

# The Atomic Age

## CAPSULES

*The author of this fable has been professor of English at the University of Texas since 1933. He is the author of numerous books on the Southwest. In 1943 he went to Cambridge University as visiting professor of American history, and out of this came "A Texan in England," a lively and highly readable account of his experiences.*

**T**HE time is 1967. The chief actor is a dictator named Confra. It was in 1945 that he decided he could destroy all democracies. That was the year in which four hundred American scientists who had developed the atomic bomb asserted in a signed statement that the secrets of the weapon could not be kept from the world at large and that for the United States to try to keep the secrets would lead to a war "more savage than the last." It was also the year in which American politicians decided on secrecy, even ruling their partners, Britain and Canada, out of the trade secrets.

Confra claimed that his name was derived from "confrere" (a fellow member in a brotherhood); his enemies said that the name was merely Franco twisted around. His followers called him "Brother" and so popularized the name that many people voted for him "because he was such a good man." He came into power almost unobtrusively. Science means knowledge; knowledge is not spectacular; "practical" politicians deride it; it is humble and keeps silent. Confra was practical and he was also a politician, but he was not a "practical politician."

At the very beginning of his career, Confra began building up a corps of scientists. Science, knowledge, is always international. The most nationalistic people are always the most ignorant people. A smart politician before a mob waves the flag and makes the eagle scream, in order to win applause; facing brains, he uses his brains and what knowledge he can appear to have, in order to save himself from contempt.

Confra's funds were limited. He saved them for science. In his years of preparation he did not build a single bomber, a single piece of artillery, a single warship. He did not raise a single extra battalion of soldiers, or try to get possession of a single outlying airfield. Along about 1960 he began selecting between three

and four hundred courteous, discreet, loyal, capable men whose science lay mainly in knowing foreign languages, especially English, and in being familiar with foreign countries and foreign ways. They were urbane men, not one of them showy.

One night in March 1967, he gathered them together, though of course they had been rigidly instructed in private, and told them that D-day would be December 26, at three o'clock in the morning, Eastern Standard Time. To each man he gave a capsule of atomic energy to be carried in his vest pocket. To each also he gave a time fuse, with instructions to wrap it in a pair of dirty socks and put it inside his suitcase. All were amply provided with money, and every man was assigned a particular city for his destination—Washington, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, St. Louis, Houston, London, Liverpool, Manchester, Belfast, Melbourne, Toronto, Berne, Paris, and others. They were to travel by air, sea, railroad, and were to dribble away to their respective destinations as inconspicuously as the evaporation of water from a tank. Each had, on the surface, a plain piece of business to transact, a business that he was reasonably familiar with and would actually work at.

"You will accommodate yourselves to circumstances," Confra said. "The sole and simple purpose is to destroy totally the power of the democracies, especially the English-speaking democracies. Most of their civilization will go with their power and with

the lives of tens of millions of people now inside your vest pockets. The only specific directions I give you are for the finality. These are more than directions; they are orders.

"At midnight, Eastern Standard Time—not an awkward hour, after all, for the business in Europe—each agent will plant his capsule and his time fuse in the selected place in the assigned area. Each will time his fuse to explode the capsule at D-hour plus 3. Each during those three hours will go out between thirty and forty miles from the planted capsule and observe the explosion."

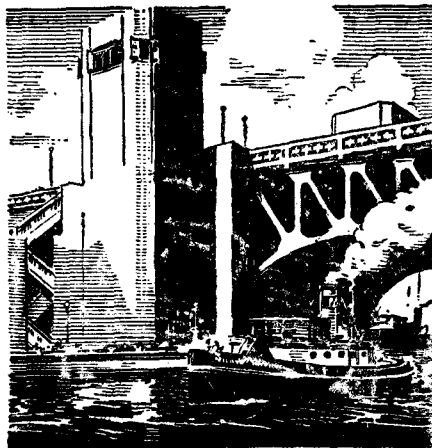
Confra actually sent 378 agents out. In the United States he omitted several state capitals, having little respect for the science residing in them, but he figured that the destruction of all the main cities, harbors, factory centers, government centers, and seats of learning would be absolute. He wanted to leave most of the grass, woods, and farm lands and the people on them. He said that if the grass, the woods, the fields, and the people remaining all got along together they might amount to something in the world eventually. He had no real plan, however, for anybody or anything, including his own country.

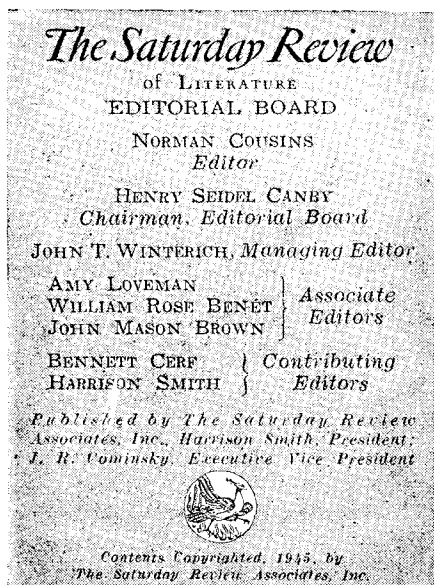
His plan was designed to allow nationalistic patriotism to go on its booming way clear up to the fatal hour. The course of economic isolationism would not be at all interrupted until the minute of utter extinction. At that minute nearly everybody would be in bed and would not know what had happened to them even after it had happened. Not even the wise among them would have the satisfaction of pointing out how the politicians had succeeded in keeping the people as ignorant as they themselves were or how the greedy had fairly bought their own bargain. The conflict between the literalness and the spirit of the plan for a unity of nations would be at an end. Particularly, the dream of a partnership, based on a decent trust, between the English-speaking nations would go into peaceful slumber.

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Grey of Fallodon, who was a very fine gentleman, a very noble man, and a very great statesman, said that the cleverest bit of wisdom he was acquainted with was a Spanish proverb: "He who does not know, but thinks he knows, is a fool. Avoid him. He that knows, but does not know he knows, is a sleeper. Wake him. He that knows, and knows he knows, is a wise man. Follow him."

J. FRANK DOBIE





## VALE

THERE have often been men in American literary history, too modest to pose as men of letters or great novelists, yet so keen in observation, and so skilful, that their books prove as memorable as more pretentious work. Such a writer was ARTHUR TRAIN, author of a long list of books, and president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. His talent was extraordinary, as is proved by the wide and long success of his writings. And in one respect it rose to genius, and that was in the creation of character. Perhaps it would be better to say, one character. His Mr. Tutt became unquestionably the best known of American lawyers. And this was not only because Mr. Tutt, like many a Dickens character, was, thanks to his author, more real, more typically true to the legal personality than life itself. His just fame must also be attributed to a core of shrewd, typically American idealism. His object in life was to use the infinite resources of Yankee ingenuity to save the morally innocent from the clutches of law, which, as Mr. Tutt used often to say, is by no means synonymous with justice.

Arthur Train himself had the great advantage of always knowing his subject. If he wrote a novel of the Balkans, it was because he had been there. If he wrote some of the best stories of salmon fishing, it was (partly) because he was an excellent fisherman. If he made drama out of the complexities of the law, it was because he had been an assistant district attorney, and before that had served the poor and the weak when trapped by the technicalities of legal procedure. And while he wrote for a large and often uncritical public, he worked as an artist, not as an artisan. No labor was spared—even to the thrice

writing of a full-length manuscript—to make his stories and his books as good as he could make them. Many a writer of our times of equal talent, and sometimes greater genius, has been slovenly and only semi-articulate by comparison. It was the realized authenticity of Mr. Tutt that caused a storm when Mr. Train wrote that much-loved character's autobiography. For many a reader refused to believe that Mr. Tutt was not the real man, and insisted that Arthur Train was only a pseudonym.

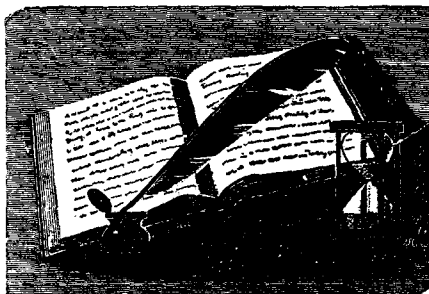
American literature and the social and intellectual life of New York will both suffer from the death of this quietly perceptive man, who was as much loved by his friends as was Mr. Tutt by the readers of the country.

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THEODORE DREISER's death marks the passing of a monumental figure who will be discussed for generations, alike as novelist and social observer, before a final critical appraisal satisfactory to everyone can be arrived at—if it ever can be. But Dreiser's place as a protagonist in turn-of-the-century realism is already beyond dispute. Stephen Crane had died, at twenty-nine, in 1900; Frank Norris was to die, at thirty-two, in 1902. Dreiser, born eighteen months after Norris and two months before Crane, was left to carry on almost alone until the Sinclairs, the Andersons, the Steinbecks, and the Farrells could enter the lists as redoubtable champions of the movement that was to turn American fiction diametrically away from Graustark.

"Sister Carrie" broke over the country like a bombshell in 1900. The youth of today, reading it for the first time, may well wonder why, for the grass of custom inevitably grows over the trail of the trail-blazing book. There are those today who cannot understand why people stood in line to get their monthly parts of "The Pickwick Papers." The careers of Caroline Meeber and Jennie Gerhardt have been far surpassed in luridness. But they were none the less pioneer women, who rode, not in covered wagons, but in fringe-topped surreys.

Dreiser wrote ponderously and awkwardly. God help the youngster who



tries to model his own after Dreiser's prose style. But Dreiser also wrote honestly and sincerely, with depth and understanding and pity, and these are qualities that can always bear imitation. A tower has fallen—not a tower of architectural grace and beauty, but a tower that had stood as a significant and inescapable landmark in American literature for half a century.

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The Saturday Review has had no stauncher friend from its inception than MANYA GORDON STRUNSKY. A woman of brilliant mind and generous enthusiasms, her interest in literature was as keen, her appreciation of it as understanding, as was the insight which her own books displayed into the problems of labor and industry profound. Born in Russia of a prominent Social Revolutionary family, she was bred in a hatred of tyranny and autocracy, and through all the years of her undeviating devotion to America and American institutions she gave unstintingly of her time and her energies to the cause of the suffering, the oppressed, or the exiled of her native country. She was a friend of such celebrated revolutionaries as Kerensky and Catherine Breshkovskaya, but it was not merely to their causes that she gave her sympathy; she poured out help to any and all of the enormous Russian circle with which she was constantly in touch whom she deemed worthy of her assistance and her compassion.

Devoted as Mrs. Strunsky was to the land of her birth, she was first and foremost an American, deeply and constantly concerned with the problems of her country, afire with zeal to forward those ends which she deemed essential to its welfare, blazing out against what she considered abuses of the public trust. A scrupulous writer, who thought no pains too great to secure the accuracy of her work, Mrs. Strunsky made a valuable contribution to the literary and economic discussion of her time in the articles which she contributed to the magazines and newspapers, and capped a career of distinguished journalistic writing with two volumes which won the warm encomiums of competent critics—"Workers Before and After Lenin" and "How to Tell Progress from Reaction."

But it is as woman and friend that Manya Gordon Strunsky will live before all else in the memory of her acquaintance—as a vivid and sparkling personality who gave of herself lavishly to those whom she loved and whose greatest joys came from their triumphs and happiness as well as from those of her family.

The Saturday Review