



"Baby Doe"—"Creation" by Shaw

THE choice of Douglas Moore and John Latouche's "The Ballad of Baby Doe" to open the spring season at the City Center devoted to works of Americans was an apt one. It had been audience-tested during summer 1956 in the hospitable surroundings of Central City (like giving "The Last Days of Pompeii" in the shadow of Vesuvius); it is the work of two experienced craftsmen who know the verbal and musical language well enough to tell their story effectively.

As the late Latouche told it for the theatre, the story of Vermont-born Horace Tabor, who struck it rich in silver and died in poverty when all of William Jennings Bryan's eloquence could not rewrite economics, is mainly composed of three elements: the rough and tumble of Leadville at the crest, the tender emotions aroused in the middleaged millionaire by the youthful Mrs. Harvey Doe, and the unyielding bitterness of the wife (Augusta) he casts off, who remains the "rich Mrs. Tabor" to the end.

In some ways, this scheme is a little too ambitious even for eleven scenes, especially overdeveloped being those of Act II, in which Tabor's political involvements are depicted. Moreover, there is much more color and vitality in Moore's music for the lively atmosphere of Leadville and the romantic beginnings of Tabor's infatuation with Baby Doe than there is when the shadows begin to gather. Thus, the work tends to lose musical effect towards the end, though the best scene, dramatically, is that in which Tabor, broke and dying, revisits the "Opry House" he built and relives his career in a series of flashbacks.

Much of the color and vitality alluded to have been resourcefully derived by Moore from songs of the "Bird in a Gilded Cage" variety (the whole gamut of what is called the Gay Nineties), from a lively, nostalgic recollection of piano accompaniments for "illustrated song" renditions, for cornet lead with violin and piano embellishment. There is an attempt at musical characterization of Tabor (swaggering), Augusta (tight, withdrawn), Baby Doe (melting, tender) woven for awhile into an artful kind of homespun which sounds simpler than it is and has been executed with much compositional craft.

This, then, is music with a sense of our own past in it, which we can recognize as our own and respond to with affection.

Some might question why a takeoff on "O Promise Me" is artistic when the basic creation of De Koven would be regarded as passé, but Moore has added more than a little of himself to the composite. Ennobling the commonplace is sound artistic procedure, and Moore has done it with high success in several arias for Baby Doe.

However, there is no comparable counterpart for the seamier side of the Leadville story, and what Moore has invented does not cling to the ear as well. He has tried to tell the whole story with melodic recitative and no spoken text, a feat difficult to sustain in a work playing two-and-a-quarter hours. Latouche borrowed a convention from the Broadway "musical" in casting his book in two acts, which cost him, it seemed to me, the logical curtain for Act I when Tabor declares his love for Baby Doe. But there were two scenes and twenty minutes more of "story" before the curtain fell. Had Moore really mastered the "flashback" scene with music of real power this probably wouldn't have mattered much, but he didn't produce the seizing invention to involve me with the sorrows of his characters as well as their joys.

One of the happiest aspects of "Baby Doe" is Donald Oenslager's economic but atmospheric setting (as seen in Central City) with stage waits bridged by projected slides showing the Colorado locale as it existed in the 1880s and 1890s. His apt costuming and Vladimir Rosing's stylized direction are worthy of the work's best qualities. As much may be said for the excellent group of principals, of whom Walter Cassel (Tabor) and Martha Lipton (Augusta) created the parts. Beverly Sills was Baby Doe, and a very credible one in sight and sound, rather than Dolores Wilson of the Colorado cast. She was equally adept with the simple songlike strains and the excursions into coloratura which Moore devised to expand them to "lyric theatre" dimensions. Beatrice Krebs was a strong voice for Baby Doe's mother, Joshua Hecht a more effective choice for Bryan's "cross of gold" speech than Jack de Lon as a plump but boyish Chester A. Arthur. Emerson Buckley's conducting was founded both on comprehension and control.

Another phase of the season being

sponsored by a Ford Foundation grant came later in the week when Mario Bucci's "Tale for a Deaf Ear" was presented in a doublebill with Leonard Bernstein's "Trouble in Tahiti." Bucci has derived, from a story by Elizabeth Enright, a modern miracle play of a man who collapses in the midst of an argument with his wife. As she prays over him, there are flashbacks to three episodes (Tuscany, Skye, and Germany) in "history," when life returned. To her astonishment, he suddenly arises, and they fall to arguing again. As suddenly, he collapses, and this time there is no reprieve. Bucci has handled his difficult problem well, and is obviously a talented man. Patricia Neway and William Chapman were the principals, with Arnold Gamson conducting.

AS may or may not be generally known, Robert Shaw, as able a choral conductor as this country has produced, has been investing some of his recent time in Cleveland, where he has organized a chorus while absorbing the fine points of orchestral direction from such a finepointer as George Szell. The new power showed itself in a splendidly prepared and artistically presented series of performances of Haydn's "Creation" with the Philharmonic Orchestra during Holy Week. Blending with the warm sound of the Robert Shaw Chorale was much beautiful playing by the orchestra's solo woodwinds and strings. There has not been a performance of Haydn's miraculously expressive score on this level in New York for a generation, and it should stimulate appreciation of a great work greatly. In a generally fine group of soloists, Mack Harrell was outstanding for smooth sound eloquently used, Adele Addison for soaring tones touchingly applied to the angelic music of Gabriel.

Coincident with "The Creation," NBC's TV-Opera Theatre offered Mozart's "Cosi fan tutte," in the English version of the Martins. Kirk Browning brought a new skill to management of "asides" by moving his people to closeup position, or strategically placed microphones. James Pease as Alfonso was the most professional member of an ensemble generally small in vocal scope and style, though agreeable enough as microphoned. Peter Herman Adler's tempi were mostly "comfortable," especially where the difficult arias of Fiordiligi (Phyllis Curtin) were concerned. Helen George was the lively Despina, in a cast with Frances Bible (Dorabella), John Alexander (Fernando), and Mac Morgan (Guglielmo).

—IRVING KOLODIN.

Spiritual Nature of Man

"In God We Trust," edited by Norman Cousins (Harper, 464 pp. \$5.95), is a selection from the writings of the American Founding Fathers to show their religious beliefs and ideas. Reviewer Dumas Malone has written numerous books and articles about Thomas Jefferson and his peers.

By Dumas Malone

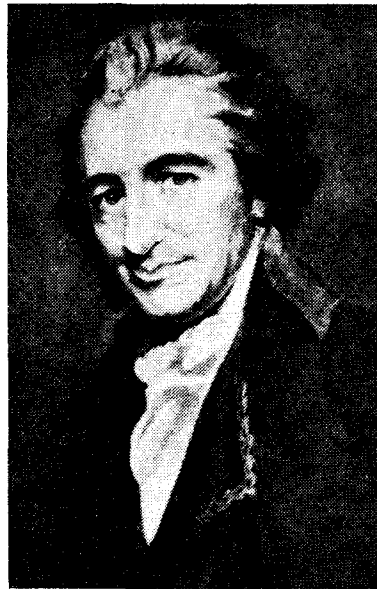
IN THIS book Norman Cousins deals with nine of the Founding Fathers. He has selected them because of their importance in our early national history but has made little effort to pin particular church labels on them. He recognizes that some of them, most of them perhaps, were unwilling to subscribe fully to any historic creed. He is concerned with their ideas relating to religion "in its broadest sense." It may be claimed that these men were more notable for their secularity than their religiosity, but he finds neither atheism nor agnosticism in them. There is ground here for endless argument about semantics, but I believe that the materials provided in the book disclose in most of these men a notable spiritual quality.

The main body of the work consists of excerpts from their writings. The editor makes it clear that he is not providing complete statements or full documents. In fact, the formal documents available to him were relatively few. These statesmen were officially concerned with religion only as it bore on matters of state, and most of them felt strongly that personal religion is a private matter. Inevitably, Mr. Cousins had recourse to private letters which were not intended for the public gaze they have since received, but he could not find much that was pertinent in some cases. Thomas Paine shouted his views from the housetop, but Washington rarely talked about religion to anybody.

The largest body of materials is from Jefferson. He was as unwilling to talk about his own faith in public as to discuss his family affairs, but he expressed himself strongly on the subject of religious freedom throughout his long life. His famous bill is printed here, as is a generous portion of the so-called "Jefferson Bible," which he drew from the Gospels for his private satisfaction. The private letters relat-

ing to this beautiful compilation comprise the most illuminating as well as the most moving statement of his own belief. An entire section is devoted to the Adams-Jefferson correspondence, to which John Adams, a lifelong churchgoer though always an unconventional thinker, was actually the larger contributor. Much of this bears on religion, and its appearance in this extended form is very welcome.

There are characteristic and delightful bits from Franklin, and I hope no reader will miss the letter to Ezra Stiles in the incomparable doctor's last weeks. Also, I hope the excerpts from Paine's "Age of Reason" will not be overlooked, for, as the editor says, that work has often been reviled without being read. Paine's manner will still offend many, as it always has this reviewer, and his condemnation of the churches of



Thomas Paine—"his 'Age of Reason' often reviled without being read."

his day was appallingly comprehensive. But, as the editor wisely says, Paine's "war against credal belief was carried on in the cause of the spiritual nature of man and not against it"; and there is much of the philosophy of the man and the age in his assertion, "My own mind is my own church." Some of the selections are disappointingly meager, as in the case of Hamilton. Samuel Adams appears as the most intolerant of the lot, and John Jay as the most

conventional. There is relatively little from Madison, one of the most notable champions of religious freedom who was at the same time exceedingly reticent about his own belief. I wish a bit had been added from "The Federalist," Number 51. "In a free government," he said, "the security for civil rights must be the same as that for religious rights. It consists in the one case of the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects." This is a classic statement of the uses and the merits of diversity.

Each body of selections is preceded by a brief editorial introduction, summing up the career of the man in question. In attempting to place these prominent and often controversial figures in political history, Mr. Cousins has gone beyond the necessities of his task and has made some statements which can be challenged by historians. Also, he has fallen into some factual errors. One unimportant but amusing one may be attributed to faulty proofreading. Jefferson's first teacher appears as "the Reverend Douglas A. Scot," while the original reading no doubt was "the Reverend [William] Douglas, a Scot." In his interpretation of the religious attitudes of his subjects, which is the matter of chief importance, Mr. Cousins shows sound judgment and uncommon discernment, and his main thought is that the excerpts will speak for themselves anyway. The best of them are genuinely eloquent and all of them command respect.

He gives his understanding of these men as a group in his perceptive introduction, which was reprinted in large part in SR March 27. He holds that "their view of mankind had a deeply religious foundation"; he finds in them a determination that "a man's religious opinions were to be his private concern and his inviolate right"; he sees in them a common concern lest the government attempt to determine the religion of its people; and yet, in his opinion, these men had "profound respect for spiritual belief" wherever it existed. Perhaps he does not allow sufficiently for the influence of classical philosophy, but in these basic considerations, with minor exceptions which he notes, I think he judges them aright. In varying degree they were in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Most of them, though not all, were pre-eminently constructive, and their attitude toward the human spirit was by no means negative, for by and large they believed in human beings. Most of them were as unwilling to bow to ecclesiastical as to royal authority, but every one of them in his own way put his trust in God.