

Law and Humor

PILLAR TO POST. By Henry H. Curran. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1941. 387 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by JAMES REID PARKER

THAT delight in a full, exciting life so commonly regarded as the exclusive property of the Elizabethans crowds the pages of the autobiography of Henry H. Curran, Chief Magistrate of New York City. It is in the best use of the word a humorous book. The fact that a career spent almost entirely in the circus maximus of Manhattan politics has not dulled Judge Curran's wit and love of his fellow man, but, rather, sharpened these qualities, is something worth remarking all by itself.

Regrettably, he by no means writes enough about his days as Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island and his work as a magistrate—the case book sort of thing that he did so beautifully in his last book, "Magistrate's Court." Here his Aldermanic experiences, his Army life, and other chapters are done in rather greater detail. Not that the Ellis Island interval is overlooked (the story of how the theatrical midgets rid the Island of mice by crouching beside the mouseholes and pouncing, cat-fashion, engagingly refutes the supposition that there is nothing new under the sun) and not that one isn't given a glimpse or two of the Magistrate's Court (we get the authoritative version of the one about the young couple being sent from the Yorkville court to the Waldorf-Astoria for a good night's rest, with hotel expenses paid, when the East River road construction had continually deprived them of their sleep). If the book is mostly anecdote, one can't complain, for it is through the graphic agency of storytelling that a wise and gentle official has modestly chosen to explain something of his own character.

Like so many good romantics, Judge Curran has found his life complicated by an occasional impulsiveness, not necessarily inviting trouble, either. A wistful, unpremeditated reply to a formal speech of greeting read by the Crown Prince of Norway at the City Hall—"You speak so much better English than the Board of Estimate!"—while a blow to protocol, did not result in disaster. It enlivened the occasion, in fact, and in this autobiography gives the reader a pleasant sidelight on a municipal dignitary who can be troubled not only by such a matter as injustice, but by those less spectacular annoyances, the verb "to

ELLEN GLASGOW

"who belongs unquestionably to that small group of fiction writers who, in the twentieth century in America, have brought that art to one of its peaks in English."

—Citation of The Saturday Review of Literature's Award to Ellen Glasgow for Distinguished Service to American Literature.

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—Presentation of the Howells Medal for Fiction to Ellen Glasgow.

WITH the appearance of Ellen Glasgow's new novel, *IN THIS OUR LIFE*, there is reaffirmed this salient fact—America has a great novelist. Her wide circle of readers has known it, has seen her successive books build, from the amazing fund of her genius, that peak which is hers in American letters.

In *IN THIS OUR LIFE*, "the wisest woman in the South has written her commentary upon us," says Howard Mumford Jones, "and we do not yet know how profound that commentary is . . . In the whole history of the American novel there is no achievement quite like hers." But, as *Time Magazine* says, "her novels are no more Virginian than *The Trojan Women* is Trojan." *IN THIS OUR LIFE* is a book for everyone, and particularly everyone today. It examines with compassion and wit and vision the standards we live by. For its magnificent story, for its suspense and drama alone, it is the season's most exciting reading. For the power and glory of its creation, it is the novel of the year.

IN THIS OUR LIFE

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contact" and the expression "and/or."

One of the numerous things that set Judge Curran apart from his colleagues is his readiness to take elections philosophically. He has been in campaigns, without being of them. When a man who is running for the office of Mayor of New York, or for any other office in the city, for that matter, is endlessly aware of the humorous aspect of each moment of his life, he can be neither a master politician nor a self-idolater. Of all the jobs Henry Curran has had, the job to which he seems most happily suited, temperamentally, is the one he currently occupies, a chief magistracy. To watch the sidewalks of New York from a vantage point, and to be able to improve those sidewalks in whatever way he can—his own amiably eccentric way, as a rule—is a dish that pleases him. In a way this autobiography might be called an auxiliary guide to New York. A book beguiling and wise, that has very little to say about the city's architecture, but a great deal about its fascinating people. Including, and it must be remembered that the adjective is the reviewer's, Henry H. Curran.

James Reid Parker, author of "Academic Procession," is currently writing the *Forbes, Hathaway, Bryan & Devore* law stories for The New Yorker.

A Panorama of Christianity

A HISTORY OF THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY: Vol. IV, *The Great, Great Century, 1800-1914*. By Kenneth Scott Latourette. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1941. 516 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

PROFESSOR Latourette's great work is nearing completion. His first three volumes dealt with the expansion of Christianity in its first eighteen centuries. His last three, of which this is the first, will deal with a single century, the nineteenth, which he very properly concludes in 1914. In this volume, he limits himself to Europe and the United States. He is concerned neither with the history of theology, nor in the ordinary sense, with Church history, but with the history of Christianity as a missionary enterprise.

So enormous is his material that for pages and pages he has to fall into a kind of catalogue, an encyclopaedic listing of missions, circuits, revivals, colleges, dioceses, and associations. Into this endless series of names and dates little color and life can penetrate. The Mormons move like disembodied spirits from Kirtland to Nauvoo and on to Deseret. John

Humphrey Noyes, in a bare sentence, "established a Christian communistic society at Oneida, New York." It is true that a footnote sends the reader to books where he can find the color and the life with which this "Yankee saint" was abundantly endowed. Had he done nothing more than to unite systematically material nowhere else brought together, Professor Latourette would deserve the gratitude of every student of modern history. He does, however, do a great deal more.

For, in addition to giving us these scholarly listings of the facts about the expansion of Christianity, Professor Latourette pauses now and then to give a sociological interpretation of the impact of organized Christianity on the world, and of the world on organized Christianity. In his earlier volumes he has supplied at least the minimum of intellectual and institutional history, so that the reader familiar with the whole work knows what Professor Latourette means by Christianity. Here he sums up such forces as agnosticism and rationalism, nationalism, socialism, militarism, and many other "isms" and relates them to the growth of nineteenth-century Christianity. The bones of his logical framework stand out clearly, a little in the classroom manner, and his terms often have the lack of precision so frequent in the social sciences. But there is meat here, and good sense. The extraordinary multiplication of sects in the United States he rightly sees is not in itself a sign of weakness in American Christianity, but rather a sign of youth and strength.

This book should remind the skeptical and the indifferent as well as the prophets of doom among us of a simple and often forgotten fact. Since the French Revolution, Christians in the technical and measurable sense of membership in an organized body of worshippers have multiplied proportionately far beyond the very great natural increase of world population. There were in 1914 many more Christians than in 1789, not only absolutely, but relatively. Many grave problems are still left unresolved when you have made that statement. Perhaps most Christians in 1914 were not "real" Christians. Perhaps totalitarian national faiths have since then further undermined Christian faith. Perhaps knowledge of contraceptives will do more damage to Christianity than did knowledge of Voltaire and Tom Paine. But all this is speculation, some of it speculation in neglect of the facts Professor Latourette has so ably brought to our attention.

"THE RIVER RISES is recommended as a great picture of New England in transition, and as a fine, rich drama with about as good invention-structure, struggle and humor as anyone is likely to find."—*Saturday Review*.

by

Helen Abbott Beals

"It is not often that one comes upon a novel so fresh, so convincing, so thoroughly enjoyable. Sensitive, dramatic, it gives the lie to those who hold New England is necessarily dour."—*N. Y. Herald Tribune*. \$2.50

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