

A Book Review

of

The Band-Wagon: A Political Novel of Middle-America

by Franklin F. Ellsworth

Franklin F. Ellsworth (1879-1942), a lawyer by profession, ran for congressman from Minnesota's second congressional district five times. He lost elections in 1910 and 1912 and won in 1914, 1916 and 1918. In all he served from January 1915 to January 1921. He did not run for re-election in 1920, choosing instead to seek the Republican nomination for governor. In that party's primary on June 21, 1920, he lost badly, coming in fourth in a field of six. The following year he published *The Band-Wagon: A Political Novel of Middle-America*.

One review has been found. W. H. Boynton's reviews of three books, including Ellsworth's novel, were published in *The Weekly Review* on September 27, 1921, under the caption "More or Less Americans." It follows.

There was also this one sentence reference in the "News and Comment" section of *Minnesota History* 186 (August-November, 1921):

The Bandwagon, a novel by former Congressman Franklin F. Ellsworth (Philadelphia, Dorrance, 1921), will have an interest for students of history as the author's interpretation of recent political developments and tendencies in Minnesota.

More or Less Americans

As a story of Minnesota politics, "The Band-Wagon" deals with a racial compound already pretty thoroughly established and to be taken for granted. Wheels within wheels continue to turn, as in Jake Torkelson's feeling of superiority, as a Gulbrandsdelener, "over the many who had come from Bergen and the Bergens-Fjord countries, over these intermixtures of Norsk and Svenske from Bergen and Smaaland—and especially the 'Fiske Strils.'" There is also the distinction between Jake's German-born and German-natured neighbors, with their reluctance to identify themselves with us, and Jake's own eager adoption of "every American ideal." But clearly this Minnesota "of the Band-Wagon" is a social and political America in little, infused with American ideals and dominated by an American political mechanism of the most finished and corrupt type. The book, it seems, must be largely autobiographical. The author, Congressman Ellsworth, has lived through at least the political career of his hero, Treman Treadwill; and the dedication hints at an identification of the heroine with some one in real life.

This book has the crudity of an amateur performance. Its continued use of italics is fairly distressing. But often there is a compensating freshness about the fiction of an unprofessional writer, and we feel it here. A novel of politics by a politician has possibilities which a novel of politics by a story-teller does not share. Some of these are realized in this book. It is not a bad story, as a story. And it is an earnest plea for honesty and patriotism in politics. If in the end it appears to leave us nothing better than a choice of band-wagons, the basis of choice has at least been set down.

The novel itself is posted in the “Literature” category in the Archives of this website.



Franklin F. Ellsworth (1932)
Source: *Minneapolis Tribune*
Minneapolis Newspaper Photograph Collection
Hennepin County Library

Posted MLHP: August 1, 2020.