

Capital Sob Sister

WASHINGTON BY-LINE. By Bess Furman. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1949. 348 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by KATHERINE PRINGLE

THE author of "Washington By-Line" is a Nebraskan born and bred, the daughter of a small-town newspaper family. A reporter literally from childhood, Bess Furman has covered Washington since 1929, much of that time for the Associated Press and more recently for *The New York Times*. For twenty years she has looked at the Capital through the eyes of a newspaperwoman and of an unreconstructed Midwesterner.

The reminiscences of two decades which she has here set down are sometimes wide-eyed. Miss Furman has had, as she observes in another connection, "a whee of a time." She never stopped going about "like the old lawk-a-mercy lady, more amazed from day to day at where I was and what I was doing." Her Washington may be artificial; it is also brilliant, dazzling, altogether fascinating.

The Capital, as Miss Furman reports it through the Hoover and Roosevelt Administrations and the first Truman Administration, is seen in terms of personalities rather than of issues. As an old AP reporter, Miss Furman has the habit of neutrality. She wrote for both Republican and Democratic papers and, as she says, on all sides of controversies. But she is a friendly person, and she has drawn friends to her by the hundreds. She came to know almost everyone of importance in Washington. Her book consists largely of a series of graphic, if uncritical portraits of Senators, Representatives, politicians, Government officials—and their wives and families—from Mrs. Herbert Hoover to Margaret Truman. Centering around them the nostalgic reader will find retold some episodes, now half-forgotten, which once shook Washington to its core: the Alice Roosevelt Longworth-Dolly Curtis Gann rivalry, for instance. Both ladies come off with their dignity intact in Miss Furman's version, by the way, and Mrs. Gann receives some long overdue credit for her political acuteness and her successful campaign for her brother's renomination. The late Ruth Bryan Owen Rohde was a close personal friend of Miss Furman, who pays her tribute in illuminating details of her activity first on the Hill and later as Minister to Denmark.

Most of Miss Furman's portraits are of women—and what emerges most vividly from her book is the impor-



tance of women in the New Deal—from able, self-effacing Mrs. John Nance Garner to Pauline Morton Sabin and her "Women Wets." Here, for the first time, is a detailed appreciation of the contribution to Franklin Roosevelt's 1932 and 1936 victories of Miss Mary W. Dawson, who supervised the Women's Division of the Democratic Campaign Committee. Here are described some of Miss Grace Abbott's struggles in the children's bureau. Here is the record of an early press conference of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, in which she outlined in masterly fashion some of the paths the New Deal might explore—a press conference which the late Raymond Clapper called one of the most outstanding of his entire Washington experience. This was before Miss Perkins became allergic to the press, as a result of its magnifying her famous slip about "putting shoes on the South." Here is a swift sketch of General Hugh Johnson's indispensable "Robbie."

Many other names and faces appear in Miss Furman's pages. But her book is dominated by the personality of Eleanor Roosevelt. Bess Furman was a White House intimate to a greater extent than any other newspaperwoman except Ruby Black. Covering Mrs. Roosevelt was her top-priority assignment from 1933 through 1936, and she writes that in order to keep up with the President's wife she had to go into low-heeled shoes.

Not only Mrs. Roosevelt's energetic public activities, but also her warm, generous, thoughtful private life is portrayed in detail. If Miss Furman's book is important chiefly as a footnote to Washington history of the past twenty years, on the subject of Mrs. Roosevelt it contains much valuable source material. Whoever writes the ultimate biography of Eleanor Roosevelt will want to consult this volume for the light it sheds on that many-sided woman. Meanwhile, for anyone who has watched the Capital, or lived in it, since 1929, the book makes lively, heart-warming reading.

Katherine Pringle has collaborated with her husband, Henry F. Pringle, on many magazine articles about the Washington scene.

Reform Pressure

THE SOCIAL POLITICS OF FEPC. By Louis C. Kesselman. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1948. 253 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by MARK STARR

RARELY does a book so well live up to its jacket claim:

For the social scientist this book analyzes the physiology and anatomy of a reform pressure movement; for the reader interested in reform politics it evaluates pressure techniques in realistic terms; and for the general reader it tells the inside story of one of the most exciting and controversial legislative campaigns in recent years.

The letters FEPC, as you can easily check by quizzing your friends, have reached the stage of familiarity when nobody unpacks them any more. And because the request for a permanent Federal Employment Practices Commission will figure prominently in the Eighty-first Congress, this story of the movement for Federal compulsion to remove job discrimination is much more than water down the stream of history. The Report of the President's Commission on Civil Rights (now being made into a movie by a committee headed by Melvyn Douglas) and the more recent report on the revolting treatment of the Negro in Washington, D. C. (to be made more widely available soon as a Public Affairs pamphlet) have indicted our failure to practise our democratic faith.

But Dr. Kesselman's study goes farther than these reports. He relates how President Roosevelt, alarmed by Phillip Randolph's proposal to lead a march of Negroes on Washington, created FEPC in 1941 by an Executive order, and tells about the difficulties created by officials afraid to apply it and by Congressmen who tried to kill it. From 1942 to 1946 the legislative battle to make FEPC permanent was waged until a twenty-three-day Senate filibuster by the Dixiecrats defeated the FEPC advocates, although some consolation was found in the commissions against discrimination set up in New York and other states.

Since this book was finished, the Dixiecrats, with whom Roosevelt compromised, have defied their party on the issue of civil rights, and equal job opportunities are basic to that program. We lynch by inches when we refuse men and women the right to work or deny them membership in unions or the right to better jobs. Incidentally, the attitude of the unions has improved since Herbert R. North-

The Saturday Review

rup's "Organized Labor and the Negro" (1944), which Dr. Kesselman follows, was written.

The twofold purpose of this book is to tell not only *what* was brought to the attention of Congress but *how*. Given a two-party system, with each party a mosaic of regional and economic interests, muddled principles, and historical hangovers, pressure politics seems likely to be with us for a while. Nevertheless, one should not ignore that a conscious extension of New Deal methods and principles, the economic changes consequent to the cotton-picking and coal-digging machines, atomic energy, corporate controls, and social planning may well produce a new political alignment which would introduce a more logical pattern into our political party life. Hence, we need this manual based on experience. How do we focus our indignation and desires on Congress by adequate political pressure? Securing and enforcing a permanent FEPC will be a tremendous effort in community self-education.

The fundamental difficulty of pressure politics is that men and movements cannot normally concentrate upon one measure and forsake all others. The Anti-Saloon League was the outstanding exception and the results of prohibition and its repeal are not encouraging. Dr. Kesselman's criticism of Phillip Randolph in his leadership of the National Council for FEPC overlooks the fact that Randolph was an idealist Negro Socialist who could not demean himself by promising votes to the old-line party politicians when he believed in a new third party. Neither could he trade with the Stalinists under any conditions.

Dr. Kesselman shows all the difficulties of a radical pressure organization: shoestring resources and the frantic search for angels; voluntary or poorly paid staff; Stalinist attempts to infiltrate and capture; frictions among the various regiments of the stage army of reform often accentuated by personality conflicts; uncertain allies; the political deceptions, and maneuvers which operate to snatch victory in the final moments of the campaign. He is alarmed by the weakness of the Good Cause and its failure to break through the cake of custom, the apathy and ignorance and the fear aroused by any social change. But progress has been made, and the agitation over FEPC prepared the way for the new Congress to deal with this item of unfinished business on our agenda of applied democracy.

Mark Starr is educational director of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

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Personal History. In the autobiographies reviewed this week, two men and a woman offer glimpses of worlds now vanished yet nostalgically remembered. The tragedies and triumphs that daily befell an active and curious twelve-year-old boy living in New York City during the last decade of the last century are charmingly recaptured in Henry Noble MacCracken's "The Family on Gramercy Park." In it readers will find some of the same atmosphere and good humor that distinguished Clarence Day's reminiscences of Manhattan in the same epoch, "Life with Father." In almost the very year of which Noble MacCracken writes, a young American housewife by the name of Margaret Chanler was making a pilgrimage to the Wagnerian capital of Bayreuth—one of the highlights of the long lifetime as an aficionada of music she describes so delightfully in "Memory Makes Music." Nicholas Monsarrat, the son of a wealthy Liverpool surgeon, poignantly pictures the crumbling of the placid pre-World War I world in his family memoir "My Brother Denys."

New York Boy's World, 1892

THE FAMILY ON GRAMERCY PARK. By Henry Noble MacCracken. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1949. 213 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by EARNEST ELMO CALKINS

THE charm of this book is that a small section of the New York of 1892, a sort of enclave of which Gramercy Park is the center, is seen through the candid eyes of a twelve-year-old boy. That is, it is not an old man looking back with sentimental license or adult wisdom on his boyhood, but a lively kid writing in boy language, misspellings, bad grammar, and all, of what he and his gang do and what grown-ups talk about. The New York in which Noble MacCracken lives and moves is only as large as his interests and preoccupa-

tions, which are first his gang, then his family, and then such outside manifestations as the Columbian celebration, his school, or riding around with his father to seek a site for a bigger university up town.

For Papa is Chancellor of New York University, a pushover for auctions, an impulsive joiner of fights for worthy causes, who moves so fast between home and office his coattails and whiskers stream out behind. "Papa gets into more rows than you can shake a stick at," observes his admiring son. Papa almost becomes a full-length portrait in his son's picture. The boy is called Noble by the family, for Papa is another Henry, but to the boys of the gang he is "Nibsy." Wouldn't Vassar alumnae love that!

The Park with its high iron fence is the citadel of the gang. The passport is the private key to its gate, of which Noble is, for his family, the custodian. The gang sallies forth from this fortress to fight the Micks from Second Avenue, to ambush the choir boys of Dr. Satterlee's Calvary Church—choir boys being, it seems, especially tough gangs—and to chase alley cats until it falls afoul of one of Mr. Bergh's newly-created cops. Girls intrude and are tolerated with mild condescension. Mutton Gravy—the gang's rendition of her French name—tries to initiate them into the arts of romance and gallantry, but with small success. Sex intrudes, but not much. It is a healthy boy's world. Not many of the duties that country boys know fall to Noble's lot. Instead of weeding or chopping wood, his meanest chore is licking stamps for the catalogues of Papa's university.

