

Hammar skjöld

Continued from page 38

for love. Mr. Auden speaks of Hammar-skjöld in his foreword as a great, good, and lovable man. One trusts that he was all those things; and yet there is, in the self-contemning spirit of his book, an implicit defection from the life celebrated—ironically but seriously—by Mr. Auden's poetry, the life of modest achievement, decent failure, honorable refusal to despise the gifts of the gods.

Apparently, the book posed special problems of translation, as the unidiomatic title itself suggests. Leif Sjöberg is reported to have prepared a literal English version which Mr. Auden used as the basis of his own text, reworked and polished in consultation with his Swedish collaborator. I do not find the resulting translation attractive, but that is probably because I feel a kind of respectful hostility toward this literary enterprise as a whole.

There is a certain indelicacy about these cryptic utterances—indelicacy, at least, in publishing them, for it suggests the author's faith that his most fragmentary or private speech must be momentous for us; on the other hand, in my judgment, the book does not have the self-transcending quality of a finished work of art, which would make any such objection irrelevant.

Moreover, I distrust the religious resignation that springs mostly from a fastidiousness before the things of this world, a shrinking and distaste that is, in Hamlet's words, ever three parts coward. Now, Hammar skjöld's life and even these posthumous writings scarcely suggest that he was any such thing. But I know little of Hammar skjöld and, for good reason, much about *l'homme moyen sensuel*.

So, for my purposes, I conceive the virtue of this book to lie chiefly in its being a spiritual irritant, provoking us by its other-worldly animus to rededicate ourselves to man.

Executive. Thus, as it stands today, President Kennedy's last book is a personal charge to the American people to value immigration as integral to continuing national growth.

A Nation of Immigrants is written for popular understanding, using historic data supplemented by concise commentary. During the nineteenth century, President Kennedy notes, one in ten of the new immigrants failed to survive the unpampered crossing from Europe to America. They came in search of freedom of worship, to escape political oppression, or for complex economic reasons. And if New York's streets were not paved with gold, at least the famine and hardship at home made the brash new country a worthy goal. Even if the new immigrant failed to realize his dream for himself, he could still retain it for his children.

President Kennedy, in calling for major revision of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (the McCarran-Walter Act), points out that 3,500 special immigration bills were introduced in the 87th Congress alone to overcome impossible rigidities in our basic immigration statutes. Indeed, he states, private immigration bills make up half our modern legislation. His detailed recommendations to Congress are contained in his message of July 23, 1963, reprinted here, calling for reunion of families, changes in preference standards, updating of medical criteria, and pooling of unused quotas. He flatly asks for abolition of the Asia-Pacific Triangle restrictive clause, which has drawn the severest criticism since its enactment.

President Kennedy took time from the world's most demanding duties to prepare this document as a cogent message to the American people. It has validity today, with Congress stalemated on immigration reform despite President Johnson's special message last January.

However, as the final literary work of a beloved public figure, this book has even greater appeal than the specialized subject it covers so well. It is a poem of praise to a growing America that would have pleased Walt Whitman.

In Praise of All People

A Nation of Immigrants, by John F. Kennedy (Harper & Row. 111 pp. \$2.95), urges the American people to recognize that newcomers are essential to our growth. James MacCracken is on the board of directors of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and other similar organizations.

By JAMES MACCRACKEN

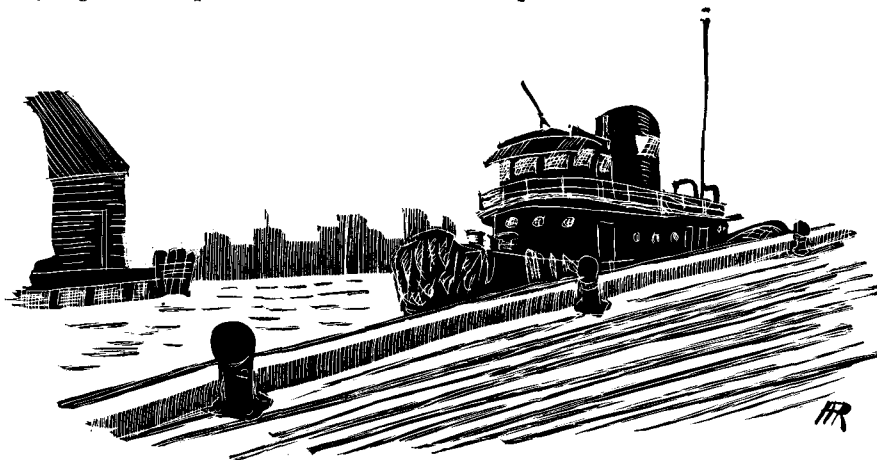
JOHN F. KENNEDY was completing major revisions of *A Nation of Immigrants* when tragedy struck. The book, with an introduction by Robert F. Kennedy, is a simple testament of faith to a growing America enriched by a continuing flow of immigrants.

Repeatedly throughout his public career President Kennedy gave special attention to the need for reforms in the immigration laws. "Our investment in new citizens has always been a valuable source of our strength," was the concluding sentence in his special message to Congress on July 23, 1963. His personal interest in this subject marked his six years as congressman and his two terms as United States Senator. Working in close harmony with Senate colleagues, including Senator John O. Pastore of Rhode Island, Mr. Kennedy secured major legislative action to admit refugees and to reunite families separated by legal technicalities.

In 1958 Mr. Kennedy took time to

draw up the first edition of *A Nation of Immigrants*. This interpretive study, published as a pamphlet in the One Nation Library by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, summarized briefly the history of immigration and challenged the American people to seek adoption of an enlightened policy consonant with our country's absorption capacity and national interest. Attractively printed and effectively illustrated, the pamphlet presented Mr. Kennedy's views, consonant with his senatorial responsibilities.

The present revised edition is much more than a mere updating of his philosophy. The text, illustrations, and specific recommendations are filled out and enlarged commensurately with Mr. Kennedy's greater responsibilities as Chief



Adam and Evil in the Garden

The Interrogation, by J. M. G. Le Clézio, translated from the French by Daphne Woodward (Atheneum. 243 pp. \$4.50), a first novel, exemplifies the contemporary search for a secular mysticism. Henri Peyre is professor of French literature at Yale.

By HENRI PEYRE

LITERARY prizes are so numerous in France and their winners have lately so often been traditional novelists of scant originality that the acclaim of the critics, if not that of the gregarious readers, goes preferably to those writers who just miss winning them. Such was the case last December with the Goncourt award. Armand Lanoux, who was selected after much debate and a tie vote when the President of the Ten threw in his ballot for him, is an honorable, solid story-teller in the tradition of Zola. His book portrayed the return of a Canadian soldier to the Normandy beaches, where he had landed in 1944, with the melancholy reflections of a disillusioned veteran.

J. M. G. Le Clézio, who was Lanoux's rival for the prize, showed far more technical skill, a youthful and impetuous vigor, and a mastery of style truly astounding in a first novel. He is only twenty-four. Without a moment's hesitation the journalists who wait for the announcement of the Goncourt award at the famous restaurant where the deliberations occur gave Le Clézio their own prize, named after Théophraste Renaudot, the founder of the first European newspaper over three centuries ago. A halo of publicity at once surrounded the rising star just discovered. The jacket of this American edition quotes a few of the eulogies poured over the book. Much harm has lately been done to new talents through such high-powered promotion, and a debunking of the "new novel" of five years ago is already taking place in the fickle literary world of Paris.

Le Clézio does not follow the devices or the portentously inflated philosophy of Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, or Claude Simon. The short and disarming foreword seems to point to a good and solid head and to a modest reticence toward the claims of literary advertisers. A very small volume with a long title, *Le jour où Beaumont fit connaissance avec sa douleur*, which appeared six

months after this novel, and depicted a man suffering from a violent toothache and crying for help, or for a remedy against the metaphysical, Kafkaesque anguish set in motion by the physical pain, demonstrates that the psychological and stylistic mastery of the young author is remarkable. If he is not spoiled by success, Le Clézio should prove to be one of the genuine talents among the writers born during World War II.

His literary lineage, like that of many young French writers, does not derive from American novelists (although Le Clézio, who comes from Southern France and is half English, has read some of them and admires Salinger in particular). It can be traced at once to Kafka and Beckett, and to the two most influential novels of the mid-twentieth century in France, Sartre's *Nausea* and Camus's *The Stranger*. There is no plot in *The Interrogation*, and events hardly count or mean anything. There is no character study of anyone but the protagonist, who speaks of himself alternately as "I" and as "he." Fragments of a factual diary, devoid of introspection; bits of letters, equally unliterary and crude, written to a girl with whom he copulates occasionally on the floor or on a billiard table, and jerky dialogues break into the long monologue of the one personage in the novel, Adam.



Adam Pollo is a man of culture, who has perhaps read the mystics and certainly a few philosophers, and been seduced by the ideas of Antoine Roquentin of *Nausea*. He is twenty-seven, has served in the army, and may have spent time in a mental hospital. He wanders around the parks, the cafés, and the beaches of Nice. He does not declaim against society or take pride in his alienation from his fellow beings, like a Byronic hero or the ambitious upstarts of Balzac's and Stendhal's fiction. Without any display of words, he feels totally indifferent to the mediocre life around him. As his first name hints, he wants to begin all over again in an earthly paradise.

He settles in a house by the sea which is temporarily inhabited. He rapes a half-willing girl named Michèle in the rain. Later, she wearies of his cynicism and his constant need for money (naturally he does not work) and denounces him to the police. In a weird scene, the most haunting in the book, he sadistically murders a white rat with billiard balls and at the same time is fascinated by his victim. Earlier, he followed a dog in a similar mood of curiosity and envy. The concern of this novelist is that of other men of the younger generation: to protest against all the lies of mass media, of publicity, of government through suggestion with words and on the screen; to revolt silently against the sham of the adults who have too easily compromised with a world of greed. These younger writers are bent upon exploring how much of the innocence of animals can be recaptured, and whether the rejection of all links with society, of a past, of any projection into a future, can gain these ascetic rebels the peace of mystics without faith.

Adam, however, once he has attempted to merge his being into that of animals, plants, or pebbles, emerges from his solitude and, like a prophet leaving his desert to indoctrinate men, delivers long speeches to a listless crowd in the city. He is picked up by the police and sent to a psychiatric ward. There, in a brilliantly satiric scene, the doctor, his medical students, and his aides question Adam clumsily. They are baffled by the strange and brutal man's quest for a state of secular mysticism.

The translation of a story alternately realistic and philosophical, coarse and pretentious, was not easy to accomplish. Daphne Woodward has met the challenge with courage and surprising talent. Why, however, translate the French title, *Le Procès-Verbal*, as if it meant another interrogation by a tribunal of the kind the cinema and literature have made sickeningly commonplace, when it actually points to the objective tone of an unsentimental record by a solitary and innocent Adam of his spiritual adventure?