

Judge Bok's Judge "Ulen"

BACKBONE OF THE HERRING. By Curtis Bok. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1941. 302 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by MAURICE HINDUS

MR. S. S. McCLURE, one-time magazine magnate, once said that the one quality in literature he always cherished, was charm. Had Mr. McClure been now an editor and had the manuscript of Curtis Bok's book come to his desk, he would have celebrated the discovery of an author after his own heart. For the one quality that permeates every page and every paragraph of this book, is charm. Reading it makes one forget a world gone mad with falsehood and hate and recreates a world we had once known and loved, the world of the common man with his silly vanities, his incongruous innocence, his response to kindness and wit, his love as well as his distrust of common sense.

The son of the late Edward Bok, the Dutch immigrant who has left an imperishable mark on the American magazine world, Curtis Bok, unlike his father, has taken to pen rather late in life. Though in his early forties, this is his first book. All his life he seems deliberately to have run away from writing or from a share in his father's literary enterprises. He has been a lawyer, an adventurer, a traveler, a politician, a social crusader, and finally, he has found the one profession he truly loves—a judgeship in the Court of Common Pleas in Philadelphia.

Though written in the third person, the book is autobiographical. Judge Ulen is none other than Curtis Bok. The judge tells us little about his private life but a great deal about his private thoughts. The key to these thoughts is revealed in Ulen's remark

that the late Justice Holmes "loved life and had, I suspect, more compassion for the gods that run it than for the people that live in it."

Ulen certainly loves life, not the extravagances of material enjoyment nor the quest of social adulation, but the things that common folk do, the nature of their waywardness, and the reasons thereof. The men and women who pass before him sin and deceive one another. They seek revenge, fight for the restitution of glory or possession. Ulen listens intently. He never sermonizes. He pronounces neither anathemas on the erring nor benedictions on the righteous. Always he seeks to understand them and to treat them

with dignity and wit, and that regardless of whether they are frightened immigrants or flirtatious young women, single and married, who never forget to flaunt their feminine allurements before His Honor. He hears a serious case of a violator of the traffic laws and shortly afterwards has his own car smashed on a busy crossing. He doesn't mind showing an erring mother in his private chambers how to diaper her baby, nor to give her instruction how properly to care for it. He is a father, he loves children, and why shouldn't he perform a humane chore even while wearing his robes?

Curtis Bok has written a wise and delightful book. In days of violence and blood like ours, it is a heartening book to read, for it reaffirms one's faith in the humanity of man.

The "Discoverer"

TAR HEELS: A Portrait of North Carolina. By Jonathan Daniels. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1941. 347 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by JOHN TEMPLE GRAVES II

IT isn't necessary to be a North Carolinian or even kin to one to be stimulated and entertained by Mr. Daniels's book about his state. Art for art's sake is always cropping out in Jonathan and embarrassing as this may be to so earnest a sociologist, it makes him readable where others are not.

He takes you here from sea-lands to mountain tops, Buck Duke to Frank Graham, tobacco and cotton economies to hotcha and to the "strawberry babies" that are born at biologically exact intervals after annual convivialities of the berry-picking season. He travels from Wilmington to Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Durham, Charlotte, Asheville, and back to his alma mater at Chapel Hill, and always with a happy trick of putting a red ribbon on a statistic to make it dance, or a black dress and letting it cry. In all the ways in which North Carolina is different and the other ways in which it is typical you are carried along in the company of a wondrously catholic-spirited and companionable gentleman. It is a treat to be with him anywhere, and especially at home.

This book, one of a series on "The Sovereign States" which Dodd, Mead is publishing, deserved better proof-reading. It is a mercifully fresh departure from books about localities which can interest only the people who live there, and them not much. The author makes his North Carolina as nationally attractive as Brooklyn's

beloved Dodgers or California's stars.

In the chapter on Asheville, Thomas Wolfe comes home again, dead. Mr. Daniels was a pall-bearer. Thomas Wolfe had written ill of his fellow citizens there and could never again feel comfortable with them. All over the South there are gentle folks, and some not gentle, who are "mad at" Jonathan Daniels for something he wrote about them in his "A Southerner Discovers the South." He has written some sharp things about people of his own state in this book, too.

But he can come home again any time he wants to, and is doing it all the time. That is partly because he has never really gone away in spirit and is continually going and coming physically. His roots are there and they go deep and away back. He knows the state so well he can feel it as well as see it. He belongs to it so ingrainedly that he couldn't get away if he tried. From all his travels and "discoveries" he comes back to North Carolina as surely as a pigeon.

In addition is the fact that he writes with merciful freedom from those awful introspections which were making so much genius hard to enjoy until the war put an objective focus on everything. Because he is a man of letters and also a newspaperman, his story comes first with him, and he tells it with such gusto and sharp-sight that the attending observations and analyses seem incidental, no matter how pungent, and make no one more than just a little mad. There is a merriment about him as he writes, a song under his breath, an inclination to play with words and happenings and generally to enjoy life as he plies with fine determination his sociology.



Curtis Bok

In Darkest Tabloidia

MY LAST MILLION READERS. By Emile Gauvreau. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1941. 467 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by HAROLD PHELPS STOKES

ONE day, years ago, crossing Long Island Sound in the ferry from Sea Cliff to Rye, I spied a man in the car ahead of me dictating into a phonograph. I introduced myself as a cub reporter on the *Evening Post*, and Mr. Brisbane dropped the tube long enough to deliver me a memorable lecture on journalism. Its central theme was the risk an ambitious young newspaper man ran of getting to know too much about his subject.

"Whatever you do, Mr. Stokes," he warned, "never lose your superficiality."

That might well serve as the motto of the times, the manners, the methods, and the men Mr. Gauvreau describes in this book. Read it and learn:

How he discovered a "vaudeville hooper" named Winchell who could "convey as much implication in a line as could be safely expressed in a column."

How he met competition in the tabloid world by moving girl Siamese twins into a hospital after they had announced that they intended to be cut apart to enable one of them to marry.

How William Randolph Hearst, sitting on a pile of cushions in a lounging robe and in his bare feet, studied a copy of the first issue of the *Mirror* on the floor in front of him, turning over the pages with his toes.

How Hearst and Brisbane worried over the "extreme quietness" of that paper.

How one tabloid publisher, believing that Gauvreau was hot on the trail of the kidnapped Lindbergh baby, arranged to have it presented to Mayor Walker on the steps of the City Hall with the cameras clicking—and then returned to its mother in New Jersey.

How a slot-machine king fixed the machines in his apartment so that his guests (including city magistrates) would always win.

Gauvreau grew up down by the railroad tracks in New Haven and got his first job on the *Journal-Courier*, where he tried to impress the Yale professors who haunted his sanctum in World War days by the odd expedient of growing side whiskers. Five years on Charles Hopkins Clark's ultra-conservative *Hartford Courant* served as a perfect foil for his later adventures in tabloidia. The *Courant* fought daylight saving time as it ear-

lier fought reckless bicycle-riding, and Clark couldn't understand Gauvreau's crusade to save Mark Twain's house.

"Do you think Hartford will ever forget that he voted for Cleveland?" he asked.

A quarrel with Boss Rorbach over another of his crusades—this time against the "national diploma mill" which put workers at the mercy of untrained physicians—drove Gauvreau to New York.

There he launched the *Graphic* for Bernarr McFadden, whom he describes as the "only sincere publisher with whom I was ever associated." Certainly the picture he paints of his later employers is not flattering. One of them—Moses Annenberg of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*—ended his spectacular publishing career in jail. Another, Arthur Brisbane, of the dictating machines and dinosaurs, word wizard, headline genius, worshipper of Nero, blue eyes, and big money, is the subject of an exceptionally mordant picture.

Between the covers of this book is compressed much that is ugly and faithless in contemporary journalism. The world in which Gauvreau moved was one in which the counting room ruled and sensationalism reigned. He would have his readers believe that he was never happy in that world, however at home he was in it. He



—Drawing by James Montgomery Flagg
Emile Gauvreau

considered his paper a "crazy sheet," his labors a "waste of time." Repeatedly he sought escape from a way of life which impressed him as only "slightly above the crustacean order," and on rare occasions he even knew the joy of "covering news instead of uncovering it."

But more often he climbed scornfully out of one pigsty only to tumble gaily into another, living with the sensationalists long and intimately enough to produce, in "My Last Million Readers," what Lewis Gannett once called "a document for the pathological history of our age."

The Kings of Hawaii

WITHIN THE SOUND OF THESE WAVES. By William H. Chickering. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1941. 327 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

THIS is mainly the story of the kings of Hawaii, well written except for an occasional luscious phrase, and as accurate historically as could be expected considering that much of the material is derived from the natives' word-of-mouth biographies and the diaries of mariners. Mr. Chickering begins his narrative with King Liloa in the fifteenth century who for the first time separated the religious and the secular authorities. Then there were Hakau and Umi with their great battles, Keawe who collected his rivals' bones in a calabash, Lono who could dodge sixteen spears at once, Kalaniopuu, and friend of Captain Cook, Kamehameha, the first Hawaiian statesman and Liholiho who in 1819 freed the island of religious tabus just before the arrival of the New England missionaries.

The author's appraisal of these

primitive kings is an intelligent one; he extols the virtue and happiness of their people, despite continual internecine wars, and accepts their cruelty, which was mostly sacrificial, as a reasonable cultural phenomenon, but he cares little for the Polynesian gods who ruled every move of king and commoner. The marvelous Maui is not mentioned nor any of the major pantheon. He is at his best when telling of the natives' relations with the early white visitors, Captain Cook, whose death he describes most vividly, Metcalfe who wantonly massacred hundreds of Hawaiians, kindly Vancouver who introduced cattle and European plants, those curious beach-combers, John Young and Isaac Davis (this reviewer's grandsire) who became advisers to Kamehameha; and he has admirably built up from many journals the most consecutively detailed history of early commerce that we yet have had. These make excellent chapters, but the royal biographies, occupying most of the book, may seem too remote and exotic for the general reader.