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Review of *Beef, Leather and Grass* By Edmund Randolph

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in a unique manner, not as a fictional account of a ranch, a would-be 'Western' or an autobiography, but from personal observation. It is a bit of biographical history, a first-person, factual description of places, people, customs and a form of American life that had its being in pioneer days and is now almost gone. . . . Only the names have been changed, and for obvious reasons: out of respect for the dead or the privacy of the living" (pp. x-xi).

This volume is most valuable for the insights it provides into the operations of a large-scale cattle ranch in the mid-twentieth-century West. What we find here is what surprisingly few people even yet understand: that ranching was and is a truly cosmopolitan and complex business, involving intricate financial dealings and far-flung geographical maneuverings. Randolph describes the familiar scenes and characters of western ranching: the shrewd and down-to-earth stockman, with "the standard middle-aged cattleman's starch-and-fried-food paunch just showing over the silver belt buckle" (p. 36); the crusty but trustworthy hired hands; the brandings, roundups, and rides. But more interestingly, he also tells of the extensive stock-buying forays into Mexico; the rigors of moving cattle by train north to Montana; the partnership that he and his partner formed with an Austrian nobleman and his wife during World War II; and even the filming of a movie on the ranch by a Hollywood crew. The story ends with a retrospect that is largely a warning against destroying this still lightly populated range country through thoughtless development, mainly by open-pit coal mining.

Randolph writes well, with a smooth literary flourish. His book is interesting for its deft character portraits and for the unpretentious manner in which the author tells his story of a fascinating time, place, and way of life. Yet it leaves one wishing that he had not confined himself to a series of vignettes that are revealing but do not fully encompass the breadth of his experience. Had he rounded out his book more in the fashion of a standard autobiography and used the real names of participants, historians would find it of more general

Beef, Leather and Grass. By Edmund Randolph. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981. Illustrations. xi + 286 pp. \$14.95.

Edmund Randolph is a New Yorker and a Princeton graduate who came west in the 1920s and took up ranching in southeastern Montana. In *Beef, Leather and Grass*, he presents an autobiographical account of his partnership venture during the 1940s and early 1950s in a big-time ranching operation on the Antler spread, which lay on the Crow Reservation in the Little Big Horn Valley. The book, as the preface tells us, "deals with this situation

value. As it is, *Beef, Leather and Grass* is limited in scope, but it nevertheless captures the spirit of an age that is rapidly fading from memory.

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