

small group of people which have much to do with which books make the best-seller lists, which books the libraries buy, which books are picked up for review in other publications, and, therefore, the reading habits of all those people who like to feel that they belong to the intellectual elite. I find it hard to believe that people from Maine to California would have paid good money to buy such a book as *The World According to Garp* if the New York literary establishment had not recommended it with such cant phrases as "rich and humorous" (the *New York Times*), "Superb . . . the imagination soars as Irving draws us inexorably into Garp's world" (*Publishers Weekly*). By sending *Garp* to its members, therefore, the Book Club didn't contribute to the standardizing of the taste of the country; that had already been done. The Book Club was merely following the lead of the literary establishment.

ly following the lead of the literary establishment.

With the reports to its members of these books still in mind, it is instructive to compare them with a very different kind of review of a very different kind of book: Clifton Fadiman's 1948 review of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*:

Scobie is maneuvered, without his quite knowing how it has come about, into a position where he must partake of Communion in a state of sin. This to him means quite literally eternal damnation. The scene at the altar rail in which this man, hungering for God, torn with guilt and quite unconscious of the heroic beauty of his own character, takes God into himself and

condemns himself in his own mind to an eternity of deprivation, is one of the most moving I have encountered in recent novels. Its intensity is exceeded only by the final chapters in which Scobie finds himself forced to commit the final unforgivable sin which puts the human soul outside the mercy of God—self destruction in a condition of despair.

Such a review and the book it describes seem to come from a world different from *Garp* or *The Witches of Eastwick*. It is interesting to speculate whether the standards of the American people have changed as drastically as Silverman's history seems to indicate. Or is it the standards of the Book-of-the-Month Club that have changed?

Harvard Goes South by Clyde Wilson

"Ce sont les modernes qui font des progrès. Nous sommes bêtes une fois pour toutes."

—Péguy

Tombee: Portrait of a Cotton Planter by Theodore Rosengarten, New York: William Morrow; \$24.95.

This curious big book is an amalgam of left-wing scholarship and commercial panache. On the one hand, the author, a Harvard Ph.D. in American Civilization and a missionary to South Carolina, seems to have enjoyed extended foundation support during the production of this book, as well as a good deal of paid assistance in the drudgery of transcription and research. And his work has received respectful attention in both the *New York Times* and the *New York Times Book Review*.

On the other hand, a generous publisher has secured for *Tombee* a book-club selection and has allowed the author an indulgent 750 pages to present the biography and diary of a relatively obscure and historically insignif-

icant planter on the Sea Islands of the South Carolina coast. The chain bookstores, in my portion of the Union at least, were piled high with copies of *Tombee* for the Christmas trade, suggesting a hope of capitalizing on the century-and-a-half-old preoccupation of the American reading public with the Old South that made best-sellers out of Uncle Tom, Uncle Remus, "Marse Chan," *Gone With the Wind*, and *Roots*.

Contained within these bulging covers are two potentially good books, each about a third the size of the artifact that exists. The author seems to have discovered, or rather to have had pointed out to him, the existence of an intimate journal of Thomas B. Chaplin, kept over a period of many years. Chaplin was a planter in the isolated region between St. Helena and Port Royal Sounds inhabited by a few dozen planter families and some thousands of slaves. Leave aside the fact that among those few white fami-

lies were a number of remarkable men (and women), Elliotts, Rhetts, Seabrooks, and others, of whom Chaplin was probably the least interesting. Leave aside the fact that there are dozens, possibly hundreds, of other planter diaries in existence that are equally or more important than Chaplin's. (One sometimes gets the sense that this one has assumed immense importance among the intelligentsia of the Northeast because it was the one read by someone from Harvard.) Leave aside the fact that there are certainly dozens of scholars equally qualified to present this material to the reading public as Mr. Rosengarten. Still, Chaplin's diary is an extended, intimate, and candid record of real life in a vanished part of America. And it is always good to have historical sources made readily available. Thus, the publication of Chaplin's diary, appropriately introduced and annotated, would have been a valuable scholarly contribution.

Unfortunately, while it remains valuable, the value is compromised by the author's statement that he cut out a third of the original material. While he describes in several pages himself going about constructing the "published diary" out of the original, his

Clyde Wilson is a backward Southern historian who does his own research.

discussion of his editorial procedures is so subjective that he never really meets the basic scholarly requirement of indicating fully the nature of the omitted material.

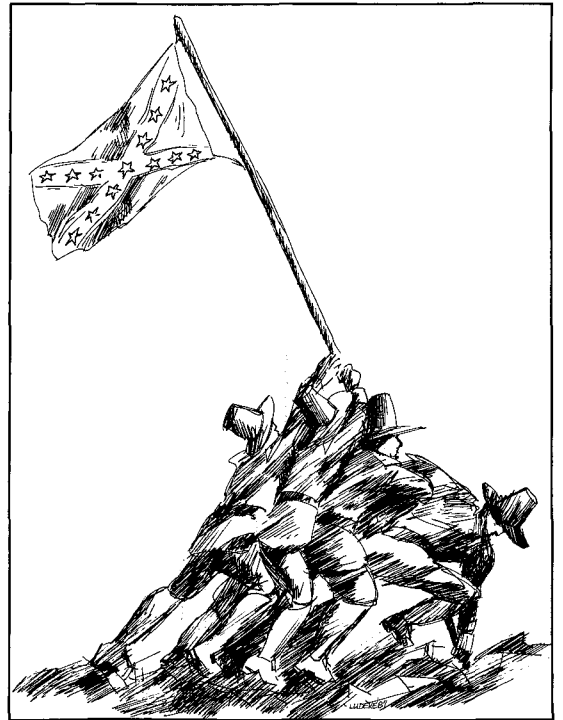
On the other hand, one might have made use of the diary and other sources and written an interesting short biography of Chaplin, which would have been more useful than the author's decision to present both an abridged diary and an overextended biography. Like most of his neighbors, Chaplin was an able sportsman and Confederate soldier. Unlike most of his neighbors, he was not a successful agriculturalist. His fortunes declined even before the war and he engaged in a protracted tedious litigation with his stepfather. After the war, like many other 19th-century Americans who lacked nonaddictive pain-killers, he became a dope fiend, which perhaps explains part of his presumed appeal to the contemporary reading public. One might argue that some of his more significant neighbors would have made a better study, should one want to examine in depth the society of the Sea Islands, which was somewhat peculiar by Southern or even by South Carolina standards. But there is a great historical value in studying the more ordinary level in any situation, and I have no quarrel with the selection of subject. Rosengarten's approach is in the familiar genre of the psychosocial, by which we have learned that beneath their stern exteriors our 19th-century forefathers were quite often as human (i.e., screwed up) as we are. That is fine and well worth knowing, so long as it is kept in perspective with other historical considerations.

A good deal of value and interest emerges from the biographical treatment. Its flaws are two. First, there is no true historical perspective. The reader never quite escapes from the awareness that he is being lectured by a superior modern observer on the political, social, moral, and character shortcomings of other men of another day and place. Though his actions and comments are described fully, one will never understand, from this source alone, what made Chaplin tick. His political beliefs, for instance, are never made meaningful because the author cannot really believe that they were real, serious, inherited, and rational in

Chaplin's world and not just a smoke screen to fool observers.

Secondly, the author felt impelled to frame his biography with an extended and digressive history of the Sea Island region and of South Carolina from early colonial times through Reconstruction. Where first-rate secondary sources exist, as for the Reconstruction period, this is fairly successful. On the whole, it is not. John C. Calhoun dies in the wrong month. Robert Barnwell Rhett, foremost of the fire-eaters, is described as a "provincial." Rhett was a Southern nationalist, and Rosengarten is free to disapprove of him; however, he was not a "provincial," as any rudimentary perusal of his correspondence or career will indicate. To characterize a complicated historical figure in this way is little more than sloganeering. At another level the author tells us, "On the eve of secession, the great majority of white people in South Carolina did not own any slaves." From this statement he proceeds to an extended discussion of the beliefs and motives of the nonslaveholding farmers, about whom he surely knows less than I know about Paraguayans. But the whole discussion is pointless. The most salient fact about antebellum South Carolina was that nearly one-half of the body of citizens were slaveowners and that, unlike any other American state, there was no "great majority" of nonslaveholding farmers.

Such missteps are trivial taken alone, but cumulatively they suggest a level of historianship somewhat lower than *Tombee* aspires to. Should you wish to learn something about the Sea Island planters, let me suggest you pass up *Tombee* and turn to a book by one of their number that is a classic expression of their spirit—*Carolina Sports by Land and Water* (1846) by William Elliott, which is a good deal more than its title suggests. Or you might turn to the letters of the Jones family from the adjacent region of Georgia, letters published a few years ago as *The Children of Pride*. Should you want the larger history of the Sea Islands, look at Willie Lee Rose's *Rehearsal for Reconstruction* (1964), where it is concisely and reliably presented by a master historian. And the black experience is beautifully rendered in Charles W. Joyner's *Down by the Riverside* (1984),



which concentrates on another but similar region of the South Carolina Low Country.

There is little in *Tombee* that the specialist cannot find more reliably elsewhere. Nevertheless, the book has already achieved the critical acclaim which it sought and which was doubtless fore-ordained. I am not apprised of the degree of its commercial success. Presumably, there are still some thousands of "general readers" tucked away in odd corners across that great forest of satellite dishes that make up American culture. But, I suspect, *Tombee* will prove a bit too heavy and too cynical for them, and too bulky for the Hilton Head tourist trade.

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Reenchanting the World *by Herbert Schlossberg*

"Do not seek to become a god."

—Pindar

Unmasking the New Age by Douglas R. Groothuis, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; \$6.95.

Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism by Gary North, Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press; \$19.95.

Once we begin to see that we are all God, that we all have the attributes of God, then I think the whole purpose of human life is to reown the Godlikeness within us; the perfect love, the perfect wisdom, the perfect understanding, the perfect intelligence, and when we do that, we create back to that old, that essential oneness which is consciousness.

This is the religious philosophy being taught to students in the Los Angeles public schools, as part of a Federally funded project. Where is the ACLU now that we need it?

Kant has few readers outside of university philosophy departments, but his influence obviously extends to Los Angeles. Part of Kant's legacy to the modern world is the iron curtain that seals off all reality into two compartments: that which can be known by the senses—phenomena—and that which cannot be known by the senses—noumena. The latter includes the objects we normally associate with the religious: God, spirit, immortal soul, and so on. One of the unintended effects of this effort was to provide an excuse for ignoring the noumenal world. What modern man cannot know through the senses, he feels safe in dismissing from further consideration. One of the first and most notable casualties of this reasoning is the idea of purpose. The senses are silent on

Herbert Schlossberg, author of Idols for Destruction (Thomas Nelson, 1983), lives in Minneapolis.

such topics. The response of Nietzsche and the existentialists was a sometimes stoical despair. The naive managed to keep up the cheerful scientism that characterizes the work of scientific publicists like Isaac Asimov and Carl Sagan, but the official grin of 19th-century optimism is beginning to resemble the rictus of a corpse.

Coexisting with such thinking throughout much of the last century-and-a-half, especially in Europe, was

the philosophy of Hegel. His all-pervading spirit was a sophisticated contra-Kantian development of what Aldous Huxley called the "perennial philosophy." Thus pantheism was the religion—often unacknowledged—of a great many of those in the 19th-century intellectual classes who did not subscribe to scientism. Ernst Troeltsch, early in this century, surveyed the German Protestant church and found it to be largely pantheist in

