



The BOOK Trail

SURELY GOODNESS

By Janet Rankin Aiken

Quarry Books (Ridgefield, Conn.)

This is a book that must be read aloud. And if it works with you as it did with me, it will be.

There you are in your big easy chair, with your nose buried in the thing, and before you know it—that will be about page three, where Eve wants Adam to sock the big bum that got away with her coconut—you will be chuckling aloud. Friend Wife, deep in a pretty good book herself, will eye you from across the room with a trace of annoyance.

But that will not stop you. The lines that moved you to mirth are much too good to keep. She will have to hear them. And hear them she does. A few pages further on, and it will happen again. Another chuckle and some more reading aloud, with the wife showing more interest in the proceedings this time.

Follows a two-minute silence and then, for the third time ... Well, at that your wife lays aside her book for the evening and does one of three things: She asks you to go on reading aloud; she takes the book away from you and she goes on reading aloud, or worse still, she takes the book away from you and goes on reading to herself.

If you have the third kind of a wife, and if you are that much of a mouse, you'd better have two books. One was sufficient in my family.

But that is not all. I had been reading aloud for half an hour or so when neighbors called. Did that stop us? It did not. Nothing would do but they must sit down and listen, too. A little later another couple dropped in. Then we did lay the book aside, but before ten minutes had elapsed the first couple

had it out again and they were reading it to the second couple!

That is the sort of a book "Surely Goodness" is. It is a book that is not only chuck full of chuckles, it is one that insists on being read aloud. And yet, with all its chuckles, it is not, at bottom, a humorous book. If it might be called a humorous book of ethics, it might just as well be called a humorous book of morals, or philosophy, or economics, or English, or grammar.

The author of "Surely Goodness," Janet Rankin Aiken, is a linguist of note. She teaches English at Columbia University and Brooklyn College, and is well known for her articles and books on English. Among the latter are, "Why English Sounds Change," "English Past and Present," "A New Plan of English Grammar," and "Commonsense Grammar."

You would know what to expect in the way of grammar from a writer with that sort of a background, wouldn't you? You just think you would. What Dr. Aiken does with and to her beloved grammar, particularly to punctuation, will surprise you more than a little, especially if you got your grammar the hard way, as I got mine—pounded in to make it stick. She will have nothing to do with commas—uses dashes and parentheses instead. Apostrophes are out. She doesn't like the word "whom"; by the way, you've read "For Who The Bell

Tolls," haven't you? She uses footnotes in a way that is amusing and amazing.

But these tricks of grammar are of negligible consequence. You may like them or you may not—personally, I was not overly enthusiastic about them—they will not obscure the fact that "Surely Goodness" is a most unusual book, a gay and witty book that at the same time is a very serious book, with a very serious purpose, a book that is all things to all people.

The territory covered is indicated by the book's sub-title, "Sixty-Six Little Sketches Of Nineteen Ways To Become Good At Living." The blurb is more truthful than blurbs usually are when it says of "Surely Goodness" that it is "a regular college course in skill at living and besides is first-rate entertainment for old and young, with a lot of information thrown in, and a dash or religion, too." It is, indeed, a good deal of a college course, as you will find when you tackle the midterm, and, as the author calls it, the "five-star final" examinations.

It would be difficult to say that any particular chapter or section of the book stands out ahead of the others. There was no part of it that I did not find thought-provoking and interesting, and that, it seems to me, is about as much as can be asked of a non-fiction book. Georgists will find the chapters on abundance and security of special interest. Dr. Aiken has a good understanding of the nature of economic rent and the purpose to which it should be put.

From the foregoing you may conclude that "Surely Goodness" is quite a book and that I like it.

It is, and I do.

C. O. STEELE

