

SMALL STATES ARE BEST

John Chamberlain

LEOPOLD KOHR, a writer of knockabout charm despite his professorial background, throws his *The Breakdown of Nations* (Rinehart, \$6.00) smack in the face of virtually every modern shibboleth. He tells us why there can be no peace through empire or pursuit of the universal state. He isolates the "political cancer" (his word for it) which consumed the League of Nations and will surely be the death of the United Nations. He explains why so much of the energy of the contemporary world must be devoted to overcoming the inconveniences created by the progress which has heaped us all together in great urban warrens. Incidentally, Dr. Kohr does not expect to convert anybody. We learn, he seems to say, only through failure; and the only cure for the sterility of the universal state is to try it on for size and watch it burst into smithereens after the forthcoming inevitable war between the U.S. and Russia.

Dr. Kohr's theory is that life is only manageable through cultivation of the "small-cell principle."

Anything big, he says, is bound to break down through instability. Bigness can, indeed, be handled through the principle of decentralization, as many U.S. business concerns (General Motors, Johnson and Johnson) have discovered. But only when the decentralization permits true local responsibility in the various parts. The parts, in turn, must be small parts, no one of which has the latent power to impose an imperialistic design on any of the other units.

Inasmuch as political Bigness is the worst sort of Bigness (it has a monopoly of force to back it up), Dr. Kohr is primarily concerned with explaining why Great States are their own Nemesis. But Dr. Kohr's mind is only interested in politics for purposes of outwitting and circumventing the politicians. Though he is by trade a political economist (he teaches economics and public administration at the University of Puerto Rico), Dr. Kohr is actually far more interested in his hobbies and his avocations. He delights in things which, though "socially useless," minister

to the creative individual's pleasure. He applauds artists who retire to ivory towers to create "true moments of civilization" in defiance of the "clamor of the masses." He glories in such rulers as the princes of Salzburg, who, lacking the military power to enlarge their territorial possessions, were forced to "divert" their aggressiveness into hewing theatres out of mountainsides and building churches ("all wholly unnecessary but each more beautiful than the other").

The great ages, says Dr. Kohr, were those of the Greek city states and the small medieval principalities and free cities. In such "small-cell" communities men could provide for their needs and still have time for "musing and slowness of pace." The worst age, so Dr. Kohr continues, is any age in which the individual can find no relief from the necessity to engage in "stultifying social service." Or, he might have added, no relief from a surplusage of stultifying individual self-service. In a notable passage on the disappearance of housemaids, Dr. Kohr observes that every housemaid has now become either a wife or a stenographer. This has had a paradoxical issue: it has turned every secretary and housewife into a housemaid — but without a day off. The housewife is now, truly, the house's wife.

The good society, in Dr. Kohr's

definition, is one which allows a creative individual to participate in a great variety of personal experience. But variety, he insists, is only possible in a small state. Large states require — and compel — large-scale specialization. But in small states there is no need for such specialists as social analysts, efficiency experts, or singers whose talent is for producing mass swooning. In small states mechanics gather with greengrocers, and professors of history hobnob with artists in the café. In large states, the exigencies of organization — trade associations, conventions, and the like — compel mechanics to spend most of their time with mechanics, garment workers with garment workers, and journalists with journalists. "If a businessman knows a sculptor" in a large state, so Dr. Kohr says, "he is suspected of being a sex pervert. If an engineer knows a philosopher, he is suspected of being a spy . . . It is considered snobbish, indecent, or treasonable to mix with anybody not of one's kind."

All of this is exaggeration, of course. But Dr. Kohr is a master of the parody which conveys truth. When he remarks that modern authors lack the "opportunity to experience the multitude of social and human problems that constitute life," he hits close to the mark. To know anything today, an

author must keep a staff of researchers who "do the learning and experiencing for him." Dr. Kohr thinks it significant that England's period of literary greatness, the Elizabethan, came when she was a "quarrelsome insignificant" minor power. And it is no coincidence, he says, "that many of the most . . . fertile contributors to modern English literature, Shaw, Joyce, Yeats, or Wilde, were Irish, members of one of the world's smallest nations."

Dr. Kohr is not against war. But he thinks wars make sense only when they are small, personal combats—say as between two armored knights. He objects to such "universal" political mechanisms as the League of Nations or United Nations precisely because they tend to turn small, personal conflicts—such as between Israelis and Egyptians for control of the Sinai Peninsula—into universal combats between great power blocs. He objects to Big Unions and to corporations which believe in industry-wide bargaining because they cannot fight an economic war without disrupting an entire economy.

Having proved to his own satisfaction that smallness, not ripeness, is all, Dr. Kohr tells us how we could work back to a world of small states and still retain the advantages of large-scale federa-

tion. The successful federations, he notes, are those of the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Swiss Republic. The failures in the field of federation include Bismarck's Germany, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, and (though it is not an example of true federation) the League of Nations. Dr. Kohr observes that the United States, Canada, and Switzerland have one thing in common: their component units are small units, none of which could really hope to impose its will on the federation as a whole. In the German federation, on the other hand, Prussia (the cancerous cell) had the power first to expel Austria and then to impose its designs on Bavaria, Baden, and the Free City of Hamburg.

Divide or Explode

The lesson to be derived from all this is obvious: to federalize the world, we must first break all the great powers up into their medieval regional units. Great Britain must devolve into England, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, and the Isle of Man before she is fit to send delegates (on the regional representation plan) to a European parliament at Strasbourg. France must become Burgundy, the Midi, Aquitaine, and Normandy. Germany must become Saxony, Brandenburg, and the

Rhineland (no Prussia!). Only if the monsters cease to be monstrous could such small nations as Switzerland, Denmark, and Austria trust themselves to the decisions of a Strasburg government.

Naturally, Dr. Kohr is under no illusions that France will become Burgundy, the Midi, and so on. He thinks the world is fated to "unify" into two great-power confrontations, with Washington and Moscow as the opposing capitals. And he says, categorically, that the "critical mass" of the Iron Curtain and anti-Iron Curtain worlds will result in fission and wild explosion.

This fission, says Dr. Kohr, won't be nice to experience, but it will have the virtue of creating a totally unmanageable situation for the victor power. Unable to handle all things from one center of power, the emergent tyrant won't last very long. And out of the chaos of "One World" there will come a new world of small, regional units, which, like the Greek city states, will produce another cultural efflorescence. If our descendants wish to participate in the efflorescence, however, they must be careful to choose their family trees. The ones who have ancestors in any city which is fated to be a Hiroshima just won't be on hand for the small-state millennium.

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American Faith

By *John Sutherland Bates*. New York City: W. W. Norton, 1957. 479 pp. \$6.95.

THIS is the second printing of a book which received favorable notice when it first appeared in 1940. The book has not changed, but scholarly outlook and understanding has, and the book leaves a less favorable impression today.

The American faith, as the late Professor Bates viewed it, "is summarized today in the term 'democracy.'" This faith did not arise out of eighteenth century social conflicts, as some have supposed, but rather took its origin in the Reformation. "Democracy," he writes, "was envisaged in religious terms long before it assumed a political terminology." This large volume begins, therefore, with our European heritage, with the Reformation considered as a Social Revolution, and urges that this Reformation was completed in America.

The story, which stops with the Civil War, is told in pleasant narrative style with a minimum of footnotes and no bibliography. It is a useful book for one who wishes a compact account of the major religious denominations which helped to shape American life and institutions, who likes to explore some of the fantastic religious byways traveled by cults