Smith appears in an appendix, and a "Chronology of Smith's Revelations" and an extensive bibliography add to the usefulness of the volume. The index, however, is incomplete.

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The historian can portray political and economic conditions admirably, placing before our eyes a well-ordered museum replete with terra cotta figurines nicely painted, each with its little white-on-black explanatory card. But when it comes to breathing life into the clay images created by the historian, commend me to the teller of tales. Under his magic touch they live again—sweating, laughing, cursing, recreating the color and pageantry, the heartbreak and aspiration, the gallantry and villainy of other days.

The authors of Mike Fink, well aware of the limitations of their theme as well as of its opportunities, label the book "not only fiction but also biography, history, legend and, at rare intervals, poetry" (p. 269). They have drawn freely upon their imaginations for details, but this does not conceal the scholarly character of their work. They have recreated the atmosphere and revived the traditions of a bygone age and they have done it on a foundation of research. The analysis of the growth of these traditions in the epilogue is no mean contribution to American literary history, and the extensive and well-selected bibliography furnishes additional clues to the printed sources of the incidents in the text. But why bother about scholarship anyway? The book is a portrait, ranging from life-size to gigantic in extent, in natural colors, and authentic in spirit, if not in detail.

Mike Fink was a real character, a graduate cum laude from Captain Sam Brady's school of western Pennsylvania Indian fighters about the time of Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers, who for thirty years lived a life of such colorful adventure on the western waters that it was bound to become the stuff from which legends are spun, and then died a violent death on the far-away banks of the Yellowstone River. The western Pennsylvania frontier, the scene of Mike's early exploits as a marksman, hunter, and Indian fighter, lives again. The broad humor, the rough-and-ready law, the hot loves and hates, the vaunting boasts, the bloody street fights, and the reconciliations over the whiskey
barrel are all there. With our own eyes we witness the development of a demi-god. During this apotheosis we traverse three successive frontiers, feeling and hearing again "the strength, the exuberance, the roaring laughter of America in her glorious youth." During the interval between the Revolution and the War of 1812, when the steamboat was for the West little more than a pipe dream, the keelboata men ruled and rollicked on the rivers. They came to occupy in the popular imagination much the same place now held by mischievous college boys and destructive yet colorful racketeers.

Mike Fink was the archetype of the western boatman. From the depths of our easy chairs we watch him and his men strain at the poles as they literally walk their keelboat from New Orleans to Pittsburgh, or follow him in his relaxations of raiding camp meetings, battling with berserk rage against other mighty "gougers," shooting the tin cup from his comrades' heads, and chasing the spangled skirts of New Orleans. Boastful, blasphemous, and brutal, save for rhetorical purposes he acknowledged no code nor deity not of his own making — that is, none beyond the spirits that dwelt within the whiskey jug. With this familiar oracle ever waiting at his elbow to be consulted Mike toiled and rollicked and gouged his way through the world, the living proof of the profound aphorism afterward stated by Mark Twain after years of conscientious experimentation: "Westward the jug of empire takes its way."

Dare we imagine the scene as Mike Fink's soul rises from his body to the American Pantheon on some cloud-enshrined peak of the Tetons? Davy Crockett, the bear-hunting politician, John Henry, the Black River roustabout, Paul Bunyan, the titanic lumberjack of the northwoods, and old Dan'l Boone are sitting around the camp fire passing the whiskey jug and swapping yarns. Presently, striding over the boulder-strewn mountain meadows, seven leagues at a step, comes Mike Fink. Old Dan'l looks down and sees him coming. "Davy," he says to the great b'ar hunter, "go on down and see who thet brash young feller is a-hornin' in on our convention." So Crockett leaps down the mountain side and confronts the keelboatman. Mike, unabashed, faces the champion. "Manner," he says, "who are you?" "Why, don't you know me?" replies Davy. "I'm little Davy Crockett, I am, the greatest b'ar killer in Tennessee. I've killed so many b'ars their skins would carpet the continent of Europe and their claws would make a necklace to encircle the moon. Whoop! I pick my teeth with a pitchfork, comb my hair with a rake, fan myself with a hurricane, wear a cast-iron shirt, an' drink nothin' but creosote an' aqua fortis."

Is our hero fazed? Not a bit of it. He makes a contemptuous flourish with his jug, prances a few steps like a gamecock before a fight, and launches forth
on the old boast: "Well, maybe you was the high muck-a-muck in these hyar parts, but you ain't no longer. I'm Mike Fink, the greatest keeler thet ever pushed a pole on the ol' Massassip, only now immortalized by Messrs. Blair an' Meine, an' I've come ter claim my rightful place by your camp fires. Whoop! I'm a Salt River roarer! I'm a ring-tailed screamer! I loves the wimming an' I'm chockful of fight! I'm half horse and half cock-eyed alligator an' the rest o' me is crooked snags an' red-hot snappin' turkle. Whoop! I kin hit like fourth-proof lightnin' an' every lick I make in the woods lets in an acre o' sunshine. I can out-run, out-jump, out-shoot, out-brag, out-drink, an' out-fight, rough-an'-tumble, no holts barred, ary man on both sides the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans an' back ag'in to St. Louiee. Come on, you b'ar hunters, you lumberjacks, an' you cotton rollers an' see how tough I am ter chaw! I ain't had a fight fer a hundred years an' I'm spilein' fer exercise. Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

A glad light gleams in Davy Crockett's eyes as he holds out his massive paw. "I hope to be shot ef you ain't a reg'lar ol' time screamer from the muddy Massassip," he cries. "Come on right in, mannee, an' don't fergit the jug. Us sperits ben runnin' kinder low in sperits lately." With which Crockettesquerie he jovially gives Mike a mighty thwack on the back, and arm in arm the two go up to the gate of the American Pantheon.

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