

conservatism, accepted the industrial system and the liberal *goals* of freedom, reason, mobility, progress, higher living standards for the masses, and an end to theocracy and war; but it tried to achieve these ends by the use of incompatible conservative means: statism, central planning, communitarianism, etc." It should be obvious where that sort of reasoning leads when he turns his gaze on conservatives. He seeks no detente with the traditionalist Right, and for those who so categorize themselves, this essay will hurt.

If the major ideological enemy is authoritarianism, the major enemy agency (as eviscerated in "The Anatomy of the State," from *Rampart Journal*, 1965) is: the State—coercive, parasitic, voracious, seemingly uncheckable, at least thus far, at least, he would have us believe, until libertarianism reigns. But why libertarianism? Are we to suppose that, of all manner of men, the libertarian alone is not subject to the lures of power, is not prone to the perversions of force? Is he so unlike bushy-tailed radicals,

leaking-aorta liberals, and God-Country-Motherhood conservatives, that he is not wont to fanaticism when the moon is full and the conditions are appropriate? Well, Dr. Rothbard insists, a libertarian must exemplify a "lifelong dedication to liberty" which "can only be grounded on a passion for justice"—a radical temperament, an abolitionist one in fact, to "abolish instantaneously all invasions of liberty"; "powered by justice, he cannot be moved by amoral utilitarian pleas that justice not come about until the criminals are 'compensated.'" So there we have it. But I wonder. Goodness knows, we're in lousy shape now, what with collectivism racing (no longer creeping) to overtake us all. But might not even these passionate abolitionists wreak havoc, "powered by justice"? One hopes not, but zealotry is off-putting, and I reach for the Bufferin after reading manifestoes, libertarian or otherwise, by nuttys as well as by my sweet friend Murray.

But what fun he is! What a delight to watch Rothbard start by saying A, march

to B, then gallop on to X, Y, Z: on war, peace, and the state; on the fallacy of the public sector; on anarcho-communism; on much more besides. And what saucy stuff is an essay like "Kid Lib" (from *Outlook*, 1972), brutal but sound as a tight drum on the "rights" of kids, the "duties" of parents, and a civilized interplay of the two, albeit Pandoran in opening up more questions than finishing them off. But he is too harsh in "The Great Women's Liberation Issue" (*Individualist*, 1970): he demolishes Chick Lib insanity, fine; but he simply does not comprehend (and seems silly when pooh-poohing) the sounder insights of that movement; indeed, he has no real understanding of the prevalence of sexism in this society. On these matters he resembles more his enemy the traditionalist conservative than the beacon of freedom he would wish to be considered.

But then, who's perfect when he's furious? Murray Rothbard evokes in me the image of Garrison, whom he quotes: "I have need to be all on fire, for I have mountains of ice about me to melt." □

Theatre Review/Max Geltman

An Evening with Mencken

Over in a corner of old Greenwich Village in New York City, Paul Shyre is holding forth as H. L. Mencken at the tiny Cherry Lane Theatre in an adaptation of some of the Baltimore Sage's most ebullient epigrams and aphorisms which he has aptly titled *Blasts and Bravos*. The audiences—happily the youngest of audiences—are chuckling with unalloyed mirth, a kind of joy that hasn't been heard in the land since the untimely departure of the founder of the original Saturday Night Club. Men like Mencken always die too soon.

But now—for a while at least—he comes to life in his study (exquisitely recreated by Eldon Elder) at 1524 Hollins Street, Baltimore. Here in fireman-red suspenders, with a bottle of good cheap wine on one table, and a stein full of Michelob (he didn't always guzzle Wurzburger) on his writing desk, Mencken-Shyre talks casually, wittily, stalking among his bookshelves in house slippers, culling bits and pieces from his *Schimpf-lexicon* (barbs cast in his direction by the High Booboisie) and from newspaper clips, very much in the spirit of this *Alternative's* "Current Wisdom." Best of all, one smiles inwardly not merely at the high humor of the man, but at his reverential love of life and manners (or lack of them) as expressed by the most canting of his pet hates—the American politician.

Not that Mencken hated politics. He was, in the best sense of the term, a po-

litical animal. A Tory in politics (though this recreation of the Master is perhaps niggardly on this point), he deplored the low caliber of men chosen for the highest offices in the Republic. "Going into politics," he once said, "is as fatal to a gentleman as going into a bordello is to a virgin." Also he detested "democracy"

*Blasts and Bravos:
An Evening with H.L. Mencken*

adapted by Paul Shyre
Cherry Lane Theatre, New York

in the ignoble sense which sees in absolute egalitarianism an improvement on the human spectacle. In fact, he despised all "uplift," political and religious, most of all that kind of uplift practiced by the YMCA that combines muscle-building with soul-soaring.

Mencken was an unabashed agnostic, but not quite an atheist. When the Seventh Day Adventists predicted the end of the world, he took the precaution of removing the works of Voltaire from his shelves and the portrait of Darwin from his studio wall!

Once in Hollywood he let himself be converted by Aimee Semple McPherson. To set his friends' minds at rest he sent

off the following telegram to Philip Goodman: "was baptized by Aimee last Tuesday night you can have no idea of the peace it has brought my soul I can now eat five bismarck herrings without the slightest acidoses."

The orthodox may say that Henry lacked the gift of faith. But he had faith in man—so long as he stayed out of Hollywood, the national suburb which he called "the great reductio ad absurdum of civilization."

These things, quoted out of context, make one chuckle, as indeed they were intended to do. He observed of Coolidge, "Speaking or silent he says absolutely nothing. There's nothing to be said against him, but then there's nothing to be said for him—except that he slept more soundly than any other President. Nero fiddled but Coolidge snored." (These quotations from Shyre's production and lots more can be found in Sara Mayfield's *The Constant Circle*, a book I heartily recommend.) Yet he liked Silent Cal, reserving his undiluted contempt for William Jennings Bryan, who denied to the heavens that he was a mammal, as the Sage told his musical colleagues at the Saturday Night Club.

Mencken was not (in my judgment) as sound in his musical appreciations as he has been made out to be. It was his notion that there were only two kinds of music: "German and bad." Beethoven stood on

top of the Mencken musical pantheon, and of Schubert he said, "Schubert sweated beauty as naturally as a Christian sweats hate." A bit much, this, but quintessentially Menckonian.

Of course you won't hear all this at the Cherry Lane, but if you come to the "Big Apple" (Mencken would surely have had something pithy to say about *that!*), don't forget to visit the little theatre on the

corner of Commerce and Morton Streets for a civilized and bracing evening with and about H. L. Mencken—a national institution lost to us these despairing days when we need him most. □



Richard Cobden, *Political Writings*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1973), 2 vols., 770 pp. \$48. Introduction by Naomi Churgin Miller.

"War is the health of the State," wrote left-anarchist Randolph Bourne at the time of the First World War. The course of twentieth century history has verified his judgment with a vengeance. For the United States in particular, every war emergency and its subsequent detumescence has been a case of two steps forward and one step back for the government power. As a result, not only have militarist institutions and values and the number of State functionaries grown, but so have the suppression of civil liberties and, most especially, the whole system of state-corporate capitalism with which we are presently blessed.

That this was the logic of war—that the State, born in war and conquest, would tend to expand when placed again in its natural culture-medium—was an insight of the radical wing of nineteenth century liberalism. Historians have sometimes expressed perplexity over the fact that such "brutal" Social Darwinists as Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, or such "cold egoists" as Jeremy Bentham, were among the most outspoken enemies of imperialism and war. (Spencer once said that his British patriotism could not survive the Boer War, and Sumner entitled a lecture on the outcome of the Spanish-American War, "The Conquest of the United States by Spain.") But there is little cause for wonder. These men were, as we are so often told, the embodiment of the middle-class *weltanschauung*, and that at its best. On the one hand, the bloodshed, poverty, and statism caused by war filled them with horror. On the other, they had no sympathy with the "glories" of war—which means, no love for the way in which certain people heighten the drama and intensity of their own lives by creating a stageset requiring the destruction of the lives of other people (George Patton offers a good example of this process in

our own time). Heraclitus was wrong, Mises wrote in *The Free and Prosperous Commonwealth*: peace, not war, is the father of all things. And, we may add, Schumpeter was correct in seeing this insight as probably the most enduring contribution to world civilization by the industrious and creative middle class of nineteenth century Europe and America.

There is no question but that, of all the great classical liberals who championed peace, the men whose names are most closely associated with that cause are the leaders of the Manchester school, Richard Cobden and John Bright (arguably the two noblest individuals who have ever sat in the House of Commons). In the present day, the Manchester school is best known for its strict adherence to *laissez faire* (*Manchestertum* is commonly used in German as a generic name for extreme economic liberalism): its opposition to state regulation of hours and conditions of work (except for children), any but the meagerest taxes, coercive trade-unionism, government meddling in general but particularly protective tariffs, and, above all, the tariffs on grain, the Corn Laws. To the Manchesterites, the Corn Laws represented purely and simply a tribute levied by the Lords and great proprietors of the soil on the productive classes of Britain, and the repeal of those Laws in 1846—which, perhaps even more than the Reform Bill of 1832, signalled the fading of the ancient system of rule by Whig and Tory landed interests—was largely the work of Cobden's and Bright's great Anti-Corn Law League. But, as with Frédéric Bastiat, who learned much from them and who helped spread their views on the Continent, these most famous of free traders believed that their doctrine would serve even higher ends than material abundance: free trade was to be a major means for the eventual elimination of war (which, along with paper

money, Cobden called "the curse and scourge of the working classes"), by tightly interconnecting the economic wellbeing of all civilized nations.

Here, their theory, though often ridiculed, can be supported by the fact that the reversion of most major nations to protectionism after about 1880 was surely part of the process of steadily augmenting international antagonism that finally led to war in 1914. By the same token the utter inconceivability of present-day France and West Germany going to war—even if they had continued to have great power status—would be a good confirmation of Manchester school expectations (except that, for Cobden and his friends, the ideal was worldwide economic integration).

But while the interest of the great majority in all countries was peace, Cobden and Bright were well aware that both specific wars and long-term patterns of belligerency on the part of governments could be explained by and large by reference to the interests of *particular* groups within the governing circles—the interests, more or less, of what Bright was fond of calling the "tax-eating" rather than the "tax-paying" class. In the social order of mid-nineteenth century Britain, these "tax-eaters" were the aristocracy, with its ramified sinecures in the Army and Navy, the Foreign Office and colonial bureaucracy, and the established Church, and, to a lesser degree, certain capitalist groups wishing to spread foreign trade with the backing of English military and political power. And it was the producing classes of Britain who, through merciless taxation, had to pay for militaristic policies. (Interestingly, Cobden traces much of the miserable condition of the British workers in the earlier stages of the Industrial Revolution to the war policy of the British government—England was at war almost continuously from 1793 to 1815—a point which is recognized but not, I think, sufficiently appreciated by libertarian pro-Industrial Revolution scholars such as T.S. Ashton.)

So that, besides pressing for the changes in the direction of free trade that would tend to make war an increasingly self-defeating economic proposition, the Manchester liberals considered it their duty also to attack and expose the particular wars into which England was always drifting or threatening to drift. "It would seem," Cobden asserted, "as if there were some unseen power behind the Government, always able, unless held in check by an agitation in the country, to help itself to a portion of the national