

time, yields superman.

Aldrich surely does not intend such a conclusion, for he betrays a complicated sensibility in attributing his own *noblesse oblige* to something called *pietas*. I would like very much to define what he means by the word, but once again poetry works against him. Describing its effects—a reverence for grandparents, a sense of history, a vague belief in eternal recurrence—he seems to be transplanting ancestor worship from the temples of Tokyo to the mansions of Newport. It survives the journey, but emerges more muddled, if possible, than it is at its place of origin.

To distinguish, finally, between those who *use* money from those who merely possess it, Aldrich resorts to the pyrotechnics of contrast. He discerns a historic contentiousness between “old money” and its necessary opposite, “new money.” By “new money” he means the big-spending entrepreneur, promoted to wealth by hard effort of hand and mind. A recent arrival bursting with pride and appetite, “new money” denies obligation to society. Instead of speaking of the bottom line in hushed, somewhat embarrassed tones, “new money” flaunts wealth, elevating it to preeminence on the scale of human worth: a man is nothing unless he earns. The factions, of course, are bitter enemies, and never more so than at present. “Ronald Reagan installed an administration composed almost entirely of self-made men (men, indeed, who were determined to use their offices to make it), and by the end of his second term Reagan had fed a flock of torrent birds whose droppings nauseated patrician sensibilities as nothing had since the days of Richard Whitney.”

Now, Whitney went to Sing Sing for stealing from the trust accounts of persons as rich and well-connected as he was himself. As an example of errant wealth, the main virtue of his case has to be its relative recency (1938), because for sheer venality Aldrich might have—but of course would not have—chosen his own family’s grocer-patriarch of the Ocean State. When Senator Aldrich went to Washington in 1881, he was worth \$50,000. Thirty years later, having engaged in no business but politics, that figure was \$12 million. Bribery,

apologizes his grandson, was an accepted practice when today’s “old money” was new.

In attempting to draw boundaries using dates of accession, Aldrich fails at his second project: weighing the success of “old money” as a social force. The difference, Aldrich perceives in the agnostic dimness of his Northeastern Republicanism, is ultimately intangible. “Patricians . . . know that life is never so fair, so meritocratic, as the entrepreneur would have it. . . . But it is in their interest to know, too, that while this unfairness can be ameliorated, preferably by them, it cannot be undone.” They know this even as grocers, for what Aldrich speaks of is the natural aristocrat—this time without quotation marks. For such aristocrats, who, as Russell Kirk has written, stand out in whichever human subgroup they find themselves, money is incidental. When present, however and whenever obtained, it is a vehicle for great deeds. But when money is absent, the deeds go on. The natural aristocrat performs dramas of heroic proportions whatever the size of his stage.

I refer to “agnostic dimness” because the remarkable thing about Aldrich’s argument, and the root of its confusion, is its Godlessness. The name of the Deity appears three times in the book, first in a joke, next in a child’s sentimental prayer, and finally, in a eulogy, as the essence of “the wind and the weather, the line of the shore—things one couldn’t do anything about.” Considering that his argument, and the social hierarchy it defends, are medieval, God should be writ large. God is the ill-defined source of strength in Aldrich’s *pietas*; God’s law, as they understood it, inspired the earlier American aristocrats to acts of splendid generosity; God’s grace (which Aldrich obscures by the generality “life”) set apart rich from poor. Without Him, Aldrich’s claim of “old money” superiority is at best mysticism, at worst arrogance.

It would be best to ask a theologian how the natural aristocrat subject to God differs from the vegetative aristocrat of Aldrich’s vision, an aristocrat to whom things simply happen and whose authority is his pocketbook. By way of summary, it is perhaps sufficient to say, using paradox in the manner of

Chesterton, that the one retains his free will by losing it, while the other loses everything. For the Godless aristocrat of pure wealth, be his justification “old money” or “new,” cuts himself loose from the chain of being, from the Augustinian scheme of earthly existence that justifies—and ennobles—inequality by placing God at its apex. To God we are all unequal, yet by Him equally beloved.

Late in *Old Money*, Aldrich reprints word-for-word a touching address that he delivered at the funeral of his father. Nelson W. Aldrich (1911-1986) was an architect, a painter and, between times, trustee of Boston institutions public, private, educational, cultural. “He thought it was the task of one’s life,” said his only son, “to make the most of whatever one had. . . . He was blessed, and knew it. Indeed, there were times—when you were nearby, for example—when he felt he could bless.” If the late Aldrich was really like that, he was living proof why the poor hate the rich. They hate them for refusing to be humble. By accepting only so much of the medieval argument as is convenient, the rich pervert the myth that is their legitimacy. The myth becomes not an expression of wonder but an entangling web of lies, from which “old money” can buy no release.

Enduring Wisdom

by H. Lee Cheek

The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things Are Written on the Sky
by Russell Kirk, Washington, DC:
Regnery Gateway; \$17.95.

Wise Men is a collection of 11 lively essays by the wise old sage who is contemporary conservatism’s most able prophet. The Kirk neophyte will find these essays most alluring; it is unusual to experience such an affirmation of the “permanent things” in our current age. The Kirk devotee will find this slim volume to be an encapsulation of a lifetime against the tide of the leveling influences at work in modern thought.

The book is a compilation of public lectures delivered at The Heritage Foundation from 1982-1984; while

Kirk's lectures are masterpieces in printed form, the reader can easily recognize they were intended for a live audience. Like his previous collection of Heritage lectures, *Reclaiming a Patrimony*, this assemblage has a theme: all is not lost. Departing from the view of his old friend Richard M. Weaver, Kirk holds that in the dark tunnel, some light glimmers, however dim. Through his many seminars at his home in the hamlet of Mecosta, a coterie of former assistants, and lectureships, Kirk has instilled the value of redemption. Even as the weary walls begin to crack, renewal may come. Kirk, like Joad and others, believes the West is growing more decadent day by day, and that we have "lost the object." Our appointed civilizing mission, *fatum*, has exerted less and less influence, and like Rome, our population and prosperity could disappear and frustration would replace national confidence.

In the first three essays in this collection Kirk attempts to offer a vision of hope—specifically, a refining of the idea of America's mission and an examination of the prospects for an American Augustan age. He demonstrates the need to recover this mission, but not as it has been interpreted by the neoconservative forces that abound in the Department of State and in numerous think tanks. Kirk accepts the Boorstinian perspective that the American Constitution cannot be exported, as it grew out of a special intellectual and historical experience. The legions of neoconservatives have made it appear as if conservatives endorse unabashed worldwide plebiscitarian democracy accompanied by a Novakian economic order; Kirk counters by repeating Sir Herbert Butterfield's warning against national self-righteousness—"the cardinal error in diplomacy." The American mission, according to Kirk, is to "reconcile liberty with law." A *Pax Americana* could be produced not by promoting a pale hegemony, but presenting an example of ordered freedom.

Five of the 11 sections deal with educational processes; however, they are too eclectic to be united by an overall theme. The essays range from a seminal essay on the needed coexistence of order and freedom in the university to a rather acerbic attack

detailing how computers limit the moral imagination. This reviewer, knowing Kirk's environs well, finds the tone of this particular essay overly stringent, especially since Kirk has succumbed recently to the use of electric typewriters. But the point he makes is important: the Knowledge Society will be replaced by an Information Society and the "tested tools of learning" will be discarded. The panaceas proposed by educationalists all too often become their own worst nightmares.

Russell Kirk's many lectures on virtue, including the one offered in this volume entitled, "Can Virtue Be Taught?" have not gone unnoticed by the able souls attempting to regain the educational high ground. Endeavoring to prove that virtue can be perpetuated, Kirk sides with Aristophanes instead of Socrates. The great hero-poet believed virtue, as the greatness of the soul, could not be acquired by pampering or tutorials, but was a natural phenomenon. The source of virtue, according to this argument, is the family; the recovery of virtue in America depends on our revival of this institution.

The remaining three essays address the problem of the family, the movement towards an age of sentiments and a concluding essay bearing the book's title. Once again Kirk encounters the affliction of decline. Unlike Goethe, Kirk does not believe "the current times are the worst of times" and refuses to submit to the twin vices of servitude and boredom. Kirk elegantly defends the concept of the moral imagination, initially espoused by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections*. Through the moral imagination we realize that we are simply on the shoulders of those generations—part of a "folk chain"—that passed before us; we are, in part, a product of intuition. As the essay notes, ideology is the major obstacle to a revival of the moral imagination. Ideology can be countered, relying in no small part on the American disdain for dogma; three-quarters of a century ago Santayana wrote that it would take much hammering to drive an ideology into America.

Wise Men will serve as a reminder to those of a conservative cast to continue the effort to defend the civil social order against its many enemies. The lectures presented here were given over a broad span of time and there

is a good bit of redundancy. Some of Kirk's suggestions concerning education were originally espoused in his *Decadence and Renewal* a decade ago. His frequent references to Newman's concept of the "habit of mind" will also strike some readers as repetitive.



Yet, at the end of the day, *Wise Men* is another valiant effort by Kirk to help us bring ourselves out of our current disorder and "refute the prophecies of decadence."

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Princelings of Peace

by William R. Hawkins

Peace & Revolution: The Moral Crisis of American Pacifism by Guenter Lewy, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.

"While at one time pacifists were single-mindedly devoted to the principles of nonviolence and reconciliation, today most pacifist groups defend the moral legitimacy of armed struggle and guerrilla warfare, and they praise and support the communist regimes emerging from such conflicts." This is the thesis of Guenter Lewy's study of the most enduring and successful segment of the radical left, the so-called "peace movement." Lewy concentrates on four organizations: the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, founded 1917), the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR, founded 1914), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF, founded 1915), and the War Resisters League (WRL, founded 1923). By examining Old Left groups, Lewy chronicles how the New Left gained power during the 1960's and how it has held it ever since.

Lewy presents a large cast of characters, but if one stands out it is Stewart Meacham, a one-time Presbyterian minister who joined the AFSC in the 1950's and headed its peace education division during the Vietnam War. The AFSC had decided in the early 1930's not to join Communist front groups or allow their officers to lend their names