

tition while practicing it avidly, that my silent competition with Jim Agee led me to reach a better decision about my future occupation than the one I might have reached without it. By competing I learned where *not* to compete.

Homans was also fortunate in picking up his sociology largely on his own and under the inspiration of a gifted biochemist, Lawrence J. Henderson. The formative intellectual influence was Vilfredo Pareto, whom he started to read at De Voto's suggestion. Two years after his graduation, with still no formal training in sociology, Homans coauthored *An Introduction to Pareto* (1934). As a junior member of Harvard's Society of Fellows (he never advanced beyond a B.A.) he divided his time between boning up on the social sciences and working on a study of rural life in Medieval England. His *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* turned into a sort of personal search for his roots. His researches led him to trace the customs of East Anglia (the land of the Homanses) to Friesland—an hypothesis not widely accepted by British historians.

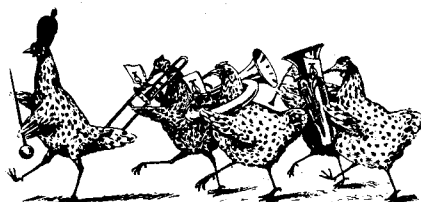
His professional career was interrupted by the war, and Homans devotes several interesting chapters to his less-than-exciting naval career, as well as *excursus* on the time he spent sailing under his uncle Charles Adams. However, the chief interest of Homans's memoir is the account he provides of his development as a sociological theorist. His major contributions to the field, *The Human Group* and *Social Behavior*, lie more in the realm of social psychology than pure sociology. As a theorist, he is an unashamed psychological reductionist. Even before World War II he had concluded:

There was a single human nature, single in its general characteristics. . . . Therefore my general propositions would have to be psychological rather than sociological, propositions not about groups as such but about what human beings have in common as members of a species.

This firm stand on human nature sets Homans at odds with nearly every school of modern social thought, including the followers of John Dewey, Franz Boas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Marx, and B. F. Skinner. Groups that have nothing else in common are in agreement on one point: the malleability of human clay. If there were such a thing as "the common human," then

we should have to rethink a great deal of the social experimentation that has been done in the name of Marxism, feminism, and progressive education. To Homans's everlasting credit, he was among the few American social scientists of his generation who dared to affirm the universality of human social behavior.

Unfortunately, Homans's decision to concentrate on individual behavior rather than on social organization also had negative consequences. It led him to reduce social units down to assemblages of individuals interacting according to certain psychological principles—as if man born of woman has ever existed outside the social context. In a way, it is a sort of trick of perspective—like looking at a painting of Seurat. If you stand very close to the canvas and examine the dots, all you will see is dots that group themselves in certain arrangements of color and shape. It is not until you stand back and look at the whole that you can learn to see the forest despite all the trees. In much the same way, Homans's "methodological individualism" is apt to lead to a distorted—perhaps libertarian—perspective on social relations. On the other hand, it can also serve as a healthy corrective to the tendency, particularly prominent in French sociology since Comte, to treat "social facts" as if they were real entities. Homans correctly perceives that his method, because it only looks at one side of the coin, has to be supplemented by a more structuralist approach.



Homans summarizes his theory of social behavior as an attempt to explain "how small groups, given half a chance, tend to develop social structures." Although his answer is expressed in terms of a modified behaviorism—his friend, B. F. Skinner, really should be shocked by what has been done with his theories—it still constitutes one of the few serious attempts to grapple with the elements of social behavior. Even today, Homans continues to work out the implications of his system. For most professors, tenure means death from the neck up, but even after retirement Homans remains open to new ideas—like those expressed by the sociobiologist, E. O. Wilson. His willingness to

listen to Wilson stands in marked contrast to most leftist sociologists. But George Homans is decidedly not a man of the left. We might apply to him the phrase he used to describe Pareto, an "aristocratic libertarian." Although he is not even a theist, he argues that "some doctrine of original sin is crucial to the survival of any religion, and that it would be well for everyone, everywhere, to recite once a day the General Confession of the Church of England." Skeptical of the ruthless idealists who are willing, like Sacco and Vanzetti, to murder or, like Alger Hiss, to betray their country for a cause, he reserves his scorn for the sentimental humanitarians and those who sympathize with "idealists" (what most of us now call liberals):

They will not go as far as the extreme idealists to use evil means to achieve ends presumed to be lofty. But they will go some distance; they are certainly prepared to lie in what they consider a good cause.

Homans's autobiography comes as something of a revelation. In the mid-1980's we are confronted with a frank, articulate scholar who is also a sociologist; a principled conservative who views politics dispassionately; an aristocrat proud of his family, his people, and his race, who seems immune both to snobbery and guilt. Altogether a sounder head than either of his more brilliant great-uncles, Brooks and Henry Adams, Homans should cause us to reverse the judgment implied by the chronicle of the Adams family, *Descent from Glory*. (TF) cc

Weekend Remedies

E. M. Delafield: *Diary of a Provincial Lady*; Academy Chicago; Chicago.

E. M. Delafield: *The Provincial Lady in London*; Academy Chicago; Chicago.

E. M. Delafield: *The Provincial Lady in America*; Academy Chicago; Chicago.

E. M. Delafield's *Provincial Lady* volumes delighted a whole generation of readers on both sides of the Atlantic when they were first published in the 1930's. It is easy to see why. These diaries of a liberated (by 30's standards) literary (by provincial standards) lady

(by any standards) are filled with bitter-sweet observations on the life of the English not-quite rich who seem to spend all their time and money making do. It is Erma Bombeck with style and intelligence, Ann Landers with taste . . . well, actually, there is really nothing quite like Delafield today. Her books belong on that special shelf we keep for guests or rainy weekends, right beside Sherlock Holmes, Waugh's travel books, and the dotty masterpieces of P. G. Wodehouse. Academy Chicago continues its policy of bringing back into print the best prescriptions against ennui—superb frivolity. cc

IN FOCUS

Flat-Footed Intimacy by Brian Murray

Georges Simenon: *Intimate Memoirs*; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; New York.

Like most people, Georges Simenon would rather read than write. He would rather sleep than write. He would rather take a walk—or a bath—than write. In his odd collection of autobiographical musings entitled *When I Was Old* (1968), Simenon admits that for him writing is an intimidating and laborious

process that is less likely to produce euphoria than anguish or even physical illness.

But the unusually relentless Simenon pounds his typewriter anyway. Since he began professionally in 1920, he has managed to crank out more than 200 novels under his own name, nearly half of which feature the exploits of Jules Maigret, the slow but cerebral French policeman. He has also managed to maintain a thoroughly respectable reputation. Despite his prolificacy and his popularity, Simenon is not often referred to as just another potboiling hack. In fact, the fastidious André Gide more than once announced that Simenon was the greatest French novelist of the 20th century.

Gide went too far. Simenon's prose is sometimes very sharp, but is more often simply plodding. His plots can be taut, ingenious; but they can also be—like too many of his characters—flat and predictable. Undoubtedly Simenon is a couple of cuts above Erle Stanley Gardner. But like Gardner, he appeals primarily to readers who remain charmed by the well-worn conventions of the gumshoe genre: readers who really do care who murdered Roger Ackroyd.

Only the most devoted of Simenon's fans will enjoy hacking their way through his *Intimate Memoirs*. In this uncharacteristically thick book, Simenon puts discretion aside as he chronicles his two failed marriages and describes many of the literally innumerable sexual encounters he engineered throughout his peripatetic life. He writes also of his relationship with his daughter Marie-Jo—a relationship which while not incestuous was certainly unhealthily close. It ended in 1978 with Marie-Jo's suicide at the age of 25. Simenon admits, for example, that Marie-Jo wore his "wedding band," and was privy to the details of at least some of his liaisons. He also appends to *Intimate Memoirs* a long series of apparently unexpurgated letters that Marie-Jo wrote during the final year of her life—sad, pathetic letters in which she refers to Simenon as "Lord and Father" and "my concrete God, the force I cling to."

In these reminiscences Simenon often makes note of his no doubt genuine affection for his children. But in the main he remains eerily detached as he documents the dramas—and the melodramas—of his domestic life. Quite possibly his aloof authorial stance—the same stance that one finds in Simenon's novels—is a protective measure, a way of keeping painful memories at arm's length. But one gets the

impression that the utterly self-absorbed Simenon has lived for so long in the world of his fiction that he long ago came to regard the men and especially the women in his life as little more than characters of his own construction. One also senses that Simenon likes to accumulate nice things quite as much as he likes to manipulate human beings; that he regards as incontrovertible proof of his success on earth the fact that he has owned such goodies as a Rolls Royce, a six-car garage, and a bathroom with marble floors.

John Updike once suggested in passing that Simenon possessed "a first rate sensibility." If so, the maker of Maigret has elected not to flaunt it in his *Intimate Memoirs*. The Simenon that one encounters in these pages is largely insensible and curiously hollow. cc

Brian Murray is professor of English at Youngstown State University.

Country Folks Can Survive by C. P. Dragash

Jeff Long: *Outlaw: The True Story of Claude Dallas*; William Morrow; New York.

Claude Dallas Jr. grew up dreaming of the Wild West. Transplanted from Winchester, Virginia, to Mt. Gilead, Ohio, he pieced together—out of Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour—a land that seemed as ancient and as heroic as the plains of Troy. When he got old enough, Claude went West to live out his dream. With hard work and application he became a first-class buckaroo in Oregon and Nevada—a sort of walking handbook of cowboy skills which were supposed to have disappeared before the Second World War. He gave up cowboying when modern times, in the form of environmental regulations, made the life of the open range impossible. To earn his livelihood, Dallas turned to the more primitive and more lonely life of the trapper.

Claude Dallas never thought much about law or government. When he received the usual notice to report for induction, he simply ignored the letter. He could not, however, forget the humiliation he experienced when Federal marshalls jerked him off the range and dragged him 1000 miles, from drunk tank to drunk tank, back to Ohio. They even cut off his boot heels. In the event, Dallas was acquitted, partly because it

MOVING?

LET US KNOW BEFORE YOU GO.

To assure uninterrupted delivery of *Chronicles of Culture*, please notify us in advance. Send this form with the mailing label from your latest issue of *Chronicles of Culture* to: Subscription Department, *Chronicles of Culture*, P.O. Box 800, Rockford, Illinois 61105.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____