

Contesting the Clichés

“Still the Most Exciting Country,” by William Attwood (Alfred A. Knopf, 118 pp. \$2.75), is the report of a young American foreign correspondent on a tour of his native land. Jonathan Daniels, editor of the Raleigh (N. C.) News and Observer, who reviews it below, years ago wrote “A Southerner Discovers the South.”

By Jonathan Daniels

IT would be reassuring if every American, whether he had spent the last nine years in Paris or Peoria, could make such a trip as this vividly reported journey round-America-in-ninety-days and come to such good conclusions. William Attwood's pace is a little dizzying. Those who do not agree with his finding may truly say that some of his inspections seem to have been made from an apparently jet-propelled foreign car. The remarkable thing about the book is that, considering its ninety-day, night-and-day intake of information, what Attwood reports best is not the kaleidoscope of a changing America but the essence of its spirit at this hour.

Obviously it was that spirit Attwood sought when he came home as an American who had been abroad nine years as a newspaper and magazine correspondent. And, as important as road maps, he had a complete set of the foreigner's clichés about America to guide him in his rediscovery of his

own country. Maybe they seem to those of us who have stayed home obviously to add up only to an unfriendly caricature. They are as important to us as to those, like Attwood, who have had to meet them abroad. This book is the examination of and the answer to European impressions that Americans are scared, belligerent, and impetuous, hypocritical, degenerate, cocky, reactionary, materialistic, immature, and overbearing.

The very sweeping quality of the charges homecomer Attwood lists, of course, makes easier the acquittal which he pronounces. No people—not even we—could be quite that bad. The important thing is not that Attwood proves—what, of course, he believed when he began this tour: that this is a country of pretty good folks. More significant, he found—sometimes, I suspect, to his surprise—that many ordinary Americans who have never left their county seats, let alone live in Paris, are as good intellectual and convivial companions as a man might expect to find in a bistro on the Left Bank or a burgher's house in Zurich.

THERE is a good deal of the bistro view in Mr. Attwood's tour of America. I do not contest his finding that “a bartender is often a better authority” than politicians, civic leaders, experts. I have a certain feeling, however, that his adverse report on food in America may be related to his haste and his inevitable dependence for food supply on some places any Amer-

ican provincial who knew his province would have avoided like ptomaine. Certainly there could be no more collapsible cliché than that all the food found in Europe is good. I found some similar weakness in his distress at finding Americans often ignorant about world affairs after being among Europeans who have so many strange ideas about Americans.

Mr. Attwood writes as a man among men and not merely as a returning American among Americans. But, without hiding American faults, he has written a very heartening essay about the dignity and the decency of his countrymen of all kinds and all classes, wherever you find them. Out of his travels among such men he has written almost a platform for America on which Americans and other peoples too, could stand in confidence, courage, and high hope, too. It is, of course, a long way from the Ku Klux mind to the aspirations for the atomic age of young nuclear scientists at Los Alamos. But between them the Americans Attwood most often found are worthy of the respect of the world as well as his admiration—men neither intimidated by the McCarthys nor lost in the materialistic maze of the shining plumbings they are said to love so well.

The story of Attwood's ride around a country incontestably worthy of his pride needs reading by doubtful men abroad. It should have the widest reading here, too, by Americans who sometimes seem readiest to believe in their own faults. Essentially this brief book is written for them—in the vernacular, full of colloquial expression and blurted native opinion and idea. There are few solemn views from the mountaintop in it. It contains little patriotic rhetoric. To sum up, it is a good guy's portrait of his native land. I enjoyed the book. I only wish I could have been in the back seat on the trip.

The Native Returns

- I have found heart-warming friendliness in unexpected places—and in every country I have visited. But nowhere does it seem as universal and spontaneous as in America.
- Years ago, Americans acquired a worldwide reputation for being hustlers, go-getters, always in a hurry. The reputation is well deserved. By and large, they are still in a hurry, still sprinting through life as though a minute wasted were a dollar lost.
- I am inclined to think that Americans are still encumbered with the burdens of their Puritan heritage. We may not like hypocrisy, but we often seem to prefer living with it to up-

dating our definition of sin. The classic definition of the New England conscience is still valid: it doesn't prevent us from doing anything—it just prevents us from enjoying it.

- Everybody is on the move. . . . Regionalism is disappearing. Americans are getting to be more like one another. . . . Television is stupendous, ubiquitous—“the most.”

- In my day a married student was a campus freak. Even the engaged senior was something of an oddity. The girls we went around with usually ended up by marrying the guys who had graduated a few years before and were making enough money to think about supporting a family. Today . . . the students holding hands under the

Gothic arch are more likely to be discussing next year's mortgage than next Saturday's prom.

- People always listened politely and attentively to anything we had to say about the outside world, but it was seldom very long before the talk shifted back to familiar things, like the cost of living or their favorite TV comedian. They were far more interested in what we had to say about our American trip than in what we could have told them about our experiences in Europe and Asia. This lack of knowledge—and even of curiosity—concerning the world around us is not confined to the small towns.

—From “*Still the Most Exciting Country*,” by William Attwood (Knopf).



John T. Flynn—"gifts for vituperation."

Dark Alliance

"The Decline of the American Republic," by John T. Flynn (Devine-Adair, 212 pp. \$3), is an alarmed look at what has been happening to this country since the start of the New Deal by a veteran journalist. Professor Lindsay Rogers of Columbia University reviews it below.

By Lindsay Rogers

FOR the past fifteen years, since "Country Squire in the White House," journalist John T. Flynn has been taking apprehensive looks at the way the world, and especially the United States, was going. The looks he takes in his newest book, "The Decline of the American Republic," will surprise no one who has been following his intellectual career, but the subject is an important one and on it much has been and remains to be said. Let me put it this way: If Pericles (an exponent of public works) had returned to earth in the time, say, of Jefferson he would have been astonished by the political changes that had taken place since he made a great speech which is still read; but the astonishment of William McKinley would be greater were he now able to examine the kind of government that is being administered by an ex-general whose corps commanders are in large part businessmen on leave. The transformations of six decades are just as surprising as the transformations of twenty-two centuries and they do not

warrant complacency, for the bigger a government gets the greater the difficulties of making it efficient and of keeping it from being an instrument of oppression. In 1932, Mr. Flynn tells us, the total national debt was less than twenty billion dollars; now the annual interest on the debt is six billion dollars—figures that mean little unless related to the national income. But twenty-five years ago 4 per cent of the national income was devoted to public expenditure; now it is 25 per cent.

THIRTY years ago James M. Beck lamented the vanishing rights of the states and, likening the Constitution *inter alia* to a lighthouse, a sheet anchor, and a floating dock—presumably bobbing up and down—was sure that in any case it was almost done for. Mr. Flynn's alarms are more recent; for him the decline of the Republic began under the New Deal.

Now if William McKinley had been with us again he might have argued that during the Great Depression men should have been allowed to starve, even though, as Keynes once remarked, men refuse to starve quietly. It is legitimate to criticize New Deal measures on their merits and demerits, and, merit apart, on the ground that some of them cancelled each other out. One can argue the danger or the wisdom of Federal control over the wages of elevator operators in office buildings; wish that there had never been any farm subsidies and desire their abolition; and oppose, for reasons one makes specific, every governmental invasion of an area that has been a private preserve. One can attempt to demonstrate that a Welfare State is robbing Peter so heavily to pay Paul that soon Pauls must be robbed to pay other Pauls.

Not so Mr. Flynn, who is content with exercising his gifts for general vituperation. "The first stage in bringing Socialism to America was carried through by the Socialist revolutionaries on the packed Supreme Court." The timetable is wrong. As in Mr. Dooley's day, the Supreme Court followed election returns, but belatedly. At three reelections the voters expressed their confidence in President Roosevelt and in 1948 they wanted Harry Truman to stay in office; and it is irrelevant that to some extent on each occasion they may have been voting lack of confidence in opposing candidates and in the Republican Party. In 1952 because of the electorate's faith in the candidate, who was to the left of his lately chosen party, the Republicans took control in Washington, but with no mandate to repeal much that had been passed and repassed by bi-partisan Congressional

majorities before the Supreme Court joined in the "conspiracy" to let the popular and Congressional and Presidential will prevail. It is only rhetoric and not good rhetoric at that, to say that "the great Republic of our fathers" has been "shockingly damaged by a dark alliance of Communists, Socialists, Boondogglers, Globalists, and certain shortsighted business leaders who, for a brief moment, float on the surface of the war boom." Presumably the Pentagon is in this "dark alliance" because it wants to continue running saloons, roasting coffee, manufacturing paint, and making its own ice cream, instead of handing these activities over to private business.

And what does Mr. Flynn tell us should be done to keep the Republic from falling? Income taxes are the root of all our evils, so repeal the Sixteenth Amendment! What taxes the Government would use to pay for the minimal functions of revenue, police, justice, and arms Mr. Flynn does not say. He would have a Constitutional amendment declaring that post-1937 decisions of the Supreme Court shall "have no force and effect as precedents in judicial or other proceedings in determining the meaning of the words, sections, and provisions of the Constitution of the United States." He should have asked counsel for "economic royalists" what they thought of this one. Without giving his reasons, Mr. Flynn wants to repudiate the United Nations and if other countries continue the organization he would compel its "removal" from this hemisphere. His final proposal "essential to the safety of the American Republic" is the adoption of the Bricker Amendment.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 640

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 640 will be found in the next issue.

GNABCP NA HDCGNL

GEFM MC BC DRSM;

ONTMXR NA BCNDL NM.

BFONB AMFTT KCTBFD.

—
Answer to Literary Crypt No. 639
My wife has a whim of iron.
—OLIVER HERFORD.