

The Credo We Call Conscience

"The American Conscience," by Roger Burlingame (Knopf, 420 pp. \$6.75), is a study of the credo of the national community before 1890 and, to a lesser extent, since. Eric F. Goldman of Princeton, author of *"The Crucial Decade"* and other books.

By Eric F. Goldman

OF THE many varieties of history, probably the type most satisfying to the general reader is that in which a fully matured mind, deeply versed in the American story, strikes off on a free-wheeling treatment of a major theme. Roger Burlingame's *"The American Conscience"* is such history. The subject could hardly be more important—the United States, as Mr. Burlingame points out, has been a nation with a "peculiar compulsion" to insist upon moral explanations and judgments.

Mr. Burlingame defines the American conscience in a broad sense—not simply the dominant body of opinion concerning matters like integrity or sex but a community credo drawn from and applying to a tangle of political and social circumstances. In all this tangle, he argues, three things made the American conscience unique for many decades. We were isolated, geographically and by our own will; the frontier stretched out invitingly; and tremendous national wealth was encountered on the transcontinental march. Within the framework of these facts, the American conscience grad-

ually took form, divided against itself at the time of the Civil War, re-emerged as a national conscience. All the while, the extent to which the national conscience would whip events into line varied, sometimes operating powerfully, at other times only weakly asserting itself.

The major section of Mr. Burlingame's book concerns the period up to the 1890s. In his opinion, the era before the twentieth century shaped the basic set of American standards. After that, isolation, the frontier, and the sense of unending wealth all slackened in their influence. The past fifty years have simply tended to confuse the original moral concepts.

In the twentieth century, Mr. Burlingame goes on, the nation has clung to these earlier attitudes long after events have rendered many of them obsolete. His usually genial pen takes on a touch of acid as he describes the insistence upon "free competitive enterprise" which has been largely inoperative for seventy years; on 'rugged individualism' which the organizing impulses inherent in our later society work constantly to suppress. . . . on 'grass roots' under a tight network of communications designed to nullify local interests; on the old 'dignity' of labor which not only no longer requires skill but has become nearly unconscious; on the horrors of socialism after all the Owenite, Fourierist, and Marxist propaganda has been almost instinctively rejected by American masses; on fear of monopoly when some form or degree of mo-



—Fabian Bachrach.

"Seasoned wisdom . . . numerous insights."

nopoly is essential to the proper function of mass production; on a minimum of government planning below the social needs of the new community.

The extent to which these attitudes have really been carried over into present-day American life can be questioned. It may well be that after, as well as before, the 1890s the basic American conscience has been changing. Some historians would certainly challenge the great importance which Mr. Burlingame assigns to the frontier. Probably a good many readers, historians or not, will wonder whether he has not defined the word "conscience" so broadly that he is really writing a commentary on general American thinking. These and other questions can be raised, but no doubts can challenge the richness, the suggestiveness, or the high readability of this book.

Nor can they remove the poignance of its conclusion. The American conscience, whatever it is, however it was formed, has frequently gone to sleep only to awake with great vigor. Mr. Burlingame is sure it is quite asleep now. "We are prosperous. We are complacent. Religion has become, for the most part, a social convention. . . . Skill is anonymous, thought is under pressure to conform, security has replaced venture as a dominant aim, intellect is in the discard, and politics are dictated by a cult of mediocrity."

Hesitantly, in a wisp of hopefulness, Mr. Burlingame asks: Hasn't the American conscience always reasserted itself in the past? Is it now possible "to feel, in an hour of quiet darkness when we have turned off the television, the old forces [of conscience] rallying round us?"

Victor Emanuel Monument (Rome)

By Harold Norse

THE marble typewriter or "wedding cake" is large enough to shelter in its side several armies; as it is, they keep a squad of *bersaglieri* there, the hand-picked of all Italy, the flower to guard this monsterepiece. In scarlet fez and blue pom-pom halfway down the back, like birds of paradise they strut, their bodies hard and flashing flesh by sunlight or moonlight with all the brilliance of the male panache. And this is all they have to do. What else on seventeen cents a day, in Italy? Any night by the white marble ploy discovers them in whispered assignments picking up extra cash, from man and boy.

"... It should be read by every person concerned with the problem of survival... it should become the subject of study by every discussion group in America."—The Washington Post

EDUCATION FOR A NEW MORALITY

by Agnes E. Meyer

Hailed as one of the important books of the year, EDUCATION FOR A NEW MORALITY charts a course for higher ethical standards acceptable to all mankind. Here is a new and vital global philosophy—the intelligent application of scientific method to education and to all problems of life.

\$2.50 at bookstores, or write

*The Macmillan
Company*

60 Fifth Ave., N.Y. 11, N.Y.

Isn't it time YOU read Charles Frankel's

THE CASE FOR MODERN MAN

This defense of reason in human affairs tops the list of books SR readers are reading with interest and pleasure.

Philip Toynbee calls it "a very fine piece of humanist polemics — as good, in its own way, as Bertrand Russell's *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*."

\$3.50 at all bookstores

HARPER

What Lies Ahead

"America's Next Twenty Years," by Peter F. Drucker (Harper, 114 pp. \$2.75), is an economist's analysis of the consequences of population growth, overcrowded schools, decline of natural resources, automation, shifting patterns of business ownership, etc., on our lives. John S. Gambs, Hamilton economics professor, reviews it.

By John S. Gambs

SOME readers may be misled by the title of Peter F. Drucker's little book, "America's Next Twenty Years." It is decidedly not a book about the glittering future—about the space ships in the heavens and the moving sidewalks of New York that we may expect to see in 1977. It is a somber book about this year and the next, and about the many hard things we shall have to go through in the calculable future if we are to maintain peace, prosperity, and world leadership. It is a checklist of the dreary but important economic prob-

lems that confront us today and tomorrow, and that must be solved during the next two decades.

In 114 compressed pages Mr. Drucker raises many large issues: explosive population growth and its manifold repercussions on the labor market, the schools, the problems of old age; automation—what it can do and what it cannot do; decline of natural resources and the implications of this fact for our external politics; current investing habits and their impact both on the formation of capital and on the management of corporations. And there is more, for this book is packed. Most of the problems he raises can be solved, Mr. Drucker feels, but solutions will not be easy, one-shot solutions. They will require self-discipline and vast intelligence on the part of labor, management, and government—indeed, on the part of all of us—editors, physicians, teachers, clergymen—as well as businessmen and laboring people.

This book is no ringing call to action, but it does say something like this: "You've all heard about population growth, overcrowded schools, dearth of engineers, decline of natural resources, automation, ownership di-



—From "Artistry in Ink."

THESE JOLLY FELLOWS, believed to be the handiwork of a fifteenth-century Japanese artist named Shuban, now make their home in the Tokyo Art Museum. There are 48 such plates in "Artistry in Ink" (Crown, \$6), a Japanese-

produced book chronicling the evolution of the ancient Sino-Japanese art of ink painting. Westerners, to whom this will all be quite novel and charming, will find Seroiku Noma's essay authoritative and informative.