

The Universal Search for Self

By Granville Hicks

AT THE end of Dan Jacobson's "Evidence of Love" (Atlantic-Little, Brown, \$4) Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Makeer arrive in Cape Town. As their passports and other papers are being examined, it is discovered that Kenneth is Colored. The horrified officials have to admit Kenneth and Isabel, since they are both citizens of South Africa, but they warn the couple that if they cohabit, they will be guilty of a criminal offense under the Immorality Act. They are seized in their hotel that night, and are jailed, Kenneth being treated with some brutality. At the trial Kenneth says:

By arresting us and bringing us into court, the State has made my love for my wife, and her love for me, a public and political act. For this reason we cannot be punished by the court, but only released by it, released from the public and political hatreds, the public and political guilts, which make ugly the most private and secret lives of everyone who lives in this country.

They are both sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labor. Kenneth is also sentenced to twelve strokes of the cane, but that part of the sentence is suspended. The punishment is surprisingly light.

The novel is the story of these two. Kenneth is the son of one of the most respectable, most obsequious of Coloreds. Isabel Fast is the daughter of a well-to-do member of the white community. In youth they meet only once, but their destinies are linked without their knowing it, since both are protégés of a rich liberal, a Miss Bentwisch. Miss Bentwisch pays for Kenneth's education while convincing him that he is to become a great leader of his people. Isabel she chooses as her successor, planning to marry her to the heir of the Bentwisch fortune.

When Isabel decides that she does not love Martin Bullivant and cannot marry him, Miss Bentwisch casts her off, and the girl, at loose ends, goes to London. Kenneth is also in London, whither he has been sent by Miss Bentwisch to continue his education. He, too, is at loose ends, for he has begun to doubt whether he wants the

future his benefactress has planned for him. He seeks Isabel out, but without telling her either that he is Colored or that he knows anything about her. Their affair is inevitably troubled, for neither one is sure of himself and Kenneth carries a heavy burden of guilt because of his silence.

After Isabel has learned the truth about Kenneth, she leaves him, not because she is shocked by his racial background but because she believes she has deflected him from his great purpose. She goes back to South Africa, determined to make the best of a marriage with Martin. Fortunately she has occasion to speak to Kenneth's brother of the sacrifice she has made, and he tells her, with forceful vulgarity, what he thinks of her. She understands how wrongheaded she has been, and she returns to Kenneth purely in the spirit of love. Kenneth says, "I know what I am, now I love you again." "We know ourselves through each other," she replies. "But only when we are true to ourselves, apart," he answers.

It is this development, of course, that gives significance to the ending. Kenneth and Isabel have had a long struggle to escape from false identities, to rise above complexities of guilt, to know themselves and to find one another. That they have achieved love, however, does not absolve them from responsibility. But what they do is not what Miss Bentwisch or some other person tells them they ought to do. It is an expression of themselves; it is evidence of love.

Young as he is, Dan Jacobson has published four novels and a collection of short stories, and he has gained steadily in reputation. In "Evidence of Love" he combines great subtlety with a powerful forthrightness. He probes with a firm, ruthless hand, and yet one always feels his compassion. He examines the problem of identity and the problem of guilt, both so much favored by the younger writers today, and to them he adds the problem of social responsibility, and in all this he never loses himself or the reader.

There is a large contrast between Jacobson's sharply realistic narrative and the fable Conrad Richter has unfolded in "The Waters of Kronos" (Knopf, \$3.50). The little novel begins as the simple story of a familiar

kind of pilgrimage: John Donner, getting on in years, crosses the continent to visit the scenes of his childhood, though he knows that in fact he cannot visit them, since what was Unionville now lies at the bottom of a vast artificial lake. The best he can do is to visit the cemetery, to which the remains of Unionville's people, including his own ancestors, have been removed.

Then the miracle happens and Donner finds himself in the Unionville of his boyhood. Richter describes the town with the felicity that has distinguished so many of his writings. It is real to us, and it is real to Donner, but he cannot be part of this town. As Richter conceives his fable, Donner is not a ghost; he is there in the flesh, to be seen and spoken to by those whom he recognizes but who do not recognize him. He is there, but as a stranger, an outcast.

The allegory is clear. The Unionville of Donner's boyhood has been inundated, as the title warns us, by the waters of time. He can find it again, but he cannot have any effect upon it, nor can his visiting it change him. He remains the aging, battered, unhappy man that he is.

One insight is vouchsafed John Donner: he discovers that he did not hate his father.

It was the great deception practiced by man on himself and his fellows, the legend of hate against the father so the son need not face the real and ultimate abomination, might conceal the actual nature of the monster who haunted the shadows of childhood, whose name only the soul knew and who never revealed himself before the end when it was found that all those disturbing things seen and felt in the father, which as a boy had given him an uncomprehending sense of dread and hostility, were only intimations of his older self to come, a self marked with the inescapable dissolution and decay of his youth.

This is an insight worth thinking about, but I am not sure how sound it is, and in any case it seems a meager reward for all that John Donner has suffered. However, judgment must be suspended, for, as the book ends, Donner has yet to see his mother. A sequel is indicated, and it may give us a deeper meaning. I hope so, for "The Waters of Kronos," strongly felt as it obviously is, is less than satisfying. The work is saturated with a quiet melancholy that is often poignant, but Richter does not seem so far to be saying much more than anyone has felt in thinking of his youth, and surely it was his idea to say a great deal more.

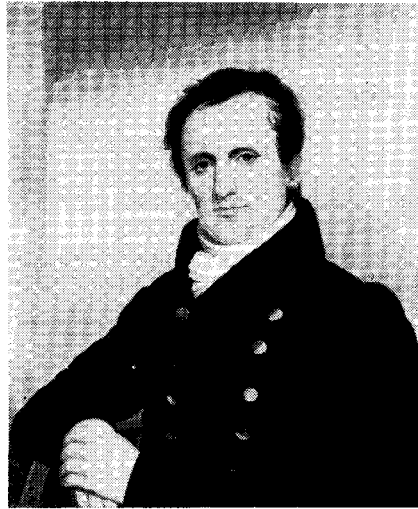
Tracking a Fiction Pathfinder

"The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper," edited by James F. Beard (Belknap-Harvard University Press. Vol. I, 444 pp. Vol. II, 420 pp. \$10 each), records the views of an American man of letters on the events of his time. Chairman of the Department of English at New York University, Oscar Cargill has edited and written many studies of our literary history.

By Oscar Cargill

THOUGH James Fenimore Cooper gave of himself generously in his letters, frequently obliging casual inquirers with eight-page replies, when he could command at least ten dollars a page for whatever he wrote, the creator of the "Leatherstocking Tales" never accommodated his point of view to any one of his correspondents, not even to those dearest to him. Because this virile, passionate, indomitable man is a most inviting subject for biography, there have been some remarkably good studies of him—by Lounsbury, Spiller, Clymer, and Boynton—but the tangy distinction of each of these finely blended productions is pallid compared with the hundred-proof Cooper which Professor James Franklin Beard now offers us in these first two volumes of his "official" edition of Cooper's manuscripts, here confined to letters, broadsides, and journals written between 1800 and 1835.

To compile these two volumes Mr. Beard has exerted an unremitting zeal, an ingenuity, an instinct for the "faint trace" which would have won the admiration of that famous scout Natty Bumppo, who had something of a reputation in his own day as a relentless pursuer. Not to mince matters, these volumes are a superb piece of scholarship—good enough to be deplored in England. Beard was faced with the fact that collectors, autograph hunters, and others better not characterized had scattered the correspondence all over the world. His fifteen years of industry have pulled together more than one could possibly believe had survived. For example, a Warsaw collection perished in a World War II blitz, but Beard provides us with letters and a leaflet, "Con-



—Bettmann Archive.

James Fenimore Cooper—he marched alone.

tribution for the Poles," showing clearly how active Cooper and Lafayette were in Paris during the summer of 1831 in aiding the Poles in their struggle for freedom—materials which suggest the nature of the Warsaw collection without wholly compensating for its loss. Annotation is properly recognized as a nuisance, but here it is so pressure-packed, so rich in substance, as to excite admiration. And what tenacity has gone into this task. In a letter home to Dick Cooper, the novelist asked about or wished to be remembered to twenty-eight people. Dick complained, "Some . . . I never heard of, and some are in their graves"; Beard has identified twenty-seven of them. Cooper was no name dropper, but his acquaintance was immense and his memory prodigious, with the result that his editor has had to run down hundreds of obscure persons on two continents. He has come upon his quarry in all but three or four instances.

THE man who emerges from these pages is the same Cooper who quarreled with his Cooperstown neighbors and successfully prosecuted Horace Greeley and others for libel, but ruddier, better fleshed, more formidable, more bellicose. A friendly letter starts like a naval broadside: "My dear Shubrick, if you keep as bad a reckoning at sea as you do ashore, God help the idlers, who will all be drowned, some night, in their hammocks." "Your friend Mrs. R. is not my friend," Cooper informed

Mrs. Peter Augustus Jay, "nor will she ever be so. As I am yours I advise you to write no more letters of introduction to her." Suits, blunt invitations to sue, and threats of suit are as frequent as the club cards in a deck; Cooper permitted himself to be sued for one dollar, rather than settle a rascally claim for wages that had not been earned. Life was a field of thistles to Cooper, but he marched on it undismayed, striking down the evil weeds with his walking stick. And he marched alone. A marvelous anecdote in a letter to Benjamin Silliman describes how when Cooper was at Yale, a group of students "scraped," that is, roughed up an unpopular tutor in a hall. Interrogated, Cooper swore on his honor, he had not participated, for "I disliked the manner of assailing a man en masse."

Cooper saw further into the French tumults of 1830 than did his friend Lafayette, who might have changed the destiny of France had he been as stout a Republican as Cooper. Cooper, having witnessed one failure to collect the American claims against the French for the Neapolitan outrages, suggested a plan tantamount to the one which was ultimately successful. These and other instances of his astuteness, as well as his service and long interest in the Navy, doubtless influence Mr. Beard to regret that Cooper was never offered the Secretaryship. But when Cooper measures a new French "22" corvette and surmises that one of our vessels, similarly armed, could blow it out of the water, the deprivation becomes suddenly endurable.

FOR all his acute sense of the respect due him, Cooper was singularly deprecatory about his own accomplishments. When a proposal was made him to re-edit his works, he had to confess he did not own a volume of his own productions. Furthermore, he thought "three hundred pounds . . . would hardly reward me . . . for the loss of time in correcting . . . and the vexation of spirit caused me by reading *nine* novels written by myself." When he actually undertook revision, he found it a proper "punishment for my old sins." They are those of extraordinarily facile composition; one novel went to the printer without even recopying. This explains why the letters and journals are not concerned with those issues which are primary in the letters and notebooks of Hawthorne and James, but with those of another order and importance altogether. His interest in decorum, for example, was as great as that of Henry James and won him an earlier respect with less gracious manners, at a time when respect for an American was harder to come by.