

BRIEF MENTIONS

JOHN S. CROSBIE

The Mayor of Upper Upsalquitch

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Pp. 185.

This book gives a day by day account of a year in the life of the Mayor of Upper Upsalquitch. The year is an interesting and eventful one. It commences with a typical New Year's Day after the party hangover; the Mayor acquires a new secretary, Annie (whom he courts and to whom he eventually proposes); there is a campaign to beautify the town; a search is made for a town motto ("Up Upper Upsalquitch"?); a new sewage plant is installed; the local movie-house is turned into a theater and an itinerant company performs "Waiting for Godot" and "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"; a fraudulent uranium concern surveys the town, at the Mayor's invitation; a circus comes to town, cannot pay the rental, and is forced to leave its animals; the menagerie is promptly renamed a zoo, and this, in turn, is advertised as a tourist attraction; finally, in the course of the election campaign, the Town Council is persuaded to confirm the position of the present Mayor and to elect him "Mayor for life." It is on this happy note that the book ends.

Or does it end? For it is written in diary form and the last entry is for the early hours of the very day that the book begins, January 1, New Year's Day, and the beginning of another year in which much the same things will occur again. The question of the election has been solved, yet other problems linger on. For example, the sewage disposal plant is a failure, and the sewage has been diverted (at the Mayor's suggestion) back into the river. The menagerie is still housed in the Termite Inspector's shed, but the worst of the winter is yet to come, and although the promise of spring's roses may detract from the failings of the elephant, it is certain that diet and cleanliness have not yet been brought under control. Again, the Mayor may be Mayor "for life," but the position is still unsalaried. This means that the political graft, the ten per cent here

and the five per cent there must still continue.

No major characters are created, but even so a second reading of the book permits one to become familiar with the backgrounds of the individuals. As a result, innuendoes and allusions which may be overlooked on a first reading fall more readily into place. In similar fashion, the innumerable puns in the book (it must be remembered that, as the dust-cover announces, John Crosbie is the author of the world's first *Dictionary of Puns*) are sometimes clearer second time through, when one is familiarized with the inhabitants of Upper Upsalquitch.

It is at the humor level that the book is most memorable. Jokes, anecdotes, and quips are to be found everywhere. The bank-manager does not have a safe, so he keeps his money in the water-closet, thus "I'm willing to bet that if you went into his john at night and flushed, the bank would go down the drain" (p. 7). The new color television set evokes the following: "It's amazing how different people look in colour! She [Annie] likes the Prime Minister greener than I do" (p. 16). Advertising produces the grim warning: "*Fairy Soap*. Their advertising used to ask 'Is there a little Fairy in your home?' I presume they got laughed out of business" (p. 24). There are, however, some "groaners"; thus, the Roman Circus: ". . . they used to throw Christians to the lions. Things have improved somewhat since those days; now the minister throws lines to the Christians" (p. 119).

In conclusion, then, *The Mayor of Upper Upsalquitch* is not a great book, but it is certainly an enjoyable one. The diary form makes for easy reading and certain anecdotes are amusing. The emphasis is on entertainment and, as the advertisement says, "Try it. You'll probably like it."

R.M.