

# To Him Sisyphus Symbolized Man



—Henri Cartier-Bresson.

Albert Camus—"a halo that no longer risks being shattered."

**"Albert Camus, 1913-1960: A Biographical Study,"** by Philip Thody (Macmillan. 242 pp. \$4.50), concerns itself chiefly with the French writer's moral and political philosophy. Leon S. Roudiez is associate professor of French at Columbia University in New York.

By LEON S. ROUDIEZ

ACCORDING to a recent survey, Albert Camus remains one of the favorite authors of the younger generation in France, and his premature death explains in part why they admire him more uncritically than they do Sartre. He has, in their eyes, acquired a halo that no longer risks being shattered through daily encounters with sordid political realities. That Camus himself, in the later years of his life, gave the impression of eschewing such encounters has made him the target of considerable criticism from the Left. Philip Thody, in his concluding chapter, carefully records and evaluates the castigations of Roger Stéphane, Albert Memmi, and the like; although sympathetic to Camus's position, he finds the criticism largely justified on practical grounds. One can easily agree that it is good to have men of intellectual standing who are willing to plunge into the fray and try to settle pressing social and political problems at great personal risk—and also regardless of consequences. But it is even more important that there be a few others who, even

if ignored or scorned, will rise to remind us that the concept of man transcends that of an efficient political animal.

Mr. Thody does not, however, concern himself exclusively with political effectiveness; his book, "a biographical study," aims to scrutinize the whole of Camus's activity. He is no newcomer to the field: the present volume is a revised and enlarged version of a study somewhat hastily put together five years ago. A considerable improvement over that earlier work, his new book can be placed alongside those of Germaine Brée and John Cruickshank and not suffer too much from the comparison. The three volumes actually supplement one another in a most useful way. For instance, while Mr. Thody once again goes over the prewar years, he places much more emphasis on Camus's brief journalistic career and gives a detailed account of the articles dealing with the Algerian situation in 1938-1939.

IF Philip Thody's book supplements the other two, it does not in any way replace them. On the one hand, he has not had access to the notebooks (presently being published in France), manuscripts, and other private papers of Camus, and thus cannot claim to have provided a definitive scholarly assessment. Nor has he, on the other hand, succeeded in giving us a truly authoritative critical evaluation; this is partly due to his ideological interests, but also because he allows a scholarly curiosity to hamper his role as a critic.

As an illustration of this kind of interference, there is the search for autobiography in fiction. A great deal of fascination is involved in attempting to trace a fictional character's behavior back to a precise experience of, or statement by, its creator. After all, creative writers have usually had to extract the essential components of their heroes out of their own beings. But so much of a writer's complex personality is necessarily left out of any one character that such investigations have only an indirect bearing either on the esthetic and emotional experience of the reader or on the significance of the work as a whole. Attempts to decide whether Tarrou, for instance, is or is not speaking for Camus on this or that page of "The Plague" degenerates into a search for "message" and "ideas," and neglects the more fun-

damental and ambiguous matter of esthetic meaning.

The limitations of this volume are also evident in the fact that the works discussed in a most illuminating way are those that, like "The Stranger," have already provoked a considerable body of critical comment. Mr. Thody's footing is less sure when he deals with "The Fall" and "Exile and the Kingdom." When he examines "The State of Siege," which, as Camus admitted, had received "an unmerciful slashing" at the hands of most theatre reviewers, he appears unable to go beyond a summing up of the reasons why the play was not a success. But what of Camus's dramatic intent? And might not this box-office failure have some positive contribution to make to the esthetics of the French theatre? The thought suggested by another critic, that "some of the hostility to 'The State of Siege' was hostility to its best qualities," simply does not occur to him. Camus's plays, quite possibly, are not first-rate theatre; but to criticize "Caligula" or "The Just Assassins" because "one very rarely has the excitement of wondering what is going to happen next" is utterly irrelevant. Anyone who is inclined to wonder too much about that sort of thing might as well read Erle Stanley Gardner and leave art and literature alone.

Mr. Thody has written an honest, academic book that will be valuable mainly to those interested in Camus's ideas. He has also, unfortunately, given aid and comfort to those who believe a work of art, in this instance a novel or a play, can be deciphered as if it were a piece of expository prose.

## FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 971

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 971 will be found in the next issue.*

NHBBQX LZKLOB ECLASZB  
DLBESC HASC EFS BHIC  
NCLXSAQTS.

LTHTOPHIB.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 970

*What people say behind your back is your standing in the community*

—E. W. HOWE.

# Peoples Plenteous and Pinched

***"The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations,"* by Barbara Ward** (Norton. 159 pp. \$3.75), probes the current world revolution caused by the struggle against inequality and poverty, the population explosion, and modern technology. Stringfellow Barr wrote *"Let's Join the Human Race"* and *"Citizens of the World."*

By STRINGFELLOW BARR

BECAUSE of its brevity, its clarity, and its vivid, colloquial style, this is perhaps the most useful book yet written on the world revolution we are living through. It cannot compete with Gunnar Myrdal's scholarly work, *"An International Economy"*; it was certainly never meant to compete with it, and it has no need to compete. But countless Americans who will never read Myrdal would find Barbara Ward's little book exciting. Again, much of what she says was said brilliantly by Sidney Lens in *"A World in Revolution."* But Lens's book was published in 1956, when anybody who talked sensibly about the world Secretary Dulles never discovered was doomed to sound like a fellow-traveler. There is much evidence that the American public has started thinking again and that it is therefore ready to listen to Miss Ward. What she invites us to consider is the same world in revolution that Myrdal and Lens dealt with.

Miss Ward chooses to give us a clear view of four aspects of that world: the struggle to secure equality among men and among nations; the effort to abolish poverty; the explosive rise in population, especially in the poorer countries, and the determination to apply scientific knowledge and capital savings to man's whole economy. She traces the origins of the ideas of equality and of economic progress in the Western Christian countries that skirt the North Atlantic, ideas which made them richer than any countries had ever yet become; and she also shows how imperialism spread these ideas throughout the world. Finally, she explains why these rich countries are growing richer much faster than the poor countries are growing less poor.

Miss Ward is vividly aware of some-

thing that rich persons and rich countries are apt to forget: that it is not easy for the truly poor to save, invest, and thereby increase their income. But she is also vividly aware of how little the feudal beneficiaries of many poor economies care to promote or even permit progress. Finally, she is aware that, unless the rich Western countries assist and guide economic and social evolution, the Communist proposals for abolishing poverty will stand unchallenged. She knows that for citizens of rich countries to make only halfway efforts to help their neighbors in poor countries is dangerous; and that for a rich man, after his usual solid meal, to tell a starving man that even if he starves he will be better off dead than Red is merely impudent.

Miss Ward analyzes simply but brilliantly the frightening difficulty of raising a poor economy to the "take-off" stage, where it can start generating the capital it needs to keep the up-spiral going; and she examines with equal brilliance the political problems the poor countries face, such as the doctrinaire Marxism of Russia and the doctrinaire "free enterprise" of America, neither of which solutions is relevant or, indeed, possible. Nor have they been applied, one may add, either in the USA or the USSR. But perhaps Miss Ward's most telling passage deals gently but firmly with our present practice of hymning the praise of freedom to two-thirds of the human race

while neglecting to mention justice. Which of them, by the way, freedom or justice, does the Preamble to our Constitution mention first?

So good a book as Miss Ward's deserves criticism. Would her discussion have been even better if she had explained, not only why a now-restored and wealthy Europe ought to be sharing with the United States more of the burdens and privileges of this great task, but why the poor countries have always believed the job could be better done by the United Nations than by any national government or governments anywhere? The governments of the rich countries, led by the United States, have always flatly refused this proposal. Why? On this issue Miss Ward could be eloquent. She could also be informative, since Washington has never been candid with the American voter about its opposition to a plan the poor countries prefer and which would cost American taxpayers less.

SECONDLY, would this admirable book have been even more useful if the author had offered at least an informed economist's answer to another question: what effect may automation have on the problem of industrializing an as yet unindustrialized country? Miss Ward writes persuasively, "There would be no economics if there were no scarcities." But if the electronic revolution continues to "automate" our production of goods, we may have to dream up an economic theory that can take care of a cornucopia. The underdeveloped countries are already leap-frogging on technology. For example, Miss Ward's own husband, Sir Robert Jackson, Commissioner of Development in Ghana, has been deeply concerned with a huge hydroelectric plant. But he is not concerned to lead Ghana through the industrial stages that England's "Black Country" was traversing a century and a half ago. Who knows whether our elaborate plans to transfer Asian and African peasants to city factories may founder on new-type factories that use only very few workers? For automation is increasing fast, and it could increase a lot faster in countries that face no sizable problems of industrial obsolescence.

There are doubtless other questions to raise. But, as it stands, Miss Ward has placed the American public once more in her debt. She has cut through the paralyzing wordiness of "the economic development of underdeveloped countries." She has given us a small, handy, readable manual of the real world we live in. She may even free our new ultra-Right from the slogan somebody has ascribed to them: "World, go home!"

