

Aristotle or Aquinas we merely close our eyes to the unconquerable corruption of human nature.

The form assumed by power and therefore the symbol of it changes from time to time. For Shakespeare it was "kingship." The nineteenth century attempted to make it "the will of the people." In our own day (and as Kafka so persistently insists) the source and symbol of power is neither a king nor a parliament but a bureaucracy. Fundamentally nothing has changed. The bureaucrat, like the king, must do wicked deeds or he will be succeeded by another, even less scrupulous. The dilemma of the ruled, no less than that of the ruler, is similarly unchanged. "We are members of an imperfect society. When we cooperate with it, we are committed to imperfection, because we are all imperfect beings and cannot conceive a perfect thought or act."

A review cannot cast a net wide enough to capture more than a small part of an idea as elaborately developed as the idea which Miss West has here developed. Even less can it hope to make significant criticism or comment. But even so brief a summary as the present should be sufficient to suggest that the thesis developed is what is sometimes called Christian Pessimism even though the terms used are not specifically those of Christian theology. It should be added that even those who disagree most violently with Miss West's thesis will find her book enormously stimulating and full of arresting *obiter dicta* like these: "The theme of 'King Lear' is that paradox by which all men were created with a desire to be loved but not with the faculty to love"; and "Of all the people who are elderly today it is true that when they studied Shakespeare at school they were looking back at an age more barbarous than their own, and that when they read him in later life they were looking back at an age more civilized than their own, for though the Tudors were blood-stained they were not stained with as much blood as the modern dictators."

ORDEAL OF ANARCHY: The fifth and final volume of "The Letters of William Gilmore Simms" (University of South Carolina Press, \$8.50) contains the novelist's correspondence from 1867 to 1870, as he struggled to write his way out of the poverty which the Civil War had brought him in South Carolina, and also a supplementary gathering of earlier letters discovered after the volumes in which chronologically they belong were printed. The editing of these five volumes by

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FICTION

8:17 Revolutionary

"Leave Me Alone," by David Karp (*Alfred A. Knopf, 303 pp. \$3.95*), is a modern tale of a man named Arthur Douglas, who struggles with a job in a publishing house while at the same time fighting the battle of Suburbia.

By Gerald Green

CRABGRASS and commuting have replaced slums and sweatshops as subjects for the ire of the angry young novelist; as lynchings diminish, library committees flourish in the new literature of protest. And when all is said and done, the protest is not really a protest but a complaint, a sputtering similar to the noise made by the prime sirloin blackening on the barbecue back of the split-level.

It is no fault of David Karp that his excellent novel, "Leave Me Alone," covers the same eighty-by-one-hun-

dred-foot thickly wooded plot of other recent books. (The reviewer knows of two authors who are readying for publication works almost identical with Mr. Karp's: it seems to be a lush year for PTA vendettas.) Nor can any reader doubt Mr. Karp's honesty, or help but admire his literary vigor, his splendid talent as a story-teller, and his rather refreshing bitterness. What is disturbing is the way in which Mr. Karp's hero, nonconformist Arthur Douglas, decides that he has no choice, no choice at all, but to remain in stifling Suburbia. "Compromise is what makes life bearable," a wiser, older friend tells Douglas. The resolution is disturbing because it is true. The proletarian novelist could scream bloody murder and call for revolution; the contemporary novelist of protest can only get mad for the moment, then go back to the flagstone patio and the iced-tea

NOW IT'S THE INDIFFERENT GENERATION: The newest group to follow the Lost Generation and the more recent Beat Generation in pattern-conscious America is the Indifferent Generation, one of whose members is David Karp, author of the newly published novel of social protest entitled "Leave Me Alone" (see review above). Most of the Indifferent Generation were born in the decade between 1920 and 1930 (Mr. Karp is thirty-five) which means that they have fought in at least one war (for Mr. Karp it was three years Signal Corps duty in the Pacific). But they rapidly adjusted to civilian life upon their return to it and just as quickly removed themselves and their families to the greener grasses of Suburbia. Some other charter members of the I.G. judging from Mr. Karp's definition: The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit and The Organization Man, both of whom accept the safe paths of established business firms and prefer not to gamble with newer enterprises. (Karp himself, who lives with his wife and two small sons in New York's suburban Syosset, Long Island, has persisted in writing both soap operas and serious fiction—a fact which, he believes, sets him somewhat apart from his more indifferent compatriots.)

Probably Mr. Karp is as able as anybody to explain the position of the I.G. "The days for yelling are fairly well done," he says. "The Indifferent Generation is security-minded, cautious, and uncontroversial. We are gripped by a kind of ennui. We have become sophisticated, more cynical. During the Depression, solutions seemed simpler. Simple solutions no longer exist. We can't shout for war for fear of annihilation and peace doesn't seem easy. So, we settle for a cold war. In this period of moderate alternatives we keep our enthusiasms in check. We compromise."

It is this attempt to compromise with the best of both urban and rural worlds that has led to the Indifferent Generation's retreat to the suburbs. Once settled into split-level existence, Mr. Karp says, "compromise is essential. Whether it is to join the PTA or the library committee, one must submit to middle-class standards." "If one insists upon suburban advantages," Mr. Karp adds, "he must accept the standards of Suburbia, but understand that he is compromising."

"We are not crusaders," he insists, summing it all up as well as perhaps anybody can be expected to sum up the Indifferent Generation. "We get more excited about whether or not the Dodgers should leave Brooklyn than about any of the really important causes."

—ROLLENE WATERMAN.

pitcher. Both the writer and his characters have it too good.

In a series of crisp, well-handled scenes, Mr. Karp presents us with Arthur Douglas's double dilemma. On the office level, he is one of several candidates for the top job in a publishing firm, a job now held by a crusty old inner-directed editor. On the home front, he is struggling under the burdens imposed on the suburban husband and father, the weightiest of which is the unwanted chairmanship of a library committee. This latter duty generates the most excitement in the book; McCarthyism rears its head in a tense and frighteningly realistic meeting, and the well-meaning Douglas finds himself alone, deserted by even the liberals. Temporarily ostracized by the community, he nevertheless decides to remain there as a kind of missionary to the gentiles.

In the course of the novel, Mr. Karp reels off a good many sharp opinions on the stock market, the East Fifties, the Roman Catholic Church, publishing houses, celebrities, and progressive education. A lesser writer would wear out his welcome with these intrusions; but Mr. Karp is always provocative and entertaining and the digressions do not harm the flow of narrative.

Only one device is disturbing. Mr. Karp prefaces his chapters (and concludes some) with lengthy quotes from a fictitious non-fiction work by a sociologist who is deeply disturbed by "the indifferent generation." These exercises in Riesmanship are well done, but Mr. Karp's book makes its points so thoroughly that no exegesis is needed. Besides, as Mr. Karp and Arthur Douglas are both ready to admit, there are worse fates than making the 8:17.



—Elliott Erwitt.

Karp—"refreshing bitterness."

Barbed Wire-Tapping

"The Prisoners of Combine D," by Len Giovannitti (Holt. 541 pp. \$4.95), is a novel about American flying officers imprisoned in Germany during World War II.

By David Dempsey

OUT of his experience as a P.O.W. in Germany, Len Giovannitti has written a long, detailed novel about the men who fought the war from behind barbed wire. But this is no "Andersonville," for Stalag Luft III was not such a camp and the German captors, until faced with defeat, proved to be more humane (at least in their treatment of American officers) than the Confederacy. As a result, Mr. Giovannitti's book has the ring of authenticity, written very much as though he had smuggled a tape recorder into his barracks, tuned in on the innumerable conversations of his fellow prisoners, and then edited out nearly all of the profanity.

It is the immediate collective personality of the group that comes through best, for Combine D is a maverick outfit which gives almost as much trouble to the American superiors in the camp as to the German captors. We meet Lawton, the affirmative tower of strength; the sensual Fernandez; Zuckerman, the lonely Jew; the well-adjusted Storch; the impressionable Bendel; and Kit-chener, the intellectual. By force of circumstance, they submerge their differences for the sake of a common goal.

The enemies are tedium, homesickness, hunger, and the inflexibility of their own superior officers. The weapons: ingenuity and courage. How they survive is the author's story as well as the implicit theme of cooperative effort rather than sheer personal survival. If war can brutalize men, Mr. Giovannitti seems to say, so can it inspire their better selves.

One of the limitations of Mr. Giovannitti's tape-recorder method is that we know little about the six prisoners of Combine D except what they choose to tell us. Attention is focused on the day-to-day events of the camp, the constant preoccupation with the progress of the war (picked up on a clandestine radio), the personal rivalries, brutalities, thwarted escapes, and the final liberation. So, though his technique gives the novel a certain compelling quality, it less successfully provides the characters with the shadows which are needed in order to suggest past lives.



—Paris-Match.

Sagan—"It simply didn't matter."

Paris Cave-Dwellers

"Those Without Shadows," by Françoise Sagan (translated by Frances Frenaye; E. P. Dutton. 125 pp. \$2.95), the third novel by a widely-publicized young French authoress, explores the lives of a group of middle-class intellectuals in modern Paris.

By Frances Keene

"NO HUMAN thing is of serious importance," wrote Plato in "The Republic." Now these words have become the theme of Françoise Sagan's latest novel, a story which may make less of a splash than the widely-publicized young Frenchwoman's earlier monologues in a mirror but which is also a more competent and more interesting job than are her earlier works. Miss Sagan's world is widening. But the fact that adolescent rebellion often ends in adult stultification is no surprise, and therefore it is no surprise that Miss Sagan, having trained her sights on the one, now swings them over on to the other.

This time she has chosen to illustrate the despair, the pointless pain, and the sporadic attempts at escape of a group of that numberless middle-class of cave-dwellers to be found in Paris. The Paris of Bernard and Béatrice, of Josée and Jacques, of the Maligrasse couple, Alain and Fanny, of the young country nephew, Edouard, and of the professional observer, Jolyet, is the urban league of childless intellectuals everywhere. They see each other, long for each other (though never at the same time), tumble with varying regularity into bed with each other, and get up in

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