

Hearth and Hurricane

"The Points of My Compass: Letters from the East, the West, the North, the South," by E. B. White (Harper & Row. 240 pp. \$4), a collection of essays, ranges from whimsical nostalgia for a fading past to vigorous protest against some aspects of the present. Herbert Gold is the author of *"The Age of Happy Problems."*

By HERBERT GOLD

THE MOST important point of reference for understanding E. B. White's special gifts as a man of letters—and his special difficulties with these gifts—is the great American writer Henry David Thoreau, who pared down his life to the smallest practical elements. From within his stoical seclusion he screeched most eloquently at the rest of the world.

E. B. White has tried to live in society. He has had, and still has, a wife; one can almost say that he has also had a magazine, *The New Yorker*, much of whose best prose is either his or reflects his own wryly committed spirit. But the burden of grafting a Thoreauvian blend of stoical abstention and poetic concern onto *The New Yorker's* peculiarly discreet diction has weighed heavily on White. *The New Yorker* dislikes strong emotion strongly expressed, sustained argument argumentatively put forward. It is as if emotion and argument might keep the commuters reading past their stops on the train. White has been one of the architects of *The New Yorker's* style, and also one of its victims. Nevertheless, his real quality as a man and a writer has managed to survive. He has felt strongly about various matters, from the atomic bomb to urban noise. Wit and understatement and a contained rage result in a considerable achievement in this new collection, "The Points of My Compass," which is brilliant sentence by sentence, convincing paragraph by paragraph, but occasionally fades out into whimsy over the long stretch of an essay.

Dogs, hurricanes, village characters, Democrats, Republicans, Florida seashores, a girl circus rider, a coon, pigeons, and old railroads receive his nostalgic approval. The essay on Thoreau em-

bodies a passionately sustained admiration, and this makes an exciting occasion. Modern times—its machinery, television, factory farming, city bustle, bad grammar—receives a dose of coolness through a series of cautious dry, humorous personal accounts. White has developed a trick that might be called the semisequitur. He often concludes one of these essays with a note of not-quite-relevant pedantry, as if to say, "Well, there I go, raising my voice again. But listen, what really concerns me is: The back kitchen got renovated."

He need not be so shy. He can compose a beautiful, helpless evocation of the weakness that overtakes a man moving out of an apartment, disposing of the accumulated years. Or he can pay a lively, funny, youthfully exuberant tribute to an old car—much superior to the Detroit product of 1958, he decided. (Moderate in most matters, he

admits that he did buy a later model.)

At his best, raising his privileged voice, White vigorously protests the abuses of power and argues that the nation must function as "the true friend and guardian of sovereign man." He is passionate about Thoreau, about disarmament, about the need for rational states and international cooperation. He does not mince words in his prescription: world government. He notes that he was misquoted in the *Congressional Record* as urging "supernatural cooperation," when what he actually urged was cooperation by "supranational" means. It is an appropriate irony that a writer who joins a finicky concern with language to large humanitarian hopes was spooked by a typo. It leads him to wonder if maybe that's the way salvation will have to come—supernaturally.

In the meantime, despite the printers' revision of his ideas, E. B. White's complaints and celebrations will continue to provide some sense under the glare of the rockets. This supernatural, supranational man, wearing his bright orange cap in order not to be shot by the hunters, bears his good wits back and forth between Maine and New York, Cape Canaveral and the United Nations, the fading past and the dim future.

No Retreat from Reason

"The Strangled Cry," by John Strachey (Sloane. 256 pp. \$4.50), contains the "unparliamentary papers" of a British M.P. and ex-Communist. Charles Collingwood is a correspondent for CBS News.

By CHARLES COLLINGWOOD

"THE STRANGLED CRY" is a collection of what John Strachey, Labour M.P. for Dundee West and former Minister of State for War, calls his "unparliamentary" papers. He suggests that they are, "perhaps, too outspoken for a politician safely to have written." Certainly no one in the Congress of the United States could safely have written them. But then, no one could have been elected to the Congress of the United States who had written "The Coming Struggle for Power."

That earlier book was one of the most influential left-wing political tracts of the 1930s, and made John Strachey both famous and controversial. He now frankly calls it "pro-Communist." Although all the pieces in the present collection were written after his break with the Communists in 1940, the Com-

munist experience and the seductions of Communism form a theme that runs through many of these essays. Strachey is fascinated with Communism from the special point of view of one who has been deeply involved with it and then lost his faith. He has not exchanged the mystique of Communism for an equally mystical anti-Communism, as did Whitaker Chambers—whom, incidentally, he discusses with sympathy, understanding, and complete disagreement—but he feels that those who have not been touched by Communism underestimate its power.

"It is, no doubt," he says, "one of the irritating characteristics of all those who have been, to any considerable degree, through the Communist experience that they, at heart, consider that all those who have not are in some degree superficial."

He chides John Kenneth Galbraith, whom he greatly admires, for his unwillingness to share his own fascination with the subject. "Galbraith," he says in an otherwise highly flattering memoir, "is, and always has been, deeply (and in my view culpably) uninterested in Communism."

Strachey's preoccupation with the

Communist experience is most evident in the title group of essays, which analyze the rejection of Communism, overt or implied, in the work of four authors, Arthur Koestler, George Orwell, Boris Pasternak, and Whittaker Chambers. Mr. Strachey knows what they are talking about and his comments on their work are both original and provocative. The strangled cry John Strachey hears in their books and deplores is the rejection, not only of Communism, but of the whole tradition of rationalism as well. He argues that it is a return to reason, not a retreat from it, that is needed.

Reason is Strachey's guide, and it is the tone of reasonableness that makes his judgments so persuasive. But it is sentiment that gives all his writing its charm, whether you are in the end persuaded or not. For Mr. Strachey feels about people and things besides reasoning about them, and that is doubtless why he is successful at the politician's trade. In "The Strangled Cry" he tells what he felt about the war (the classic "Digging for Mrs. Miller" is included), the erotic sculpture adorning the Indian temple of Konarak, and some of the movers and shakers of our time, from Leon Trotsky to Lord Keynes.

What he has to say about all these things is always interesting and frequently illuminating. Besides, he writes much better than any politician should. That is the most "unparliamentary" thing about these essays.

**FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1008**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1008 will be found in the next issue.

GWKPLRLGWNAR OAN QWN

GKLYNNAR LT ANMLPEQ-

KLY.

ALSNAQ WOAGNA.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1007

An old Chinese proverb: If thine enemy wrong thee, buy each of his children a drum.

FICTION

Voice from a Bosnian Inferno

"The Vizier's Elephant: Three Novellas," by Ivo Andric, translated from the Serbo-Croat by Drenka Willen (Harcourt, Brace & World. 247 pp. \$4.75), and "Devil's Yard," by Ivo Andric, translated from the Serbo-Croat by Kenneth Johnstone (Grove. 137 pp. \$3.95), take as themes both the folk-lore and the historic past of the Nobel Prize-winner's native Bosnia. Michael Ginsburg is professor of Slavic Culture at Indiana University.

By MICHAEL GINSBURG

IN HIS native country Ivo Andric is regarded as one of the greatest contemporary writers, not only as the author of three novels that enjoy enormous popularity in Yugoslavia, but also for his many short stories. In this respect he follows in a long literary tradition: the short story has for generations been the most popular genre of Yugoslav prose, deeply rooted as it is both historically and artistically in the folk tales of the different regions of the country. Even in the early days of his literary career the short story was Andric's favorite form of expression; since the completion of his three novels, almost twenty years ago, the short story has become his personal hallmark.

Until recently the American reader has scarcely had an opportunity to become acquainted with Andric the story-teller. It is true that one of his masterpieces appeared in an anthology published in English by the Yugoslav Committee for Foreign Cultural Relations. That was "The Story of a Bridge," in which he tells in exquisite prose the legend of a beautiful bridge over the River Zhepa, whose single white arch strikingly resembles the bridge still spanning the Neretva in Mostar, the capital of Hercegovina. However, it is not likely that this publication has fallen into the hands of many American readers. For that reason the appearance of two books containing four stories must be welcomed by those whose interest in Andric has been aroused by "The Bridge on the Drina."

Ivo Andric is one of those artists who like to people their canvases with large galleries of human figures; an endless



Ivo Andric—"life in its endless variety."

procession of major and minor participants parades through the pages of his stories. They come from all walks of life; they belong to different races and nations; they often have nothing in common with each other, but they all contribute to the re-creation of life in its endless variety. Reading an Andric story brings to mind the milling world of a Breughel painting.

Andric is a quiet, dispassionate narrator, and his stories have the dignity of epic works. In his research for themes he constantly returns to his native Bosnia, whose past is rich in colorful legends which, Andric says, are as elusive as the sly, swift trout in the mountain brooks of his homeland; a stranger rarely spots a legend lurking in the memories of the Bosnian people, but for Andric the folklore of his people is an open book.

The story which is perhaps the best among these now published, "Anika's Times," belongs to the Bosnian group. It has some of the elements of a Greek tragedy. The *dramatis personae* are entangled in a net of circumstances that sap their lives and bring about their inescapable destruction, moral and physical. Thus an episode that occurred in Vishegrad, a small Bosnian town where Andric spent part of his childhood, assumes, as often happens in his writings, the proportions of a symbolic drama. Two themes, the curse engendered by