilling the six-gun—read Dan's "South From Tombstone." I think at last he tells in it the truth about cowboys and rustlers. Here and there the truth may be a little highly-coloured, but it all helps in making an old-timer's reminiscences read even more excitingly than Mulford at his most imaginative.

"South From Tombstone" is a good book by any standards; good because it has what so few books of its kind have to tell—the story of a briskly-moving, red-blooded life.

Hughes was brought up by his mother in the wildest town on the Mexican Border—a town in which it was not uncommon to find two or three corpses every morning to mark a shooting in the saloons the night before. His youth was reckless. He took part in the exploits of a gang that nearly murdered the schoolmaster, carried the paybag through wild country over-run by Indians and bandits, fought cattle rustlers and train robbers, was tricked into "peonage"—mediaeval slavery—in pre-revolution Mexico; prospected for minerals in the unexplored Sierras; and found, in the end, that civilisation was more ruthless and less clean, when once it came, than ever lawlessness had been.

The whole strange, sometimes bru-

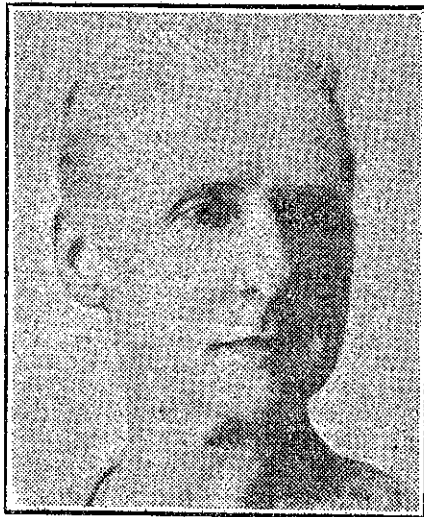
tal, story bears the stamp of authenticity, and has a peculiar, dual "personality." You can read it as a rattling good shocker at one sitting, or ponder on it as ironic history. Its climax—a brief, contemptuous picture of the modern West—is deeply moving. It left me with a grave doubt. I didn't know whether to prefer the Navajo Indians or Roosevelt's civil servants!

"South From Tombstone," by Dan de Lara Hughes (Methven, London). Our copy from the publishers.

## AN OLD FAVOURITE COMES AGAIN

FIFTEEN years ago, "The Story of a New Zealand River" was perhaps the most popular novel ever published by a New Zealander. It will be interesting to see how it is received to-day, in the reprinted edition, after so many other works of varying importance have set new standards.

Actually, there is much in Jane Mander's book that does not stand well under the light of a second, much later reading. All the same, the picture of New Zealand pioneering life, its hardships and compensations, is drawn in strong colours, and there will probably



Jane Mander.

be many who will enjoy the book for that virtue alone. If the romance of Dr. David Bruce and Mrs. Tom Roland is at times mawkish and melodramatic, the New Zealand setting and the peculiar conditions of New Zealand backwoods life are still as believable as they were when the novel was first published.

"The Story of a New Zealand River," by Jane Mander (Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd., New Zealand). Our copy from the publishers.

LISTENERS-IN to Pat Lawlor's "Purely Personal" talks from 2ZB will be interested to hear that a novel of his will be published in July by Messrs. A. H. and A. W. Reed. The title is "The House of Templemore." It is described as "a delicately intimate picture of a humble Irish colonial family in Wellington in the early twentieth century."

## VITAL FACTS

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