

Recluse and Rebel

By Granville Hicks

THIS is a good season for admirers of Emily Dickinson. A little while ago Charles B. Anderson published "*Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway to Surprise*" (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$5.95), the best study we have had of Miss Dickinson as a poet. Next week comes "*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*" (Little, Brown, \$10), a handsomely printed volume that is the work of Thomas H. Johnson, who published a three-volume variorum edition five years ago and who has also written a biography of Miss Dickinson and edited her letters. And Jay Leyda has at last completed "*The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*" (Yale University Press, 2 vols., \$25).

Although I am glad to call attention to other works, I am limiting myself here to Leyda's massive achievement. Readers of "*The Melville Log*" will not be surprised at the diligence with which Leyda has conducted his investigations. He has examined approximately 100 collections of letters and documents, many of them extensive. He has gone through the files of a dozen newspapers, has studied census records, court records, the account books of apothecaries and grocers, and has of course read everything about Miss Dickinson that has appeared in books and magazines. All his findings he has arranged in chronological order, from the engagement of Miss Dickinson's parents in 1828 to her death in 1886.

The book, Leyda says, "has been compiled in the conviction that what is presently most needed in the study of the life and works of this enigmatic poet, who has been the subject of so much distorting gossip and legend, is the most factual treatment possible. . . . The tiniest scrap of biographical fact might be the very detail needed to help grasp a cluster of associations, the missing piece in the puzzle that makes plain a series of relationships in the life that in turn reveals a major theme or continuity in the poems."

I do not see the relevance of every single entry Leyda has made, but the significance of most of the material is unmistakable. What impresses me first of all is the insight the book gives into the life of Amherst, Massachusetts, in the years when Emily Dickinson was growing up. Here was a tight little

community, dominated even at this late date by a rigid Calvinism. Most people went to church three times each Sunday, and in between many of them spent time worrying about the state of their souls. There was some scandal and some skepticism, to be sure, and there was considerable gaiety of a well-behaved sort, but for most people most of the time life was a serious matter and heaven a subject of frequent thought.

In such an environment there was nothing whimsical or light-hearted about Emily Dickinson's refusal to commit herself to orthodoxy. During her short stay at Mount Holyoke Seminary, as it was then called, she was subject to pressures of a kind it is now hard to imagine. One of Leyda's happy finds is a



Emily Dickinson
as a young girl.

journal written by various persons at the seminary and sent to alumnae in the missionary field—a record of the most extraordinary evangelical zeal. Mary Lyon, the school's founder, held frequent sessions for those, Emily included, who had not "given up to the claims of Christ," and Emily's classmates commented with concern on her obduracy.

Amherst was a pious town, dominated by a few men, of whom Emily's father, Edward Dickinson, was easily first. He was a successful and influential lawyer, treasurer of Amherst College, a member of the state legislature and, for one term, of the Congress. He was also active in the militia, the fire company, the temperance society (though not a teetotaler), the agricultural society, and much else. He had the habit of domination, and though he felt a great affection towards his three children, they were often ill at ease in his presence. Emily notes that her father was full of praise for her brother Austin when the latter was away from home, whereas under the same roof they constantly quarreled. Of her own hostility towards her father some biographers have made too much, but the evidences of tension are strong.

Leyda also documents the record of Emily's friendships. There were the friends of her girlhood in whom she confided—Abiah Root, for example, and Susan Gilbert, who later married Austin Dickinson and became one of Emily's mainstays. There were the three men of the world she looked up to—Samuel Bowles, Josiah Gilbert Holland, and especially Thomas Wentworth Higginson. There were the men—Benjamin Franklin Newton, George Gould, Charles Wadsworth—who have figured in romantic stories told about her. And there were countless relatives and neighbors of whom she saw much in the early years and with whom she corresponded all her life.

Leyda says, "Actually, she was no more and no less alone than many another artist, no more and no less isolated, or insulated, from the world." On the surface this is not true: for the last twenty years of her life she refused to see even close friends, persons to whom she was writing in the most affectionate terms. On the other hand, as Leyda shows, she did maintain contact with a large number of individuals. She was a recluse but not at all a misanthrope. In the later years ill health encouraged the habit of solitude, but to the end there is a great warmth in the notes to men and women she had not seen for years—or perhaps had never seen.

Her poetry was the product of a variety of tensions—religious, sexual, domestic, literary. In her letters as well as in her poems one sees the growth, at first slow and then rapid, of her characteristic style. Playful and even coy at the outset, she became as intense and powerful a poet as we have ever had. As Professor Anderson notes, much of her work (there are 1,775 poems in the Johnson volume)—falls short of the highest distinction, but there is a body of poetry that deserves to be called great. How greatness was achieved remains, as always, a miracle, but Leyda throws more than a little light on the process.

It should be added that the Leyda volumes have a fascination that is independent of their success in illuminating the personality and the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Here is an account of New England life in the mid-nineteenth century that is unparalleled in its minuteness and variety. Many stories unfold that might tempt a novelist or dramatist, but the romances and the scandals and the political struggles are in the end less impressive than the simple movement of life from day to day. The work, which is a marvel of industry and resourcefulness, would be of absorbing interest and high value even if it did not have a woman of genius as its central figure.

Both Sides of the Political Coin

When historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., was first approached by his publisher to write "**Kennedy or Nixon: Does It Make Any Difference?**" (Macmillan, 51 pp. Paperback, \$1.95), he said no. It took the plea of a prominent Democrat to persuade him. Once committed to the task, Schlesinger produced his manuscript in less than two weeks, and three weeks later a printing of 35,000 copies was run off. The pamphlet is debated below by William Attwood and Victor Lasky. During August and September Mr. Attwood, foreign editor of *Look* magazine, was on Senator Kennedy's Washington staff; at present he is campaign aide to Adlai Stevenson. Mr. Lasky, an author and journalist, has observed the Washington scene closely for a number of years.

1. Democrat's View

By WILLIAM ATTWOOD

SOME of Adlai Stevenson's devoted followers (I have heard them called "cultists") appear surprised to see him campaigning so strenuously for Jack Kennedy. As a Democrat, Stevenson was expected to lend a hand; but his speaking schedule this fall would be grueling even for a candidate. For a man who has not even been promised a job, it strikes the cultists as immoderate. Stevenson had no answer for them a couple of weeks ago. "This election," he told a breakfast meeting in Seattle, "is the most important I have ever been involved in."

The reasons for Stevenson feeling as he does are eloquently summed up in Arthur Schlesinger's fifty-one-page book. It is a frankly partisan work. I doubt if it will convert any convinced Republicans; indeed, their convictions may be hardened by Schlesinger's prediction that, under Kennedy, "affirmative government" will "advance the public interest."

And these Republicans—here described as "fogies, old and young"—are not likely to take kindly to Schlesinger's often subjective appraisal of their candidate in the language of Riesman ("an other-directed man") and Saroyan ("No foundation all the way down the line.")

Yet this book will be welcomed by all of us who have taken leave of jobs and families—to say nothing of sociable evenings and football weekends—to work for Kennedy's election this fall. It will save us tedious explanations to lukewarm Democrats whose hearts belong to Adlai; to independents who see no difference between Jack and Dick; to free-thinking Republicans who conclude that, all else being equal, Nixon does have the edge in experience and maturity.

For here are all the reasons why we agree with Stevenson that this is an all-important election. Here, in one explosive essay, are the things that trouble us about Nixon and the things we like about Kennedy. A reviewer has called it "savagely brilliant." I would call it harsh and perceptive. Schlesinger's indictment of Nixon is neither savage nor terribly original: but it is deeply felt and well documented. He concedes that Nixon is "not a bad man" and that he would make a better President than, say, Goldwater or Knowland. His point is that Nixon is "a strangely hollow man" who is more concerned with tactics than with principles or goals.

It is this quality that bothers so many of us who care about the sort of man who will occupy the Presidency. Nixon's concern with his political "image" and his passion to win have led him—perhaps unconsciously—to say and do things that many of us can neither forget nor forgive.

We Democrats cannot forget that he has publicly and falsely imputed not only stupidity (which is pardonable in politics) but disloyalty (which is unpardonable) to such leaders of our party as Truman, Stevenson, Harriman, and Acheson. Nixon would like us to forget. Last month, probably too late for inclusion in this book, he made this statement: "I have never indulged in personalities in a campaign."

Nixon's preoccupation with tactical expediency has also led him into taking clearly contradictory positions on many issues. (Continued on page 34)



2. Republican Viewpoint

By VICTOR LASKY

LET'S BE blunt about this. Arthur Schlesinger must have taken leave of his historical senses in producing a booklet so devoid of scholarship, so replete with pseudo-psychoanalytic hokum, and so lacking—even for campaign propaganda—in taste.

Yet, curiously, this is an important document. It demonstrates a type of liberalism which, in the name of realism, has discarded principle to adopt the stance of the Tammany politician to whom nothing matters but victory. Its importance, therefore, lies more in what it tells us about the author, Senator Kennedy's intellectual Gauleiter, than about either of the two candidates.

For perspective's sake, let us recall Schlesinger's historic words in Harvard Yard last March when James Reston came inquiring as to why so many Cambridge intellectuals had suddenly decided that Adlai Stevenson would make a fine Secretary of State. "I guess I'm nostalgically for Stevenson, ideologically for Humphrey, and realistically for Kennedy," said Schlesinger, adding he would work gladly for "any two-legged liberal mammal who might beat Nixon."

And there you have it: the liberal demonologists are now seeking to exorcise the very evil spirits they have themselves unloosed. The liberals—or some of them—have come to believe their own myths about Vice President Nixon.

Many of these myths are contained in this slim volume, whose primary aim, however, is to combat the widespread belief that Nixon and Kennedy are both pretty much alike. Schlesinger says this isn't true. And he is absolutely right—but for the wrong reasons.

According to Schlesinger, Nixon is