

all about Japan and remind me of bamboo furniture) with a couple of salutary quotations:

If one is going to print opinions that the public already agrees with, what is the use of printing 'em at all?

(Ezra Pound)

*Where, where, but here have Pride and Truth,
That long to give themselves for wage,
To shake their wicked sides at youth
Restraining reckless middle-age?*

(W. B. Yeats)

David Wright

THE NEW TRANSIGENCE

AN American friend of mine grew tired of the complaints of his teen-age daughter—half-boastful complaints—that her generation faced more problems, and more intractable and novel ones, than any previous generation since time—or at any rate *Time*—began. Finally he challenged her to name any problem that was unique to her generation. She claimed the atom-bomb and the H-bomb: he insisted that his generation had a line on these. She cited the rising of the coloured peoples: he likewise maintained that an older generation partook of that problem. Then she said, “How about *progressive parents*? You never had that to deal with.” He could not think of a convincing answer.

Progress is still a well-favoured word in America: *progressive*, and all that it implies, is not. It consorts uneasily in a half-world with words like *radicalism* and *freethinker*. These are the follies of the past—indeed, in the eyes of a large number of Americans, the treasons of the past. They have become tainted, almost as words like *liberate* and *fraternise* did in the Europe of a dozen years ago. This means that a large number of other Americans are on the defensive. Like the teen-ager's father, they have no comeback. What they sometimes deplore as the New Conformity has them on the run, because they themselves are blown by the prevailing wind. It is not an especially strong wind, nor exactly a mellow breeze. What we also hear of as the New Conservatism is not professed by multitudes. A rather self-conscious and inchoate development, it is a movement that is hostile to movement, with neither leaders nor followers, but only publicists at various levels of intellectual respectability. There is a good deal of bad temper in present-day America; and in part the New Conformity—or the New Transigence, as we might label it—represents a gambit in the unending and acid warfare of the generations. According to this, the rule that whatever is is right lies subsidiary to the rule that whatever was was wrong.

Nevertheless, the New Transigence goes further than the mere customary devaluation-revaluation process of the generations. That pat-

tern is still evident: the latest generation is busy despoiling (and not reading—one only has time for a few books) what its parents read. But there is a deeper desire for cosiness. True, America has a periodical entitled *Dissent* that offers to take on all comers in the belief that a yea-sayer is necessarily a yes-man. But it does not arouse much stir. The critics cry for “affirmations.” What is more, they get them.

A little while back they were offered Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar*, in which the heroine, a pretty Jewish girl with Bohemian hankerings, at length makes a safe marriage with a businessman of the same faith, and subsides contentedly into life as a suburban matron. Marjorie has learned that intellectuals are—in more senses than one—god-forsaken creatures. The author manoeuvres her back into the fold like an indulgent but skilful sheepdog. *Marjorie Morningstar*, a sort of latter-day *Pamela*, stood high on the American best-seller lists. It would have been in appropriate enough company with a current non-fiction best-seller called *Love or Perish*, the work of a man with the enchanting name of Dr. Smiley Blanton.

And it has a certain kinship with another novel, *The Last Hurrah*,* which has enjoyed an even greater success in America. Deservedly: it is extremely good of its kind, readable, competent in construction, literate, and humane in feeling. The minor characters are excellent. The story is funny in some places and touching in others. Its main character, Frank Skeffington, is an old-style Irish political boss, in a city that sounds like Boston. He is mayor, and at the age of seventy-two he is running for re-election. His power has been built out of graft, most of his cronies are moronic; and so you might think it a happy outcome when he is defeated by a reforming opponent. Not so: Frank Skeffington is portrayed as a kind of superior Robin Hood. His corrupt ways are gossiped about, yet nothing serious is proved against him. Never pompous

* *The Last Hurrah*. By EDWIN O'CONNOR. Reinhardt. 18s.

except when he means to be, tongue-in-cheek, he is all charm, agility, and sophistication.

There are several things to note about *The Last Hurrah*, quite apart from its value as entertainment. One is that it is not a "minority" novel, though it is by an Irish-American and about Irish-Americans: it neither complains nor apologises. The obsessive passion that you still find in most novels by say, American Negroes, is lacking here. There is an equanimity about it, as of a situation defined and accepted. The Irish have fallen into place; the city-boss moves off-stage into folklore, perhaps to join Sitting Bull and Geronimo as a wild man whose virtues can be acknowledged—and exaggerated—now that he is safely dead and gone. Like other American novelists, indeed, Mr. O'Connor is half a myth-maker and half a sociologist. The truth of this is amusingly portrayed in the behaviour of Mayor Curley of Boston, an actual man whom most people have been regarding as the prototype of Skeffington. Mayor Curley apparently held the same view, and there were reports that he intended to sue Mr. O'Connor. But *The Last Hurrah* was too benign to merit such treatment. Skeffington became confused with Curley, so that over 160 Boston voters wrote the name of Skeffington into their tickets in a recent primary election—and Mayor Curley claimed them for his own. How many cheers or hurrahs is this for democracy?

ANOTHER fascinating analysis of the New Transigence (which Mr. O'Connor, incidentally, describes as "the new emotional shallows") is provided by *The Public Arts*.* Its author, Gilbert Seldes, is an unusual man who has made a long and honourable career as an interpreter of such "popular" media as the cinema, radio, and television. It is these three that he discusses in *The Public Arts*. He manages to do so with affectionate sympathy yet without undue jollity. He knows their dangers and he does not pretend that they constitute a new kind of university destined to ennoble us all:

TV Guide noted that the comedian Orson Bean began a broadcast with this offer:

"Just write in, folks, and we'll send you \$5,000 worth of secondhand sneakers, six miles of dental floss, an all-expense vacation in Youngstown, Ohio, and a screen door equipped with 200 flies."

TV Guide also reported that people wrote in quite seriously for each of the gifts.

But on the whole Mr. Seldes is optimistic. He urges his readers to overcome their dislike of the

* *The Public Arts*. By GILBERT SELDES. Simon and Schuster. \$3.95.

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"Those who care for letters have already come to admire the purity of his style the sharpness of his memory and mind, and the lenience of his humour." Sir Harold Nicolson (*The Observer*). 18s.

WINTER'S TALES 2

Stories by John Bayley, Mary Clive, Gabriel Fielding, Rumer Godden, Maurice Kennedy, Rosamond Lehmann, Olivia Manning, William Plomer, J. D. Scott, Godfrey Smith, Muriel Spark, and John Wain. Illustrated. November. 16s.

.....Macmillan

public arts, but he is not proposing to lead them in a crusade. In common with Jacques Barzun,* who writes in similar terms of the rôle of music—a most pervasive one—in American life, he is seemingly ready to accept the fact that the public arts, and the gramophone, owe some of their sway to “an increasing resistance to words.” Here the New Transigence does frighten me a little. Is word-purveying, save as an elementary exercise, to become an obsolete craft, like cottage weaving or the manufacture of cigarettes? *Je n'en vois pas la nécessité*, as the lady said about death. There is something a little eerie in working through a batch of books on contemporary America, perhaps because they are so contemporary that they whirl one onward in a time-machine, overhauling the future; for in practice living in the present means trying to live in the future.

ALL such fears are allayed by Mr. Dingwall,† whose book brings a whiff of Europe and

* *Music in American Life*. By JACQUES BARZUN. Doubleday. \$2.75.

† *The American Woman*. By ERIC JOHN DINGWALL. Duckworth. 25s.

the past. His theme is American women, their sad history of frustration and frigidity and their disastrous effect upon American civilisation. His story is not without merit; he has culled a mass of evidence, some of it from reputable witnesses, and there is no doubt that he has a point. But it is a curiously old-fashioned point; and even though many of his sources are American, I think it is mainly a European point, all about the American dreadfulness and the need for Americans to relax and fecundate. Has he not heard of the new dispensations? His is an America whose denizens are still saying *sez you?* and *twenty-three skiddoo* to one another. I can find no mention in *The American Woman*—which has thousands of citations—of the writings of David Riesman, or Erich Fromm, or anything by Karen Horney since 1926, or of Margaret Mead's *Male and Female*. By way of compensation, there are copious references to such publications as *Esquire*, to Philip (“Mom”) Wylie, and to a horde of daft or superficial European observers. Stephen Leacock remarks that half-truths, like half-bricks, go further in argument; if so, Mr. Dingwall will meet with a lively reception.

Marcus Cunliffe

A.D. 1956

IN TIMES of disillusion and danger a secular society requires a patient but active courage from its leading citizens if it is to have much chance of survival. Its corrosive enemies are anxiety, frightened impatience, and the neurotic boredom and apathy which frequently attend such states of excitement. Contemporary Western secular civilisation in its present perilous situation seems to be seriously threatened from within by exactly such neurotic reactions, though the extent of this destructive response may be less than it appears, for alarm is necessarily more vocal than patient courage. While many of the Western intellectuals who plead for a return to religion do so because, after mature consideration, they believe that in both religious instinct and in the organised religions lie the only possible solutions to the dilemmas of modern civilisation, many also—and these again probably the most vocal—see in religion an escape from their panic. Dr. Toynbee's new book* will give genuine satisfaction to the former class; it will also no doubt have fashionable success among the latter.

* *An Historian's Approach to Religion*. By ARNOLD TOYNBEE. Oxford University Press. 21s.

Dr. Toynbee starts his argument from the inner contradiction that dwells in men. Each man is inevitably self-centred. If he does not preserve this self-centredness, he will inevitably seek extinction. If he remains self-centred, he will also perish—for this self-centredness is a palpable and absurd illusion. From this contradiction come sorrow and anxiety. The reality of religion allows man to accept this contradiction and to endure sorrow. Each man has his own approach to this reality, Dr. Toynbee declares, but he suggests that the historian's approach may be of a special interest, because the very pursuit of historical studies shows a peculiar desire to escape from self-centredness in time. He agrees, of course, that in practice historians do not wholly succeed in escaping from their own personalities, or from their own time, in their search to understand the past. He cites here the limitations of Gibbon and we may note that he could not have chosen an historian whose limitations are more convenient for his thesis. Indeed I cannot help thinking that the whole of Dr. Toynbee's argument would have been strengthened if he had attempted some self-analysis, some suggestion of the connections between his own view of history and his personality