

ALTHOUGH WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENTS don't commonly write novels on the side, it would have been strange had "Advise and Consent" been written by anyone but a newspaperman covering the U.S. Senate. No ordinary novelist could hope to acquire so huge a fund of complex expertise. Allen Drury, a tall, good-looking Texan raised in California, is now in his thirties and has covered the Senate for sixteen years, the last five of them for *The New York Times*. As he put it to me: "Writing



Allen Drury

this book was like breathing—it practically wrote itself."

Like many professional novelists, Drury wrote his book according to plan. The idea for the story had hibernated in his mind for years, and from time to time he would jot down notes for this scene or that character. Two chapters were written in 1950, after which the project lay fallow until 1957 when an alert Doubleday editor heard of it and suggested a contract. As much to see whether he really could do it as to justify a contract, Drury then began his novel in earnest.

Writing on week ends, days off, and before-and-after work, he set himself a weekly quota of 4,000-5,000 words. During this period he virtually lived in and with the Senate—the real one by day, an imaginary one by night. Are his characters based on actual Senators? He prefers not to commit himself, but if readers detect certain similarities here and there, they need not rebuke themselves.

And where does all this submergence in the U.S. Senate leave Allen Drury? For one thing, it has reinforced his faith in the American system of government, which, with all its human failings, still seems to him the best in operation anywhere. Second, it has fortified his determination to choose a different milieu for his second novel. The scene will be California, and he is already at work on the manuscript.

Does this mean he is done with Washington? "Not at all. I like it too well. In fact, I've left my book open for a sequel, which I hope will be No. 3."

—JOHN BARKHAM.

stitution) is not a work that gives promise of greater depth and brilliance to come. On the whole, despite its grasp of the basic conflicts of our life and times, it is a stereotyped picture, and the performance of its leading characters is easily anticipated by anyone who has been reading the papers in recent years. A lot of the time Mr. Drury's American characters talk Self-conscious Colloquial, the dialogue idiom of the slick magazines. And the high-flown persiflage of his foreign diplomats, to one who has really heard diplomats joshing off the record, will seem on occasion a bit overdone. Nevertheless, it is near enough to get a pretty good idea of how they really talk and what they really talk about. The author's problem here is to stick to general topics that will at once carry forward his theme and make the chit-chat comprehensible to his average reader. Has he done so? The Book-of-the-Month Club and the *Reader's Digest* reprint seem to think that he has.

It may be fiction material put together along strictly standard lines,

with little original flavor, but if the writing inclines to the pedestrian the characters come into sharp and stable focus, and the story builds up with inevitable power. Once started, this novel is not easy to put down. And it is our own story; seen if you like from the standpoint of a right-wing philosophy.

The dilemma is that of our time—Allen Drury has written us a big book, certainly the biggest one about the Senate that we have. It may be a long time before a better one comes along.

COLLEEN BETRAYED: Edward McSorley's new novel has the merits and faults commonly found in the genre of Irish lyricism. Much of the detail in "*Kitty, I Hardly Knew You*" (Doubleday, \$3.95) is shrewdly observed, and the whole is flowingly, eloquently written. Let there be no doubt that Mr. McSorley has the touch to do exactly what he wishes. Pictorially his novel is sharp; in characterization it is picturesque and vivid, but impaired by the basic fault of the book. This fault is sentimentality, coupled with elab-

orate contrivance in order that all the stops of sentiment may be pulled out, all tears shed, so that ourselves it is keenin' and weepin' an' all an' all.

We meet first a young man called Clune, in Liverpool. He has fled there because he was accessory to the killing of a traitor in the always enormous complexity of the Irish civil wars. Working as a stoker, he crosses to the United States, determined to jump his ship and remain. On the voyage he makes love to the immigrant girl Kitty. He promises and intends to seek her at her sister's house and marry her. But Clune is a weak man and simply hasn't the courage to face the involvement.

Mr. McSorley uses the demanding technique of multiple first-person narration. The thread passes back and forth between Clune and Kitty. Halfway through, a new voice—that of Dom, an Italian taxicab driver—is added. The method takes this strain but cracks when another, merely peripheral, voice is added to relate the climactic chapter. On top of it all, the author switches to the third-person style for the closing pages.

Along with this over-elaboration of narrative devices, there is an artificiality about the patterns of Clune's and Kitty's destinies. A disquieting feeling grows that things are happening not through convincing chains of cause-and-effect, or from internal necessity, but simply because the author is determined to manipulate them so. It is this understructure of contrivance which mars the often effective and touching individual scenes and sequences of Irish-American immigrant life.

—EDMUND FULLER.



Edward McSorley—"has the touch."

Exploring Twenties

"Let Me Be Awake," by Stuart Mitchner (Crowell. 305 pp. \$3.95) and **"The Golden Youth of Lee Prince," by Aubrey Goodman** (Simon & Schuster. 344 pp. \$4.50) are two first novels by two very young first novelists. Stuart Mitchner is a student at Indiana University, and Aubrey Goodman was recently graduated from Yale. Their books are reviewed by David Dempsey, Antioch '37.

By David Dempsey

"IT TAKES a very long time to become young," Picasso once remarked; and although the ostensible purpose of these two first novels is a contemplation of modern youth—the combined age of the authors is forty-three—what we get is a literary image of youth which the current generation of college students, nursed on the books of J. D. Salinger, has come to regard as a convenient symbol of disenchantment. This is probably no coincidence. Unlike the writers of the Thirties, who found their material in the depression, or those of the war-oriented Forties, Mr. Mitchner and Mr. Goodman belong to a generation that has been thrown back upon itself. And since neither author has lived long enough to realize the kind of youthfulness that Picasso had in mind, they are walking most of the time on quicksand.

Both novels, in their own fashion, are extraordinarily readable. The mere act of filling 305 pages with any kind of story at all is, I take it, something of an accomplishment for a twenty-year-old, and Stuart Mitchner's "Let Me Be Awake" (which won the Thomas Y. Crowell College Novel Contest) although impressive chiefly as evidence of a talent that is solid, if not exactly exciting, is a book which its author will not have to apologize for later. It concerns a year in the life of Vince Reed, who attends a small college in Pennsylvania and returns to Indiana at the end of his freshman year puzzled and disillusioned by his Eastern adventures. He is determined to prove that you can go home again, and stay there.

Reed is conceived more in the Penrod than in Salinger's Holden Caulfield tradition, although like the latter he is beset by the adolescent's need for sheer experience as a means of defining his own personality. This is largely accomplished at the expense of Laura Straus, a psychologically complicated girl from New

York with whom Reed falls in love. Mitchner has a talent for seeing these people sardonically; and although the story itself is somewhat incredible, and the situations all too stereotyped, the characters enjoy a kind of fumbling reality which holds our interest throughout. My chief criticism is that Mr. Mitchner, in dealing with their problems, has dealt with them too sensibly, just as he himself comes through as a very sensible and unangry young man. (Too much of the book, for example, is needlessly given over to spoofing the Beatniks.) As I noted, however, he is only twenty, and there is a good chance that he will grow out of it.

Aubrey Goodman is twenty-three and his "The Golden Youth of Lee Prince" is, stylistically at least, three years better than Mr. Mitchner's novel. In fact, it would be better yet if it were not so well written, for the author's facility, which derives from a shrewd ear for speech, points up the absence of any real engagement with the fundamentals of his subject. Lee Prince is a talented, rich, and moody young man who, having graduated from Yale, takes a fancy apartment in New York City, and settles down to write a novel. The story is told at one remove by his roommate, Tony Anderson, who is understandably disturbed by the comings and goings of Lee's odd-ball friends. The trouble with Lee, as with so many young men whose motor runs all right, but who can't seem to get the

clutch out, is that they find themselves in a world they never made and damn well enjoy it.

In this case, youth will be served, and at great length. The result is a ramshackle and highly repetitious novel, which one can start in the middle, or at almost any other point, and read in either direction without the slightest damage to the story, or injury to the characters, who pop in and out like jack-in-the-boxes in order to get off at least one Bright Remark on every page.

I wish that Mr. Goodman, with all his ability, had not tried so hard to write such a clever book, that the parties in it were not quite so fabulous and the characters not so determined to be Characters. As it stands, "The Golden Youth of Lee Prince" will be appreciated best by those under twenty-five, who are willing to eat their way through a quart of whipped cream without ever getting down to the shortcake.

I wish, too, that both he and Stuart Mitchner would spend the next few years quarreling with themselves, or society, or their past, because I believe that talent owes to itself the duty of locating its own points of resistance and working from there on out. The problem for both writers is that their leading characters, as they are conceived, have literally nowhere to go; the challenge of their future is to find a more objective viewpoint, and to apply it to something besides themselves.



Your Literary I. Q.

WHEN THEY WERE VERY, VERY YOUNG

Often we meet literary characters when they are tiny infants. Fannie Gross, of Asheville, North Carolina, asks you to identify ten such babies by the incidents briefly described below. Grown-up answers on page 40.

1. When this baby was born a boy instead of a girl, his Aunt Betsy considered it a personal affront.
2. When a day or so old, this infant was left in a hole of a wall at an Italian convent.
3. This baby was found floating down the Nile in a little reed boat.
4. Because his future looked black, this new-born boy was left hanging by his feet from a limb of a tree on Mount Cithaeron, supposedly to die.
5. This oversized infant, having freed his arm from his swaddling clothes, seized and ate the cow that was furnishing his milk.
6. This parentless baby was unanimously adopted by a hundred men in a rough camp and credited with bringing prosperity.
7. The winter night this baby girl was born both her father and mother died.
8. This orphaned son of a Negro circus trouper and a Mississippi white girl was consigned to an orphanage by his outraged grandfather and given a holiday for a surname.
9. The day this baby girl came into the world cawing crows circled about the house, which was a bad sign—the child was born feeble-minded.
10. When this baby girl's mother was sold at auction by her drunken father for five guineas, she was included in the transaction.