

The Surgical Odyssey of Max Thorek

A *SURGEON'S WORLD*. By Max Thorek. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1943. 410 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

THIS is an extremely readable book, full of good anecdote, crowded with interesting personalities, written by a man who has himself risen to distinction and through his evolution from immigrant boy to noted surgeon has retained his warm sympathies and his eager curiosities. It is not well written, being too lush and fervent, and as medical annals it is interesting rather than important, but it is excellent personal history, diversified by informative and stimulating discussion of Dr. Thorek's field of work and related subjects, replete with vignettes of men and women in all walks of life, and rich in portrayal of the quirks of human nature which are unfolded to all good medical men.

The early chapters of the book constitute one of those charming and touching stories which have repeated themselves so often in the course of American evolution. Dr. Thorek sketches with nostalgic tenderness the Hungary of his childhood and the dream which led his family to desert its home to seek a new one across the seas. Like so many Europeans who left their countries for the Promised Land across the Atlantic, the Thoreks arrived in the United States to find that the glowing reports of plenty and opportunity which had drawn them to it were illusion and not reality. The uncle, whose happy fortunes they had deduced from letters, could lead them to no greater comfort than a tenement upon their arrival. But there was a firm fibre in the mother especially which met adversity with courage and which armed the youth with ambition. The family settled in Chicago, and the young Hungarian lad rapidly began to make his way. Among the poor of his neighborhood he began to build up a practice, and as time went on (he had married in the meanwhile the sweet-

heart of his youth who had come to him from Hungary) his reputation spread and he found himself acquiring a fashionable and wealthy patronage. He moved to a handsome home and fine section of the city, but retained his vivid interest in the humble friends who had started him on his career, continuing to minister to many of them even after he had become established as a distinguished and highly successful surgeon.

It was particularly among circus and theatrical folk that Dr. Thorek carried on his work and his book is studded with entertaining tales of these temperamental and picturesque

personalities. But it is all good reading, whether he writes of stars of stage and sawdust ring, or whether he enters at length into the story of Cook whose version of his conquest of the Pole Dr. Thorek is inclined to accept, or describes the ills and attitudes of great industrialists and fashionable women, or the troubles of the inhabitants of the slums. The book has warmth and charm and gusto, and reflects an ingratiating personality of quick sympathies and ready helpfulness. There is no more enthralling reading than the chronicle of a medical man who has interest in humanity and knowledge of his profession and his world. Dr. Thorek is such a man and his volume is an engrossing narrative.



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Mr. Kane in Acadian Bayous

THE BAYOUS OF LOUISIANA. By Harnett T. Kane. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1943. 341 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

NOTHING could better illustrate the paradoxical quality of the good-bad South in general and of Louisiana in particular than the succession of Harnett Kane's work. Two years ago Mr. Kane gave us in "Louisiana Hayride" the best documentation of the theft and thuggery of Huey Long's gang. Now he has written in affection the almost idyllic picture of the State's lazy bayous and the lively French people beside them. It is difficult to recognize the people of this new book as constituents who made the tough and slippery power of the tawdry hero of the first one. The two books together, however, give depth and wholeness to the strange contemporary portrait of the romantic and roughneck, and always dramatic, old State of Louisiana.

Although Mr. Kane writes about Louisiana's bayous, he is not really concerned about the drainage system of a rich low country. He defines and describes his bayous (bi' oo is his Louisiana pronunciation; it can be biar to rhyme with fire along the big river up in Mississippi). Then he moves quickly and with a contagious eagerness to the description of the people beside them. From muskrat trapper to masters of great houses they are a people always charming in their faults, as well as in their many virtues.

Mr. Kane tells us the real story of Longfellow's Evangeline who is certainly the best known figure among all

those transplanted Acadian French who have put down such strong roots in the wet Louisiana soil. They are, as Mr. Kane presents them, a gay, thrifty, a clannish, and a romantic people. But the Cajuns (a name not always welcomed by the Acadians) are by no means the only people in this country. Long ago the Anglo-Saxon Americans began to push on the country from the North. Other nationalities came in those old days. In recent times oil and other riches have brought in Texans and Middle Westerners.

Sometimes they have seemed to over-

whelm the French on the lands they have so long occupied. But Mr. Kane is betting on the final triumph of the French. It sounds like a good bet. Certainly if these low country Louisiana French are as charming on the land as they are in Mr. Kane's book about them, it is to be hoped that they will triumph and that in survival they will not be too much changed by the roads and the movies and all the other forces which move in swifter current than the good sluggish bayous. As workers, as lovers, as jokers, as people in their own unique pattern they are a part of America which needs preservation against any push of American uniformity from any source.

Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy

GIDEON WELLES: LINCOLN'S NAVY DEPARTMENT. By Richard S. West, Jr. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1943. 379 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE H. GENZMER

IN this biography-writing land it is astonishing that Gideon Welles, Esq., Secretary of the Navy in the cabinets of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, should have rested from his labors for sixty-eight years without being disturbed by a single biographer. There was never any danger, of course, that he would be forgotten. His own indispensable diary-memoir would alone be sufficient to keep his memory alive; no historian of naval or military affairs can traverse the Civil War period without encountering his sturdy figure; and several years ago Professor Howard K. Beale contributed a masterly sketch of him to the "Dictionary of American Biography." But it remained for Professor Richard S. West, Jr., of the United States Naval Academy, to fill an all too obvious gap in our national biography.

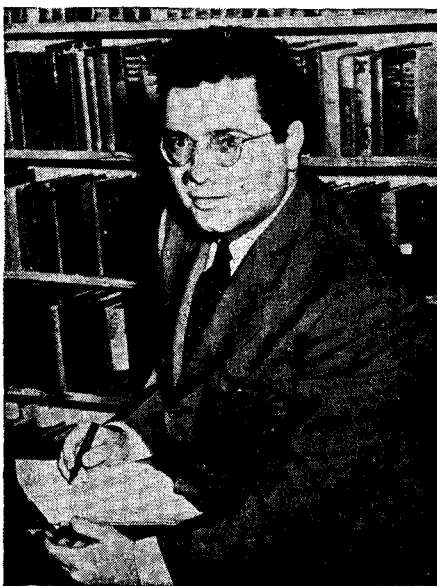
He has filled it most handsomely. Research, documentation, index, illustrations are all that could be asked, and the writing is a delight to anyone who knows good English when he sees it. Into an orderly, well-paced narrative of 325 pages, Mr. West has fitted, without crowding, hurrying, or omitting, materials that many a biographer would have inflated to twice their proper bulk.

It is refreshing, also, to catch a Navy man writing with unfeigned enthusiasm about a Secretary of the Navy; but if ever the head of that department earned this unusual honor, his name was Gideon Welles. When he took office, on the shortest notice perhaps ever given to a cabinet officer during a national crisis, the United

States had a navy department but hardly a navy. Within three months 259 officers of all grades had resigned, and the atmosphere reeked with treason, suspicion, and defeatism. Congress was mulish and the newspapers hostile. Because he refused to give them the spectacular war on the high seas that they craved to fill their columns, the papers caricatured and calumniated him to the end as either a sleepy old fool or a cross-grained, dyed-in-the-wool curmudgeon. The old-fool charge was based on an optical illusion created by Welles's bushy white wig and bushier white chin-whiskers; but the curmudgeon charge was genuine enough. But happy the nation, if it knew its happiness, that has a few honest curmudgeons in high office amidst the alarms, confusions, and chicaneries of war!

Yet in spite of everything Welles succeeded in rebuilding and modernizing the Navy, in finding the right officers and putting them in the right positions, in working with the always difficult Stanton in the War Department and with the frequently meddling Seward in the State Department, in waging a victorious war on the Mississippi and its tributaries, and in blockading the Confederacy from the Virginia capes to the mouth of the Rio Grande. Over the whole administration, too, he exercised a steadying, strengthening influence. Not the greatest of Lincoln's cabinet officers, he was the one who deserved—and who received—the President's trust and gratitude unalloyed.

A Boston husband got a letter at his Army camp from his wife. It contained a sketch of their car's instrument panel and said: "That's the exact way the dashboard looks. Do we need a quart of oil?"—*Liberty*.



Harnett Kane