

Bottoms Up!

"Drinking in College," by Robert Straus and Selden D. Bacon (Yale University Press, 221 pp. \$4), is the report of two Yale sociologists on the drinking habits of nearly 16,000 youths in twenty-seven colleges throughout the country. Our reviewer, Joseph Hirsh, consultant to the Committee on Problems of Alcohol of the National Research Council, is the author of *"The Problem Drinker," "Alcohol Education,"* and other volumes.

By Joseph Hirsh

IT IS inevitable that "Drinking in College," by Robert Straus and Selden D. Bacon, two Yale sociologists (the senior author is now at the University of the State of New York Medical School at Syracuse), will be compared with the Kinsey reports. In fact, the authors point out, newsmen have already done so. This is understandable. Their points of contact are not only in time but, more importantly, in method and findings.

The method of the Straus-Bacon study is mechanistic. It attempts to ascertain, primarily through ques-

tionnaire-derived responses, one aspect of human behavior, drinking behavior, and to reduce it to a series of units and correlations. And a good many people—this reviewer included—just do not believe it can be done by Straus and Bacon any more than Kinsey could do it successfully in his studies.

The findings of the Straus-Bacon study may be summarized broadly as putting a statistic to what has been generally known by a lot of people, college boys included, for a long time. This is not to say that quantification studies are not useful. The scientist, the teacher, the administrator need them. And if this study were undertaken and written for such groups alone its findings and their method of presentation would be meaningful, though not very novel. But when it appeals to "parents . . . and others who are called upon to make important decisions and provide guidance with respect to drinking . . .," meaning the general reader, it commits the authors to making their book generally readable. This they have not done save in a few chapters and in the chapter summaries.

This is a study of drinking patterns and behavior not of college youth but of 15,747 youths in twenty-seven colleges throughout the country. Within this framework it tells us in substance that drinking is not a matter of biology or morality but one of sociality. Among the drinkers in the group studied the decision to drink is conditioned largely by the patterns of the family and circle from which they come. Among the abstainers, however, the decision to refrain from drinking is conditioned largely by their religious affiliations.

The authors emphatically disabuse us of the stereotype, held in some circles, of the college boy as roisterous brawler. There appears to be, moreover, no such thing as "college drinking." On- and off-campus drinking reflects pre- and post-campus drinking patterns. While the majority of the students studied drink, the proportion who drink frequently and heavily is *very small indeed*, as it is in the population as a whole. Thus we do not find alcohol and riots college teammates any more than they are kin in later life.

Similarly, the authors report inconclusive information, for those who look upon alcohol as the *agent provocateur*, in sexual matters. It is and it isn't. It does and it doesn't. But, then, Shakespeare pointed this out—poetically—long ago.

While drinking patterns in the family and social setting from which he is derived largely conditions the college student's drinking behavior,

problem drinking among his parents is not a deterrent to his drinking. This and other factors point up, to this reviewer, the obvious failure of fear and scare techniques—largely introduced by the "drys"—in public-education programs on alcohol throughout the country.

There is much in this book of sociological interest as well as on the subject of drinking generally. But on the latter the reader who has bent his elbow either in previous reading or, more pleasantly, in using the most ancient of the social solvents will find no new insights here.

Beans and Cow Pullers

MISSISSIPPI BOOKFARMERS: Many of the "cow colleges" founded under the terms of the Morrill land-grant college act of 1862 have now become genuine universities. One of the A. & M. colleges, Mississippi State, this year celebrates its seventy-fifth birthday with a good, readable history of its hard road to academic maturity, *"People's College"* (University of Alabama Press, \$4.75), by John K. Bettersworth.

Unlike some college historians, who seem to believe that their institutions live and have their meaning only in the administration buildings, Mr. Bettersworth manages to get inside dormitory rooms and even into the sanctum sanctorum, the classroom. Although he does evaluate the presidents, from General Stephen Dill Lee to Fred Tom Mitchell, the book's value lies especially in its revelation of the struggles and growth of the college as a whole. Commendable, too, is the way in which the author relates the story of Mississippi State to that of the state of Mississippi, with its redneck farmers and demagogic politicians—sometimes solicitous for the welfare of the school, sometimes wrathful at the expense of educating "bookfarmers." In 1928, when "The Man" Bilbo was Governor, the president of the college was fired (along with the presidents of the University of Mississippi and the State Teachers College) and 112 faculty members were dismissed.

Mr. Bettersworth shows the transition from cow college to respectable university. In the process there has been an inevitable loss of rustic flavor. In the old days the boys rooted: "Hay, peas, beans, and squash! A. & M. cow pullers. Yes, by gosh!" Now before the annual football game with State's great rival telephone poles along Mississippi's highways carry the unimaginative slogan "To hell with Ole Miss!"

—J. MURTON ENGLAND.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 547

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 547 will be found in the next issue.

UGZVS MGZ ISTW

RDIFOSDKSV TDJ TNZRJ

UGSE ETPS T UTKRU

TNZMTF ZI UGS YZNSWUB

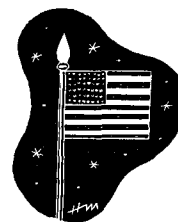
ZI UGSRW VZOFV.

—TDJWS HRJS.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 546

Do good to thy friend to keep him,
to thy enemy to gain him.
—Franklin.

An Editor in a Storm



"The Age of Suspicion," by **James A. Wechsler** (Random House. 333 pp. \$3.75), is the autobiography of the editor of the New York Post, who has been made an embattled figure by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Our reviewer, Hodding Carter, editor of the Greenville, Miss., Delta Democrat-Times, recently published his own autobiography, "Where Main Street Meets the River."

By Hodding Carter

ONE thing that Senator Joseph McCarthy, the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and James Wechsler, editor of the New York Post, would agree upon—though for varying reasons—is that Wechsler is not an ordinary newspaperman. Moreover, Wechsler's fellow journalists would be almost as unlikely to choose Jimmy as their Galahad as would the American Civil Liberties Union to select the Wisconsin demagogue its St. George.

The reader of Jimmy Wechsler's autobiography, "The Age of Suspicion," will easily discover why; and discover also Jimmy Wechsler is proof that two dangerous things can and did and do happen here. One is that in times of abnormal economic or military stress Communism has been able even in America to capture neurotic, intellectually frustrated, and arrogant young Americans, partly by appealing to their warped sense of wrong and mostly by feeding their contempt for the ordinary bourgeoisie. The other is that our atmosphere is vilely poisoned today by the political smearers who will not forgive nor forget the atoned-for past, nor believe the atoner, unless he abjectly surrenders. What happened to Wechsler between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two and again today at thirty-seven makes generally frightening reading.

He was tough-minded enough, and inquisitive enough, to break away from Communism before it had done any real harm to him—or so he thought. That's the thesis of the first part of this three-part self-examination. He couldn't look ahead fifteen years. The second section of his political confessions indicates that he believed and still believes that a man

should not be eternally damned for youthful stupidity or malice or even overt political action; and that he has tried his level best to make amends for succumbing to Communism for four years.

It is not important here that any sensitive, worried American feels any personal sympathy for the wordy, self-consciously radical, young New Yorker of the early 1930's, or any great admiration for the pompously doctrinaire, liberal spokesman of the Forties. In fact, the impact of the book's third section (which gives the entire volume its title) is greater if the reader hasn't been impressed by Wechsler's career until he took on Jack Lait, Walter Winchell, and Joe McCarthy at almost the same time. For what happened a few months ago when Wechsler fell into the toils of the Wisconsin inquisitor is enough to make any American, let alone any newspaperman, shudder and fear for our intellectual and political freedom. That last section should make "The Age of Suspicion" must reading for newspapermen and lawmakers, and anyone else who is concerned with the first amendment to the Constitution.

Maybe it wouldn't be as easy for other editors to be pilloried. As is noted earlier, Jimmy isn't ordinary. He has worked only for four, extraordinary publications, all of them underwritten in one way or another—the Communist-directed organ of the American Student Union before he saw the light; the leftwing *Nation*, the weird, unbelievable *PM*, and the shrilly liberal *New York Post*, none of

which has ever shown an objective point of view in any issue in which its political or social credos were involved. Moreover, Jimmy would have a hard time on run-of-the-mill newspapers.

To function perfectly he requires a one-handed typewriter which leaves the other hand free to carry picket-line signs and ward off haymakers, a desk big enough to stow a soap-box under, a publisher understanding enough to give him plenty of time to organize and simultaneously report the activities of new political groups and movements, and a public perceptive enough to see that underneath he's a pretty humble and courageous little guy with some stubborn and passionate convictions.

AND that he is, which counts for a lot, even—or especially—when we become the most irritated at his certainties. He is also Everyman for anyone who believes in the second chance, and in the right to differ, and that restitutive actions speak for themselves; and who sees these everyday American assumptions challenged by cunning men. And, even if none of this concerned or bothered us, "The Age of Suspicion" contains some characterizations and analyses, bitter or pitying or penetrating, that would make most of it worthwhile to the student of the American scene. The story of *PM*'s political writhings is classic, the warning report on foolish, moon-struck Henry Wallace's Presidential campaign memorable.

But more memorable than anything else is the way Wechsler paints a picture of a victim of today's Judge Jeffreys:

"There are moments when each man is alone with himself; he knows his weaknesses and his failures, his vanities and his follies. But these are endurable discoveries; they are real, they have rational roots, they are explicable. But no moment can be much more hideous than that in which your own estimate of yourself is alleged to be a case of mistaken identity; when you are charged with harboring the doctrine that you long ago renounced; and, worst of all, when you know that the men who are making the charge do not believe what they are saying. To be catapulted into the realm of madness without losing one's own reason is a rough journey."



James Wechsler—"one-handed typewriter."