

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Norris and Maverick, progressive Americans—Kenneth Burke and history—Remarque and Werfel

LIBERALISM developed during the nineteenth century as the voice of middle-class industrialism. What the new factory-owners and financiers wanted was freedom to pursue their own advantage without interference, and a political machinery that recognized and reflected their preponderance of power. This freedom was stated in terms of a ringing justification of individual liberty. Individualism, indeed, became the philosophic core of liberalism—covering aspirations far more sweeping than those of crude acquisition, crying out against the exploitation and ruining of human personality. The Gradgrinds, Sir Jabesh Windbags, and Bounderbys were disconcerted to find their individualism of private gain challenged by an individualism of public welfare. And gradually libertarian liberals themselves came to realize that individual liberty could be guaranteed only by organic social control, that the individual is inseparable from the community. The logic of liberalism led imperceptibly to the logic of nineteenth-century socialism and present-day communism.

The two political biographies we have here* cover almost eighty years in these mutations of liberalism. Senator Norris was born in 1861, when Minister Adams was struggling to prevent the weight of England's cotton trade from pulling liberals like Russell and Gladstone into recognition of the Confederacy. Norris grew up in Nebraska while America was changing from a pioneer to an industrial economy. From 1902, when he entered Congress as a member of the Republican Party, believing in its liberal professions of devotion to popular welfare, Norris has moved from conformity to insurgence and independence, and through these to an insistence on the curbing of financial rapacity in the interests of communal well-being. Representative Maverick, an admirer and in a sense a protégé of Senator Norris, today sees with no enthusiasm that "exploiting groups" make themselves "top dogs" and "skin the lickins around the edge of the dollar-pot," and shouts for national economic and social planning. Maverick has no love for Marxists, but he is closer to them than he thinks, and he is still in his forty-second year. The curve from the earlier to the later Norris, and from Norris to Maverick, reveals a highly significant pattern in political movement.

Norris himself did not cease to be a regular Republican until he was in his forties, but since then he, more than Maverick, has been one of the real Mavericks in American politics. In the early days of the World War he per-

ceived the relation between the profits of finance-capitalism and militarist propaganda; and he denounced the subserviency of the Senate to President Wilson, "the man at the head of the pie counter," in nullifying true neutrality. With LaFollette, Norris stood among the "little group of willful men" who defeated the armed-ships bill, and fought hopelessly to keep America out of war, crying, "We are about to put the dollar sign upon the American flag." To outline his career since the war is to list a roll-call of honorable battles: Teapot Dome, Muscle Shoals, the "lame duck" amendment, opposition to the ap-

pointments of McReynolds, Butler, and Hughes, and support for Brandeis and Cardozo, constant and flaming antagonism to the unscrupulous activities of public utilities, an unrelenting campaign for harnessing hydro-electric power for social use.

The personal integrity of Norris's character, however, is revealed no more clearly than the ambiguities of historical liberalism. Norris has realized that in modern society the welfare of the individual—the millions of individuals who form the people—can be improved only by socialized planning. But Norris himself, perhaps ingrained with the personal individual-



"Listen, will you please stop turning up rocks? You might discover another Max Eastman."

* INTEGRITY: THE LIFE OF GEORGE W. NORRIS, by Richard L. Neuberger and Stephen B. Kahn. Vanguard Press. \$3.

A MAVERICK AMERICAN, by Maury Maverick. Covici-Friede. \$3.

ism of the isolated pioneer farmer, perhaps reacting still against the early efforts of machine politics to dragoon him into regularity, has consistently chosen to play a lone hand, refusing to be either leader or follower in any permanent organization. In a similar way, he manifests the traditional bias of liberalism toward political objectives. By no means blind to the rôle of social and economic forces, he has supported but has been no initiator of legislation in such fields. "Most of Norris's demands for alterations in the basic law have been in the mechanics of politics." He has demanded no changes in the economic order, and seems to believe that despite all the weapons available to capitalism, big business and democracy can exist side by side.

Mr. Maverick goes considerably further. He knows that group antagonisms ("share-cropper kick nigger," "union against union," "fight the foreigner") are tricks bolstering up the rule of "the dear old industrialist." He knows that "The old theory of unregenerate masses of people who won't work and 'don't want to live in good houses' is a cold-blooded lie." And he insists again and again on unified economic organization for individual welfare: "There must be some general pattern, or 'plan,' whether the 'Liberty' Leaguers like the word or not. For a plan is simply necessary if we are to exist and save the land."

And in spite of his clowning, his calculated gum-chewing slanginess, and his deliberate cultivation of irrelevance and oddity, Mr. Maverick is by no means as crazy as he sounds. Maybe he lives in an ex-trolley car and rides horses up Capitol Hill, but he's nobody's fool. He puts no bunk into a series of chapters that might have been war-hero stuff, and as a southerner he has no greater dislike for the sentimentalizing of Harper's Ferry than he has for "magnolia blossoms, the virtue of womanhood, . . . and a lot of bunk about states' rights." He has ridden the rails, slept in hobo jungles, and vomited on Salvation Army hand-outs. He has organized the unemployed into coöperative groups, seen how they worked, and generalized shrewdly about the obstacles to their working. All this experience he precipitates into the lively pages of his book.

Far more of his shrewdness and far more of his experience than Mr. Maverick would perhaps be willing to admit derives its wisdom from Marxist insights. He has a strong prejudice against people "talking a strange tongue of Marxian dialectics," and derides the terminology: "proletarian ideology," "economic determinism," "crisis symptomology," "the class struggle." He says: "These, I tell you, American people do not understand, and do not like." But he satirizes just as violently the professional jargon of New Deal economists. "The word nodule," he told Rexford Tugwell, "is not understood by the American people, nor is it understood by me, which makes it worse—and I do not want to know what it means. . . . Nodule my eye!"

Now, there is a defense of such vocabularies, but I think Mr. Maverick is right in claiming that they do not belong in the realm



Woodcut by Helen West Heller

of persuasive discourse. They are the abstract chemical symbols of social thinking, and as such they concentrate a good deal of meaning (to those who understand them) in little space and are a great convenience to intellectual manipulation, a sort of sociological shorthand. But Kenneth Burke has pointed out the rhetorical desirability of translating such concepts into richer and more colorful terms when we want to invoke a "strategy of appeal." So examined, Mr. Maverick himself might be surprised to learn how much Marxist thought he has popularized for his constituents into racy American slang. Not that he is by any means a thorough-going Marxist, of course, but he reinforces—as an up-to-the-minute model of the individualistic liberalism that Senator Norris also exemplifies—the analysis with which this review began. The living core of liberalism, to preserve its life, has had to merge individualism in a sense of responsibility to the community, and to transcend its prosperous middle-class origins for the world.

Neither of these books is of great stature as biography. Mr. Maverick happily conveys his own personality by gossiping about everything on earth and ignoring what he calls "statistics": chronological narration of events. Lots of events get in, though, and lots of opinions and character, too, but all pretty jumbled. Messrs. Neuberger and Kahn stick to Senator Norris's public career, making little effort to recreate his private character, and their earlier chapters sound too much like an Alger book. But without any claim to having written a work of biographical art, the authors have done a useful job of journalism, and the personality of George W. Norris is decisive enough even so to emerge with considerable life from their pages. EDGAR JOHNSON.

The Science of Symbolology

ATTITUDES TOWARD HISTORY, by Kenneth Burke, in two volumes. *The New Republic*, \$1 per volume.

ONE of the subjects which people engaged in the profession of public relations might well study at great length is the matter of those terms which serve to fix or change

attitudes. The subject may be called symbolology, the study of symbols. As a matter of fact, the great majority of publicists are well aware of the enormous importance of this "science," and learn of it, though dispersedly, in books on social psychology, business psychology, and the like. They moreover practice the science without knowing it, through the mere application of common sense, or of the method of "trial and error" to the use of public symbols in their work. The American advertising man knows most about this subject, though he misuses it with cheaply cynical facility, and makes it into a technique to kid people into buying his product. The same goes for public relations counselors and the like.

The political propagandist is the one who can learn most from a specific study of popular symbols. Too many such writers and lecturers deal with their audiences as if other people's ideas were as broad and as scientific as their own. It has often been said that the application of some of the techniques of advertising to political propaganda would be a valuable reform; all this means is that propaganda should be brought more nearly into key with the symbols by which people think and act.

Kenneth Burke has written a most seminal essay upon this subject of symbols; he will, I am afraid, be surprised to learn that its value is largely in the field of practical agitation. I say surprised for reasons which I shall soon make clear.

But first, the constructive element in the book. Burke has realized the enormous value of symbols, and also the great difficulty in working in such a subject without a vocabulary of definitions to work with. It is impossible to devise a *system* whereby attitudes may be dealt with, without having a nomenclature to define the principal facts about these attitudes, and how they work. He, therefore, has erected a system of names, including about thirty-five words and phrases, which may be considered to cover the field of symbols, public attitudes toward them, and their dialectics. This "dictionary of pivotal terms" forms the last section of his book.

The first three-fourths of the book contains material of an extremely varied nature, in which the author himself learns as he writes, learns the full meaning of some of his terms, enlarges on them, and discovers some of their many connotations. It would not be fair to say, perhaps, that the first three-fourths of the book are just notes for the last quarter; yet that is somehow the effect. However, it is true that a dictionary, arranged alphabetically, would not permit a full understanding of the term "alienation" (one of his finest), because of great importance in defining that term is the term "symbols of authority," which appears at the end of the dictionary under "s." I, therefore, would like to caution readers to be patient as they go through the book, and to be aware, if possible, of what is going on: the somewhat painful creation of criteria whereby the final dictionary "definitions" will be made clear.

This undoubtedly sounds pretty formidable;