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WHERE THE AMERICAN TRADITION LIVES



By BRUCE CATTON

A REAL national tradition is something that we live by rather than something that we talk about. We seldom try to define it; we feel that we don't have to, because if it is a real, living, moving force—and it is, if it is a genuine national tradition—we simply respond to it. We respond to it instinctively, because it is so deeply a part of our lives that it has us in its possession.

The greatest of all American traditions is the simple tradition of freedom. From our earliest days as a people this tradition has provided us with a faith to live by. It has shaped what Americans have done and what they

have dreamed. If any one word tells what America really is, it is that one word—freedom.

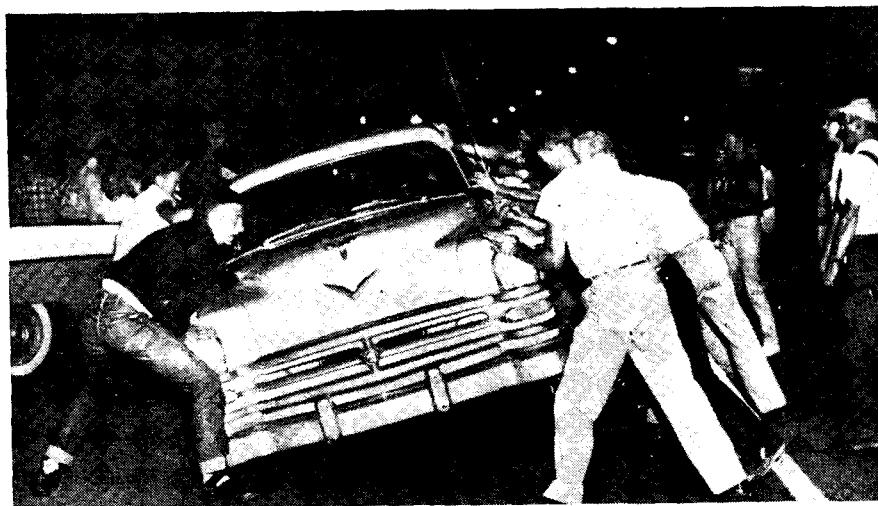
This is a word that is eternally growing broader. If any single thing gives us reason to have confidence in the infinite future of the American people it is the fact that this most basic of our traditions is capable of infinite expansion. It does not limit us. On the contrary, it forever invites us to grow—to see beyond the horizon, to look ahead to a fairer and a brighter day, to develop and to strengthen the noble concept of brotherhood by which we live.

I think we can say now that this national tradition is as strong and as healthy as it ever was. Today, as

always in the past, its best and strongest defense lies in the reactions which individual Americans make when they find the tradition under attack. The tradition may be a national thing, but it resides finally in the hearts of individual men and women. These men and women do not always bother to work out elaborate rationalizations of their acts of defense. They simply respond instinctively to specific cases. When they encounter a situation which denies the tradition of freedom, an inner force which they do not need to define impels them to go out and do something about it. They move, without thought of what the cost to themselves may be, to put themselves in between the oppressor and the op-



—Culver.



—Wide World.

VIOLENCE AND COURAGE: Mr. Catton writes: "The secret of freedom is courage." What kinds of violence American courage has had to overcome in 150 years is suggested here. At top: an early cartoon (1798) showing Republican Congressman Lyon (with fire-tongs) returning the assault of Federalist Congressman Griswold (with cane). A few days after this incident Mr. Lyon was arrested under the infamous Sedition Act for accusing President Adams of "an unbounded thirst for ridiculous pomp, foolish adulation, and selfish avarice"; he was sentenced to four months in jail. Below: the indignities suffered by other Americans six generations later. In August 1956 a carload of Negroes passing through Clinton, Tennessee, was attacked by a mob inflamed about the integration of the local high school. These particular travelers managed to get out without injury, but in this atmosphere of rage and hate children were expected to pursue their studies.

pressed. They strengthen freedom simply by going ahead and living it.

We find them, quite literally, everywhere. A state legislator in Florida discovers that his stand for school integration makes him a minority of one in his legislature; no matter, he goes on as he had started, and attainment of the brotherhood of man comes one step nearer as a result. A Catholic priest in Indiana finds immigrant farm laborers suffering medieval exploitation and injustice; he refuses to walk on the other side of the road but stops to demand that the exploitation and injustice be remedied—and, after months of unremitting effort,

finally sees his demand made good; and fifty or sixty human beings move out of peonage into the sunlight of American life. A handful of Protestant ministers risk their careers to stand against bigotry and intolerance in their own Tennessee town—and, after a long struggle, see the area in which bigotry and intolerance can operate perceptibly narrowed. A young Oklahoma schoolteacher loses his job in order to make his lone protest against racial discrimination—and, telling why he had done so, gives a noble and eloquent explanation of the spirit that moves Americans who love freedom: "In a thing like this you don't stop

to think. You just do what you feel you have to do."

You don't stop to think: you just do what you feel you have to do. From the earliest days, the presence of that spirit in the breasts of American men and women has been our most profound national asset. It is where this tradition really lives. Not all the petty, malignant forces of reaction—the men who think the people need a guardian and a keeper to guide their way into a blighting conformity; the men who dread freedom unless it be limited to folk who think and talk as they themselves would do; the men who believe that there should be classes and grades in American citizenship, and dread anything that tends to remove the barriers that set man apart from man—not all of these together, operating in a time of confusion and danger, can summon a force strong enough to beat down the simple, instinctive reaction that rises in the breast of the ordinary American when he sees American freedoms being cut down.

WE SEEM to have begun, in this country, with a demand for freedom of religious belief—in Plymouth colony and Providence plantation, in William Penn's settlement of Pennsylvania and in the charter for the first colonization of Maryland.

We moved on to see that freedom must also mean freedom from foreign oppression, and fought the American Revolution.

Then we came to see that there must also be freedom from domestic tyranny, and we put together the Constitution of the United States.

We realized, also, that the mind of man must be free from dominion by government, and we added to our Constitution the Bill of Rights.

We came, as well, to see that freedom has to be unlimited—that it has to apply all across the board, to men of all colors, all races, and all conditions—and we struggled through a terrible Civil War in order to make such an extension of freedom possible.

All of these are not separate freedoms so much as they are varying forms of an undivided whole. For one of the things we have learned in this country is that freedom has to be indivisible. Anything that limits any part of it, for anyone, is a menace to all of us, a threat to the tradition by which we live.

American freedom today is under attack—very often by people who insist that they are trying to defend it. In a short-range view conditions are extremely ominous. Yet I think if we look at our present situation long-range we can see that we have little

reason to be afraid. We get waves of reaction in this country, periodically, in times of extreme national stress, and the great national tradition comes under attack—seems, indeed, to be in a fair way to be overwhelmed entirely. But the waves always pass—with however much incidental injustice and oppression for certain individual victims—because the instinct in the American mind and heart which the tradition is based on is, finally, irrepressible.

In the early days of the Republic we had, for instance, the Alien and Sedition Acts. Europe was torn by a great war and by an unpredictable revolutionary movement. America's position seemed insecure; external pressures were becoming all but intolerable, and men hardly knew which way to turn to find national security. Out of this came these almost unbelievably repressive laws. Freedom of the press and freedom of speech were effectively outlawed. It was made a crime to criticize acts of the national administration. Editors who spoke out against these laws were imprisoned. Thomas Jefferson's mail was opened, in the hope that some paragraph or sentence could be found on which he could be arrested for sedition. A man who tried to get signatures to a petition to Congress urging repeal of these laws was arrested and sentenced to jail. Lawyers who defended victims of this oppression were denounced by judges as traitors. To all appearances American freedom had been done to death.

All of this lasted two years or more. Then came a change. Jefferson himself, against whom so much of this attack had been directed, became President. The laws expired. The freedom that had been assailed so malevolently was restored—stronger than ever for the very virulence of the onslaught that had been made upon it. Today the men who inspired and supported the Alien and Sedition Laws are remembered only because they have come to symbolize the stupidity and the viciousness of those who tried, briefly and unsuccessfully, to turn backward the mainstream of American life.

Similar things have happened at other times. During the early part of the Civil War a brigadier general in the Union army was called before a Congressional committee and questioned because of suspicion that he had been having traitorous dealings with the Confederates—his real offense being that by following the instructions of his superiors, and returning fugitive slaves to their Maryland owners, he had given offense to the powerful and suspicious

abolitionists who were rising to dominance in Congress. He was accused of nothing whatever; indeed, he never quite realized that he was even under suspicion; but he was finally removed from command and sent off to prison by a War Department which dared not oppose a powerful Congressional committee, and his career was ruined. He was released, finally—not exactly cleared, because nobody had ever formally accused him of anything, so there was no charge from which he could be cleared—but at least released. And the episode comes down in history as a melancholy illustration of the way in which fear and hysteria, operating together, can lead even a committee of Congress to narrow the area of American freedom and justice.

I have cited two cases out of the past. There are many more that could be cited, some of them, indeed, matters of tolerably recent memory. But the thing to bear in mind is that these spasms to which we are now and then subjected are always of temporary effect. We do come out of them; their authors pass on and are forgotten, surviving only as melancholy footnotes in history; and our great tradition, down the years, grows broader and stronger despite these temporary setbacks.

We are today emerging from the

latest of these spasms of terror. We have seen some highly discouraging things in recent years. We have seen an atmosphere in which the mere fact that a man was accused of something was taken as proof of his guilt. We have been reminded of Mark Twain's comment on the reign of terror that prevailed in late medieval times under the Doges of Venice, when a committee on public safety received anonymous accusations against the loyalty of citizens; as Mark Twain remarked, if the committee could find no proof to support an accusation, it usually found the accused guilty on the ground this simply showed how deep and devious and inscrutable the man's villainy really was. We have witnessed an era in which it was widely taken as a crime for an accused person to invoke the Bill of Rights itself in his own defense—as if the provisions of the Bill of Rights were not meant to operate in precisely a time like the present. We have seen times in which no one in authority seemed willing to place the slightest amount of trust in the innate loyalty, good faith, and intelligence of the American people; times which led former Senator Harry Cain to burst out with the cry: "A whole clique of spies could hardly do as much damage to us as could our failure."
(Continued on page 32)

Excerpt from Narcissus - A Parallel of Art

By M. B. Thornton

They worked, not for eight hours a day
for five days a week
But for God, not stopping day or night:
They fought and struggled and died
believing
a man can grow into something big.
"Be something, Abe," one woman said.
Of a reincarnated Thomas Jefferson
today an Emerson
would say, "you see it doesn't pay."
Younger but wiser he would say, "A
cheerful intelligent face
is the end of culture, and
success enough
—it indicates the purpose of nature
and
wisdom attained."
A benign reflection, and
the more I gaze, the more
I delight
myself.
Let us leave the world to
the little people,
The hours were long and the struggle
killing;
this wasn't what they wanted.

Children of the Modern Agony

"The Game and the Ground," by **Peter Vansittart** (*Abelard-Schuman*. 187 pp. \$3), tells the story of two brothers who attempt to salvage a group of German youths left demoralized by the Nazi regime.

By Eugene Bender

FOR close to a hundred years, it has been a minor specialty of British writers to deal with the savage and separate world of children. Some, like Richard Hughes and "Saki," have been content with shock effects: the complexities and malice of adults shown up as tame alongside the innocent cruelties of a child. Others, like Lewis Carroll—who seems, really, to have started the whole thing—have explored in one way or another the shifting and powerful fancies of children—their personal and frequently hellish wonderlands.

Peter Vansittart—a nephew of the Germanophobe peer, with whose ideas he "differs with respect"—has, in "The Game and the Ground," combined these two approaches, in order to fashion a strong comment on human nature and its distortion. His sixty children are the inmates of a camp, or refuge, at the ancient castle of Kasalten, in a country which doesn't need to be identified as Germany. They are the debris of the war—orphans, wanderers, homeless, some thieves, some murderers. The unnamed narrator and his brother Eric, both ineffective anti-Nazis throughout the previous regime, are owners of Kasalten, and administer the retraining of the children—or, rather, their lack of training. Unable to impose standards that have failed them and the world, they can do nothing but

shelter the children and give them a chance to develop free of the intolerable stresses which warped them. Aside from the nine literate children who attended the voluntary classes, they "stood around fighting . . . listlessly awaiting meals. They set fire to the schoolroom, pillaged the hospital, incessantly stormed the kitchens, assaulted those who wanted to learn, fought for a handful of nails, raped each other, and assaulted the Police . . ."

The process of advancing from this low point is the matter of the story; and the cost is high. A third brother, Nicky—ex-Nazi, ex-gas chamber operator, and still unreconstructedly enthusiastic for the blood and glory of the old days—turns up at Kasalten, and the first step in organization is made when factions among the children align themselves with Nicky's juvenile fantasies of revenge. Eric, once a surgeon, endures the incursion of evil a while, then excises it with Nicky's murder. This entails, as he realizes it must, his own sacrifice, and the handing-over of the trust to his unwilling surviving brother, the narrator.

A third victim's death—a meaningless casualty of the disturbances attending Nicky's and Eric's end—is the final sobering catalyst which allows the book to end on a note of hope, though a qualified and obscure hope: "There was something too that I wanted to say, rising in me . . . though what it was I did not yet know and, when I knew, I would perhaps no longer wish to say it."

In the broken, fantastic acts and utterances of these children, Peter Vansittart has caught a distorted—and for that reason perhaps all the more accurate—reflection of one sort of modern agony.



—Phyllis Cerf.

Jay Williams—"colorful, suspenseful."

Diabolic Doings

"The Witches," by **Jay Williams** (*Random House*. 339 pp. \$3.95), is a story of sixteenth-century Scotland, when religion, politics, and demonology became fearfully intertwined.

By Edmund Fuller

JAY WILLIAMS writes with so relaxed a grace, plus such a natural talent for rolling forward a narrative that these qualities might make us overlook how solidly grounded in research and intellectual curiosity are his historical novels. In his new novel "The Witches" he carries us deep into the demonology of sixteenth-century Scotland, creating a colorful, suspenseful, sometimes somber, and always interesting book.

Recent years have brought forth novels and plays on the theme of witchcraft, concerned chiefly with persecution, through superstition and



—From "Europe's Children," by Thérèse Bonney, (Duell, Sloan & Pearce).

"They are the debris of the war—orphans, wanderers, homeless . . ."