

# The Saturday Review



Editor, NORMAN COUSINS

Chairman, Editorial Board, HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

Chairman, Board of Directors, E. DEGOLYER

Associate Editors, AMY LOVEMAN, HARRISON SMITH, IRVING KOLODIN

Assistant Editor, ELOISE PERRY HAZARD

Feature Editor, ROLAND GELATT

Book Review Editor, RAYMOND WALTERS, JR.

Contributing Editors, JOHN MASON BROWN, BENNETT CERF, MARY GOULD DAVIS,  
JAMES THRALL SOBY, HORACE SUTTON, JOHN T. WINTERICH

Publisher, J. R. COMINSKY

Associate Publisher, W. D. PATTERSON

Contents Copyrighted, 1953, by The Saturday Review Associates, Inc.

## A Moment in Time

**I**N THEIR absorption and involvement with the present and the year after tomorrow Americans are in danger of losing their sense of perspective, as if they were a species of men born for the crises of the moment and advancing toward some undiscoverable, brief, and dark future. It is reflected in the articles in our popular magazines where we are given the latest news the airplane can bring of what is going on in Kenya, Indo-China, or East Berlin, in the world medley provided by weekly journals of opinion, and in countless books which always seem to be so authoritative that we forget that the writer held completely divergent theories ten years ago. With the exception of the fiction writers who are busily building space ships and creating the new kind of American male whose internal organs will have the elasticity to man them, the future appears to be limited to the remainder of this particular decade of the twentieth century. We are told that by the year 1960 Russia will be able to destroy us with the H-bomb and poison us with bacteria. After that the deluge!

We are forgetting the continuity of American history that has brought us where we are, toward what may be the relentless and steadily increasing force that we must now shape and build if the world of men is to be saved from destruction. It will be impossible to do so if we attempt to live on the brittle edge of a moment in time.

This attitude toward time is responsible to a great extent for the inadequacy of the authors of our creative contemporary literature with its neu-

rotic and bloodless characters who have no consciousness of the richness and the meaning of life, who have forgotten the very names and the careers of their ancestors, and who only know that their fathers and mothers spoiled them or drove them to the verge of homosexuality or insanity. These novelists and playwrights are not true realists; they are perverted romanticists or uninspired photographers of the unhappy lives they choose to portray. They lack the exaltation of mood that alone can bring forth an enduring piece of literature, though they reflect the temper of the times in which only the present can exist. In an essay of Donald Adams there is a quotation from a letter of Sean O'Faolain that is worth repeating: "One wishes that literature could learn again from Greek tragedy that exaltation of mood in which the merely familiar drops away completely and the characters achieve a certain timelessness that, like a piece of headless sculpture or formal pious picture, holds one as a symbol of the devout . . . All art is constantly striving backward out of the tangle of its own sophistication to a dignity that depends largely on the oneness of man."

**A**merican literature was born in that exaltation, and it once possessed a sense of the unity of man and the conflict of good and evil in which evil need not always triumph. It was not borrowed from Europe. It came out of our own soil and from the men and women whose immediate ancestors had come to this country for all of the reasons for which our millions of immigrants crossed the oceans, in spite of D. H. Lawrence's dictum that the

spiritual home of Americans was and still is Europe. They wished to be men without a master, whether of church or state, factory or farm. They had a passion for freedom and for the hard life they would lead. That passion—and the spiritual conflicts it produced—still exists and is still worth writing about. You will find it in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," which D. H. Lawrence in his "Studies of Classical American Literature" calls a sort of parable, an earthly story with a hellish meaning. You will find it in Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast," in Melville's "Omoo" and "Typee," and especially in "Moby Dick," one of the strangest and most wonderful books in the world. To quote Lawrence again, "It is an epic of the sea which no man has equaled, a book of esoteric symbolism of profound significance, and of considerable tiresomeness." You will find it in Walt Whitman and Emerson and Thoreau and in many an earlier writer.

It is time that we should discover again why we are here, what kind of men and women were our ancestors, and what faith they had in their own futures and in the destiny of the United States. They looked ahead with confidence into future generations of their descendants. We must do the same, and rid ourselves both of our "tangle of sophistication" and our fears. For those of us who since they left college may not have opened the American books of a past century it would be an excellent and encouraging exercise to read them again and then read D. H. Lawrence's "Studies in Classic American Literature," published thirty years ago, for he feared, hated, and loved this country, and his critical essays reflect the arguments that have continued for and against our survival since the days of the Revolution.

—H. S.

## Standing Under Stars

By Carleton Drewry

**C**OME out, and stand, and mark  
Night's whole light-spangled  
wheel.

Alone, from out earth's dark  
Look, let your eyes reveal

The void, the vast distress  
That is yourself. This small  
Glance from your littleness  
Is everything, is all.

Stay on awhile, and watch  
With more than eyes, with mind:  
The striking of one match  
Will make the sky go blind.

## THE WYLIE LETTER

PHILIP WYLIE would be well advised to abstain from expressing his views publicly when his misanthropy and adolescent debunkery cast as much discredit upon himself as did his recent letter on Albert Schweitzer's views and personality [SR July 18].

MARJORIE A. CROX.

Madison, Wis.

## SNAPPING TERRIER?

... MR. WYLIE is just another of the millions of "angry men" with a very limited mentality who, in an effort to "be contemporary," obviously has learned nothing from life. How he can presume to criticize a man of Dr. Schweitzer's stature is beyond my comprehension. He reminds me of a bad-tempered terrier snapping at the heels of a giant.

JOYCE PESTERRE.

Los Angeles, Calif.

## HIT HARD

... MR. WYLIE's harsh language about Schweitzer, the modern saint, indicates that he was hit—rather hard—in a particularly sore spot by Dr. Schweitzer's essay.

ARNE UNHJEM.

Roxbury, Mass.

## SCHWEITZER AND EINSTEIN

... IT IS DEFINITELY not too late for "more mysticism," and the man in the street should accept the evidence of an Albert Schweitzer as well as that of an Albert Einstein.

ISABEL G. MALONE.

Coraopolis, Pa.

## RESPONSE TO CRITICS

MY COMMENT on the means used by Schweitzer to arrive at "ethics" was, of course, intended to bring some thought to a far more important matter. These United States, conceived in liberty and dedicated to truth, are being assailed by the idea of Communism and its adherents.

This is frightening. It will grow more frightening until the simple, physical menace to annihilation ends and men are again free to communicate. I do not believe (to paraphrase Lincoln) the world can live half free and half slave. I have felt sure for nearly twenty years that the slave half of the world unswervingly intends to wreck our portion by whatever means may prove effective.

In this conflict of beliefs we have two weapons: truth, freedom. Their use is the announced "strategy" of our Government. It is also the heart of the teaching of Jesus, who admonished all to know the truth for the magnificent purpose of becoming free. In my humble, if vehement, way, I have always tried to follow that precept and it has never let me down.

Unfortunately, when men are so afraid of reality they cannot muster the nerve



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"My trouble is I'm 40,000 years ahead of my time."

to face it and to act upon it they turn their fear into wrath and attack lesser menaces or imaginary evils. This is hysteria or panic and has swept up billions in crises less perilous than the present one.

Today many devout and sincere people are doing that. Freedom has become so dangerous to defend that they would discard it, along with any kind of truth that does not match their own formula for evading reality. These are the people who insist we must all believe as they do, exactly, or be damned. These are the people who demand conformity, who resist anything they regard as "controversial"; among them are the many who, today, insist that what they call Godliness is one with Americanism.

Only their panickiness keeps them from seeing what they do. For, suppose they succeed? The next question, then, in a nation of compulsory Believers would have to be, Whose God is *the* God? Then every sect would turn on every other and we'd be back in the days of Inquisition, of Luther, and before. Freedom means freedom from clerical compulsiveness as much as it means ecclesiastical opportunity. It must, since "God" is the most controversial word in human speech, the one over which most wars have been fought, the word that has led to every conflict of the conscience of the mind.

That is why we have so immensely profited by our religious liberty. That is why, should it be altered to a national compulsion, the equally dogmatic Communists could rock the Kremlin with ironic mirth while we, in a mistaken effort to beget solidarity, would wreck our nation.

In Schweitzer I felt that compulsive-

ness, that insistence on mysticism, that insolence toward the truth we know and live by all day long: the incontestable truths of science. I am a minister's son. I, too, once held a dogmatic and intolerant faith. I lived among ministers and missionaries. I honor many. But I do not believe the many who would have liked to take away the freedom of my mind and to obliterate what I came to regard as true had any real understanding of Jesus.

An ethical system, that is, which cannot be accepted by every sort of person is inadequate. It is a time for goodness—always. It is a time now for intellectual guts, besides. The subjective scientists, the psychologists, have learned a great lot of truth about us all that Schweitzer does not know and many of his adherents imagine they are able to refute out of ignorance.

My demurrer was intended to keep clear the track for truth and freedom, all truth, every freedom in the mind's scope—a gesture I regard as germane to any real American and his duty whenever the way is fogged by the fearful or diverted by the unaware.

Each riposte to my demurrer was, not surprisingly, an attack on me in person. Every claim brought against me was invented by the letter writer, and demonstrably untrue. However, in constantly assaulting compulsive or ritualistic thought I do sometimes feel, as one person wrote, like a terrier barking at a giant or (as another said) a monkey assailing an elephant. But I keep my hope for truth and freedom high by remembering David and Goliath.

PHILIP WYLIE.

Baltimore, Md.