

Mostly Murder

PRISONERS AT THE BAR. By Francis X. Busch. Notable American Trials Series. 288 pp. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. \$3.50.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY? By Francis X. Busch. Notable American Trials Series. 288 pp. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. \$3.50.

By MEYER BERGER

FRANCIS X. BUSCH, who was Corporation Counsel in Chicago twenty to twenty-five years ago, has squeezed six outstanding American trials into these two volumes without giving an impression of tightness.

He has reduced great stacks of official court records and newspaper accounts into astonishingly small space. He covers all the main issues without becoming cryptic, without draining off color and without reducing the dimensions of the principals.

Perhaps his greatest achievement in these two intensely interesting volumes is his utter fairness even when he writes of defendants who seemed to have forfeited the right to such consideration. Mr. Busch writes warmly, yet without passion—a rare literary trick.

Each of the two volumes by Mr. Busch covers four cases. In "Prisoners at the Bar" he reviews the trial of William Haywood and George Pettibone for the murder of former Gov. Frank Steunenberg of Idaho in 1907; the trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti for the murder of Frederick A. Parmenter and Alessandro Berardelli in Massachusetts in 1920; the trial of Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold for the murder of Robert Franks in Chicago in 1924; the trial of Bruno Hauptmann for the murder of Charles Lindbergh Jr. in New Jersey in 1935.

THE second volume covers the trial of Leo Frank for the murder of Mary Phagan in Georgia in 1913; the trial of David C. Stephenson for the murder of Madge Oberholtzer in Indiana in 1925; the trial of Samuel Insull and others for use of the mails to defraud, in Chicago in 1934, and the trial of Alger Hiss for perjury, in New York in 1949-50.

Mr. Busch cleaves to the record in all these cases, except in the Haywood trial, where no stenographic report existed. He uses pertinent quotations from the minutes with good effect, and consistently avoids the melodramatic. His hero is Clarence Darrow, but in this, too, the author is moderate. The reader senses the admiration; it is not laid on with a barrel stave.

The reader who likes his crime accounts neat rather than watered down will be happily served at this bar. Mr. Busch never gets between the reader and the subject. Both books are extremely readable. They belong on every crime collector's shelves.

A Pulitzer-Prize winner for local reporting, Mr. Berger frequently covers criminal trials for THE TIMES.

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