
James F. Evans, head of the teaching division of the Office of Agricultural Communications at the University of Illinois, has succeeded admirably in weaving together both a biography of Burridge D. Butler and a detailed analysis of two important mass media organizations which he came to control early in the twentieth century—the Prairie Farmer newspaper and Chicago's WLS radio station. Evans meticulously covers the details of Butler's career showing the growth and influence of Prairie Farmer from 1909 to 1939, when circulation under Butler's leadership increased from 30,000 to more than 300,000. The author presents ample evidence to document Butler's organizational skill as Prairie Farmer emerged as one of the leading midwestern farm newspapers.

Clifford V. Gregory, Butler's editor-in-chief, helped him launch a number of farm programs, e.g., the American Farm Bureau Federation, leadership in forming the farm block in the Midwest, cooperative sales and marketing, and New Deal farm policies in the late 1920s and the successive New Deal years. Evans' account of these campaigns is well stated, and he clearly shows that Butler's "crusading spirit" set him apart as an important champion of the farm community.

Butler referred paternalistically to his loyal supporters as his "Midwest family." However, this paternalism was turned into positive action, for he helped support numerous state fairs, hosted several national barn dances, financed the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, farm youth groups, Blackburn College, and many other worthy civic organizations.

The author's comments on WLS, the voice of the midwestern farm community, make up the most lively section of his narrative. Butler's association and ownership of WLS spanned the years 1924 to his death in 1948, shortly after his eightieth birthday. WLS broadcasters from Chicago exerted a wide influence and established programs designed to appeal to the farm community. Evans discusses the WLS stars, Red Foley, Pat Buttram, Fibber McGee and Molly, Amos and Andy, Homer and Jethro, Gene Autry, and George Gobel, many of whom became nationally recognized radio personalities.

Evans seems to fall short of his mark in one area—the analysis of Butler's personality. The author contends that the "dissimilar personalities" of Butler's parents "help explain the fluidity of his own" (p. 12). Neither the examples nor the arguments Evans offers are convincing when he claims Butler is a highly sensitive man. In fact, the examples would indicate just the opposite. Butler comes off as a brash man, whose anti-Semitism, feelings of inadequacy, schizophrenic
Book Reviews

seizures, arrogant attitudes, and directed tactics of intimidation toward his employees indicate his rigidity, rather than his sensitivity.

The author’s research is conscientious, and his book offers the reader a fresh perspective on the midwestern farm community from 1910 to 1960 through the active life of Butler. In short, Evans has written an exciting narrative account to fill an important chapter in agricultural communications history.

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This book illustrates Dixon Wecter’s comment that Mark Twain, in a protracted encounter with the Bible, had “the will to disbelieve, but also a lifelong fascination with the mythology . . .” (p. 4). Fascination appears in many Twainian allusions to Biblical scenes and characters, his feeling of kinship with Adam and the Prodigal Son, and his fondness for scriptural quotations, often misquoted. Ensor cites numerous examples, besides statistics gleaned from Twain’s writing: 295 references to Genesis, 133 to Matthew, 44 to Christ, 34 to Noah, and so on.

Disbelief motivates attacks upon the sacred truths of fundamentalists, who practice, Twain said, “that kind of so-called housekeeping where they have six Bibles and no corkscrew” (p. 78). From disparagement of the Holy Land in Innocents Abroad to savage assaults upon the Bible in Letters From the Earth and elsewhere, occasional reverence is overmatched by irreverence, disgust with hypocritical piety, contempt for a petty, vindictive God who massacred the innocent and invented hell. A year before his death Twain concluded that the Bible “has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies” (p. 73). The long confrontation offers the familiar spectacle of a rebellious Twain, scornful of genteel conventions, vying with the conformist courting respectability.

Ensor hews to the line with a zeal commendable, if solemn; but he might have ranged further to test his contention that Twain, over-stressing biblical shortcomings, was “at the same time blind to its virtues” (p. 101). An unexplored topic is his appreciation of the sound and rhythm of biblical language. A seasoned public speaker sensitive to modulation and pace, he was observant of pulpit mannerisms, noting that clergymen often destroyed the stately beauty of the Lord’s Prayer by rushing through it, as if convinced that the faster they said it the sooner it would be answered. The reminiscences of Charles