Belles lettres and bell ringers

The Persian Journey of the Reverend
Ashley Wishard and His Servant
Fathi, by Elgin Groseclose, '20as,
Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill. $2.50.

EAST is East and West is West’’
but sometimes at least the twain do meet.
Ashley Wishard, medical missionary to
Persia, backed by all the money necessary,
with a magnificent physical plant for his
mission, trained by all that the best of
American universities had to offer, with
all the mechanical resources of Western
civilization behind him, decided to visit
for himself the field in which he was to
work for his Master. His high-powered
automobile broke down, and was exchanged
for a three-horse carriage of uncertain vintage. The driver of the carriage
got drunk on opium, wrecked the carriage,
killed himself, and left Ashley and Fathi, his Moslem servant, helpless
in the hands of Kurdish brigands. Ashley
was able to save the life of the outlaw
chieftain’s son, and thereby to earn the
right to preach Christ to the wild tribes-
men.

That is the plot; but this is not a novel
plot. It is the story of a man’s search
for the meaning of life. Ashley Wishard
came to drop, one by one, his precon-
ceived notions of the functions of Chris-
tianity. He learned to know God, not in
terms of hospitals, schools, magnificent
cathedrals, and the amelioration of disease
and poverty, but in the words of his
Moslem servant, “by leaving the gates of
the soul ajar.”

He found out something of the tre-
mendous underlying meaning, the sadness,
the fanaticism, the single-mindedness, and
the austerity of Mohammedanism; and he
found good in it. He learned that there
is a satisfaction in renunciation which is
unknown to attainment; he found that,
unable to heal lepers, or to do anything to
alleviate their misery in the short time at
his disposal, he was still able to bring
them something which they prized still
more than health or comfort.

He founded a charity and a hospitality
among the Persians and the mongrel
strains of the East which he could not
have found in the enlightened West. And
above all, he found that, instead of being
a teacher, he had become to a far greater
extent, a learner, and that by stripping off
the accoutrements of civilization, he had
found God.

For the rest, a vivid travel book, writ-
ten with all the imagery and grace of the
Persian poets (Dr. Groseclose, '20as, lived
in Persia for three years after which he
went to Armenia, where he fell afoul of
the Soviets and got himself flown into
the secret prison for political offenders;
he is now on leave of absence from the
faculty of the College of Business Admin-
nistration at O. U. acting as assistant chief
economist for the Federal Communication
Commission); a fine tale of adventure, and
a comforting, guiding essay in the philos-
ophy of life.

The book has been compared to Thomp-
ton Wilder’s “The Bridge of San Luis
Rey,” to Yeats-Brown’s “Lives of a Ben-
gall Lancer,” and to other philosophical-
mystical excursions into the relation of
man to the universe. As a matter of fact
it stands alone, a thoughtful and thought-
provoking book, one which most Ameri-
cans could profit by.—KENNETH C. KAUF-
MAN.

Sooner in anthology

Poems by nearly a dozen Sooner gradu-
ates and former students are included in
the second volume of Anthology of
Poetry by Oklahoma Writers, recently
published by Aletha C. Conner, Okla-
ahoma City.

Sooner included in the book, and the
titles of their poems, are as follows: Clem
Craven, ’34as, Tulsa, I Walk With Death;
Edgar Dallas, ’06ex, Hammon, Ship’s
Pilots; Margaret Ross Thompson, ’30as,
Oklahoma City, Autumn Leaves; Ade-
line B. Hill, ’31ex, Chandler, Rain
and My Home; Johnathon Roosevelt Johns,
’26ex, Oklahoma City, Tomorrow and
Think; Don Moon, ’18ex, Guthrie, The
Great Race; Agnes Gail McClelland, ’29
ex, Oklahoma City, The Drood; Glen
Shelton, ’35ex, Altus, The Last Chieftain;
Etalea Unferth, ’35ex, Oklahoma City,
Pencil Etchings; and Emma Lou Walker,
’34ex, Waurika, Romance and To My
Grandmother.

It would be unreasonable to expect the
workmanship on the poems in this anth-
ology of Oklahoma writers to measure
up to the standards of the nation’s best
poets. There are amateur touches, but
the sincerity and the Oklahoma subject
matter in many of the poems helps to off-
set the occasional lack of polish.

Some of the selections in this anthology
are finely done and probably will prove
of enduring worth. Don Moon’s The
Great Race is especially good, catching
the drama of the ’89 run in a simple but
effective manner.