

LETTERS TO THE Book Review Editor



the modern age as an extremely critical re-examination of ourselves.

PAUL KROPP.

Buffalo, N.Y.

How About a Few Solutions?

WHERE OH WHERE is the novel of hope, of compassion, of wonder at the glorious aspects of modern life? I do not ask for the simple boy-meets-girl-presto-happy-ending plot, but for a meaningful experience of the best of life. Are we never to mature past the clinical analysis of problem identification? I think the ills have been outlined clearly enough—we know them. Now, be challenged, authors, to present a few solutions, an idea or two—just what does modern man do about finding his identity and gaining self-respect in a machine age filled with injustice and the bomb? . . . Somewhere there must be a flower of hope, a man with principle, an idea with promise. . . .

I don't believe the novel will die, but it does need a potent injection of love to grow straight and tall.

JANE JONJAK.

Gordon, Wis.

Issue of Sweets and Bolts

QUOTE FROM "The Crisis in Creativity," by Emile Capouya: "In the very best case, then, 'Poetry makes nothing happen' represents the pride of Lucifer sicklied o'er with the pale cast of Alice Ben Bolt." . . . Mr. Capouya has fallen into a common error in thinking "Alice Ben Bolt" was the lady's complete name. The oldest daughter of a union between two old threaded fastener families—the Sweets and the Bolts—her full name was: Doanchu ReMembre Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt.

HOWARD G. WANDS.

Kansas City, Mo.

Genocide

I WAS ASTOUNDED to read the following, by Granville Hicks, in his review of Irving Malin's *Jews and Americans* [SR, May 1]: "Events of the past quarter of a century—particularly of course, the massacre of the German Jews—have served to make members of the American-Jewish community more acutely aware of the Jewish elements in their heritage."

Surely Mr. Hicks must be aware [that] it was the mass murder of European Jewry (not just German Jewry) which made American Jews more aware of their Jewishness.

PEARL CHARIE BLACK.

Pittsburgh, Pa.

Thomas, Not Tolkien

IN HIS REVIEW OF *The Cook* [SR, May 1] Nicholas Samstag attributes four lines of an old ballad to J. R. R. Tolkien. Actually these lines are from *Thomas Rhymer*, Child ballad #37. They are spoken by the "queen of fair Elfland" to Thomas. It seems to go back to a fifteenth-century manuscript. A text appears in *Traditional British Ballads* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, Bartlett Jere Whiting, ed.) and it is sung by Ewan McColl on Folkways FG 3509, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. . . .

ROGER GANS.

Los Angeles, Calif.

Matchless

RECENT CRITICISM of Granville Hicks [LETTERS TO THE BOOK REVIEW EDITOR, SR, May 1] for his review of Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* [SR, Mar. 20] prompts me to write. Not only do Hicks's comments about this novel seem justified to me, but they are really mild in comparison with those of other critics—Stanley Edgar Hyman's, for instance. It is significant that so honestly had a novel is attracting widespread critical and popular attention, and that Hicks should be criticized as a "moralist" because he objects to the excesses of Mailer's writing.

Granville Hicks is one of the very few critics—let alone critics who publish weekly—whose opinions are highly valued by those committed to or interested in contemporary writing. He maintains a consistently high standard of critical reviewing that seems to me matched absolutely nowhere in any of the popular slick magazines. . . .

JOYCE CAROL OATES.

Detroit, Mich.

GRANVILLE HICKS gets 100 per cent for his fair analysis of *An American Dream*. As an admirer of *The Naked and the Dead*, I'm glad Mailer has his brand-new half-million dollars; I'm only sorry he did what he did to get it.

I don't mind the truth of filth in the human picture; but this is hurried, careless work. . . .

ELLSWORTH TAYLOR.

Honolulu, Hawaii

SINCE I AM NOT among the "intelligentsia" who seem to count themselves one step ahead of Mr. Hicks, I look forward to his weekly reviews, and have always found his observations and style highly stimulating. . . .

JOYCE STEVENS BROWN.

Baltimore, Md.

Morison vs. Beard

I FOUND RICHARD HEFFNER's review of Samuel Eliot Morison's *Oxford History of the American People* [SR, May 1] misleading in one respect. Morison's presidential address before the American Historical Association did not attack Charles Beard for his notion of history as an "act of faith." Quite significantly, Morison titled the address "Faith of a Historian." And although he approved of Ranke's dictum about history "as it actually happened," he went on to note that "complete, 'scientific' objectivity is unattainable by the historian." Morison's real quarrel with Beard was that Beard sometimes used this obvious truth as an excuse to rearrange history without regard for the evidence, to praise his friends and flay his foes as if the world consisted solely of "good guys" and "bad guys." If Morison's opinions about the Constitutional Convention and the nature of slavery have

changed over the years, it may be because historians have learned a great many things since he first began writing; and Morison is to be praised rather than condemned for keeping up with these discoveries.

BILL MONTGOMERY.

Austin, Tex.

Mss. for Taxes

I DON'T THINK David Dempsey seems aware in his article "The Great Manuscript Rush" [SR, May 1] that the prices paid for T. S. Eliot's transcript of *The Waste Land*, or for the Maugham or Greene manuscripts he mentions, were paid at an auction in aid of the London Library, which was seeking to pay off back taxes, since it had been refused exemption. This puts a different light on the evidence Dempsey offers. He is wrong in saying that E. M. Forster "came away with \$18,200" for the manuscript of *A Passage to India*. Forster came away without a penny, for he had most generously contributed his most valuable manuscript to the same cause. Bidding on such occasions is always generous, and I think it unfortunate that Dempsey should have made an example of an occasion which offered him top-notch names for his article, but at which nothing was sold for private gain.

LEON EDEL.

New York, N.Y.

Good Deal

YOU ARE TO BE CONGRATULATED on David Dempsey's article "The Package Deal" [SR, Apr. 17]. The publishing industry is to many of us a fascinating topic. My classmates and I look forward to reading future articles of the same caliber and trust that you won't keep us waiting.

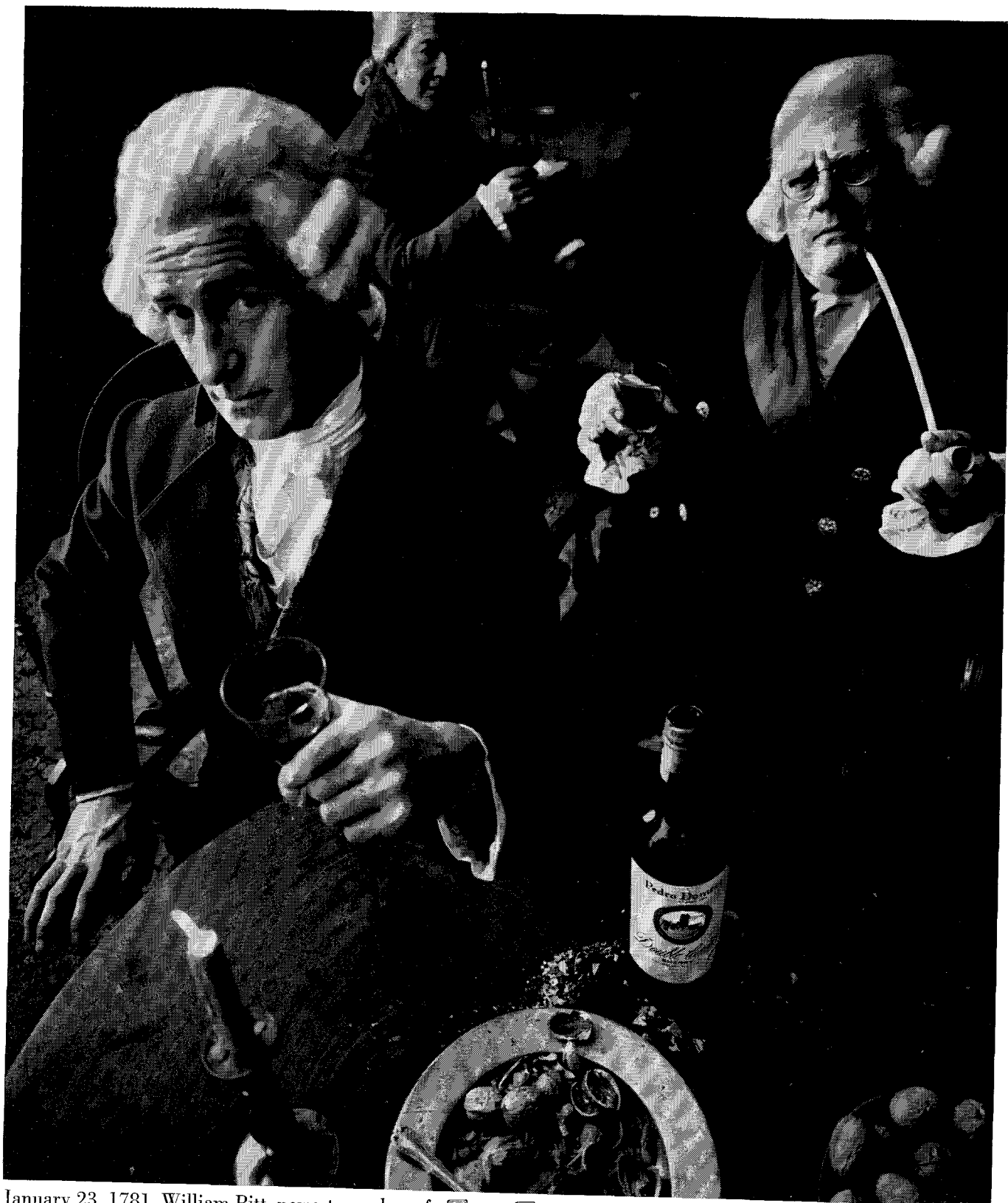
ROBERT W. O'BRIEN,
North Yarmouth Academy.

Yarmouth, Me.

Incapable of Greatness?

EMILE CAPOUYA, in his article "The Crisis in Creativity" [SR, Apr. 17], seems to accuse today's society of murdering the novel and literature in general. He writes that a "devaluation of all values" has created a world incapable of producing great literature; and perhaps he is correct. Perhaps the modern society is so saturated with the idea of death that it can no longer express itself. Perhaps our writers are so lacking in spirit and sensitivity that their creations are aimless babblings.

Yet, this pessimistic picture of the state of things may be only the superficial view of a basic readjustment of society. Today's writers certainly have discarded the standard values, but only to discover the basic misery of the human condition. This discovery may well be the cause of a lacking in spirit, but to deduce from it a lack of greatness is foolish indeed. Rather, let us judge



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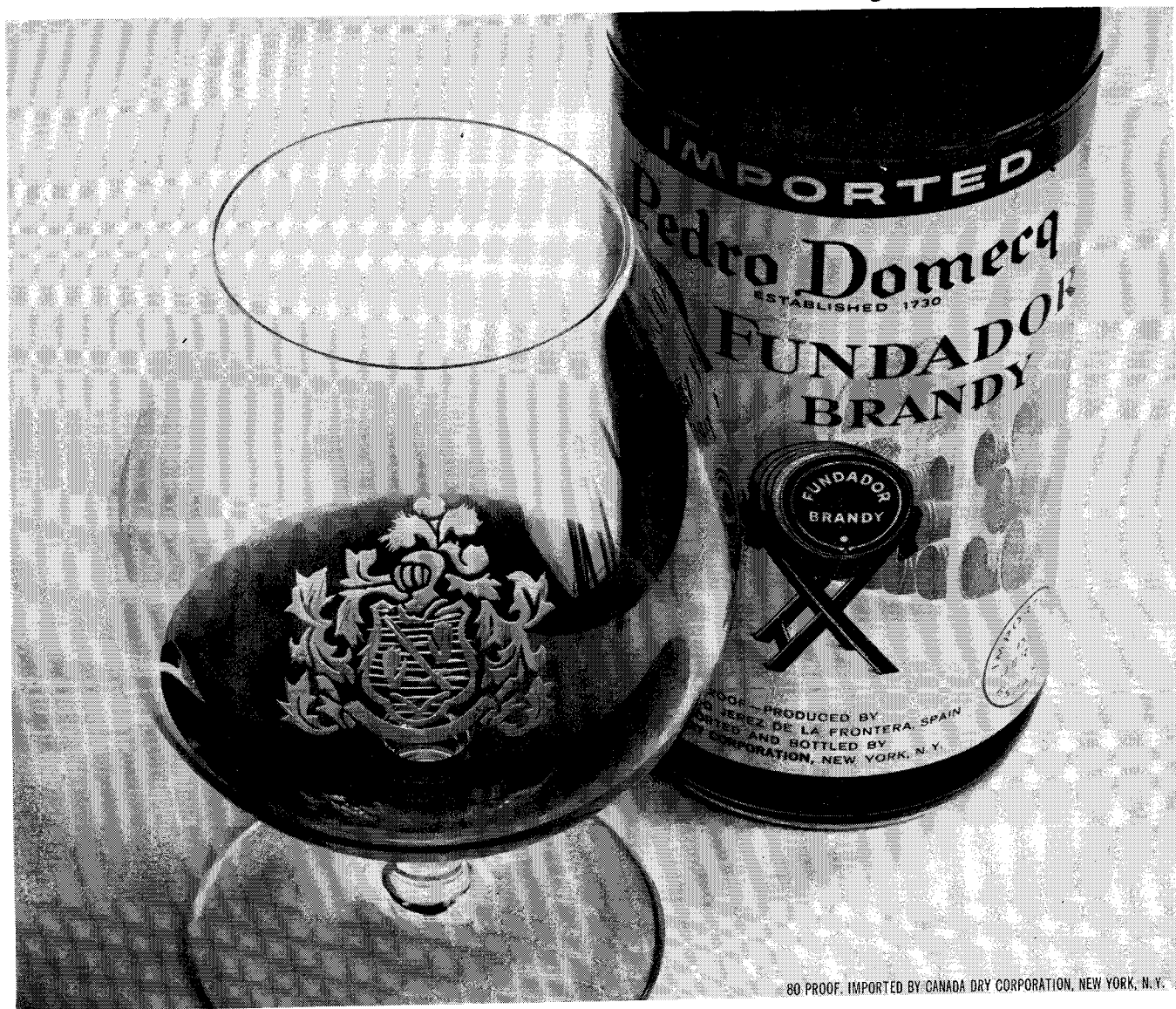


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Looking Back, He Wasn't So Bad

The Last of the Mandarins: Diem of Vietnam, by Anthony Trawick Bouscaren (Duchesne University Press. 174 pp. \$3.95), castigates as politically naïve correspondents of the American press who were influential in the removal of the late Vietnamese president. John M. Allison has been Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs and American Ambassador to Japan, Indonesia, and Czechoslovakia.

By JOHN M. ALLISON

MORRIS WEST's novel *The Ambassador* left one with a sneaking feeling that Diem, or Cong, as West called him, was really not such a bad man and that perhaps the Americans had been somewhat hasty in getting rid of him. Now comes Anthony Bouscaren's short biography of Diem, which is dedicated to proving this thesis up to the hilt. Not that Professor Bouscaren says in so many words that it was the Americans who got rid of Diem but he makes it clear that the generals would never have acted without at least tacit American approval.

Unfortunately for his thesis, the Professor oversimplifies his story and ignores important factors such as the strength of regionalism and the desire of the influential and largely non-Communist groups of Buddhists, students, and younger military officers "to find and assert a Vietnamese identity," as George Carver points out in the April issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Carver makes a good case for the claim that the groups just mentioned were against Diem, as much, if not more, because to them he represented a foreign system and a foreign religion as because of his alleged repressions and police-state methods. Diem and his essentially foreign-style government would have had to go eventually, implies Carver; the generals, with alleged American backing, merely hastened the day.

In spite of its deficiencies, however, Professor Bouscaren's book serves a useful purpose and reminds us of factors we often forget in thinking about foreign affairs and particularly the tangled situation in Southeast Asia.

We see again the tragic stubbornness and short-sightedness of the colonial powers in dealing with their subject

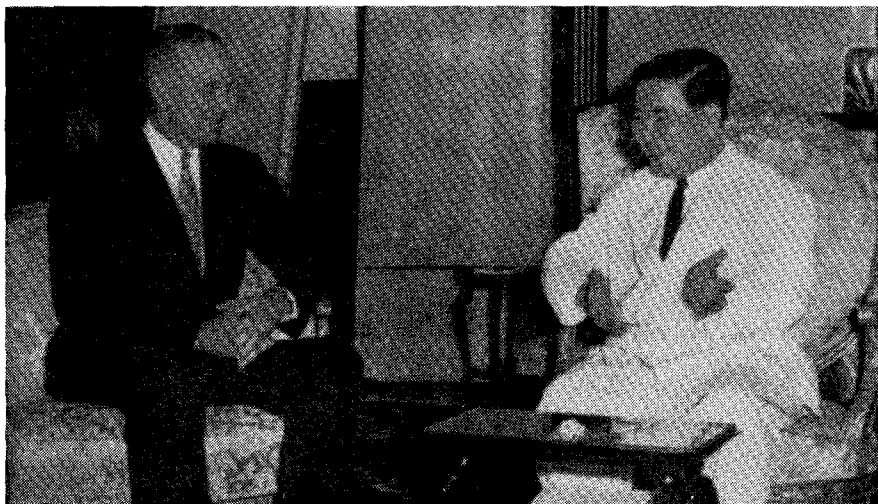
peoples. Diem consistently refused to cooperate with the French while they insisted on maintaining tight control, but this book makes clear that he would have cooperated with the French had they been willing to give the Indo-Chinese states Dominion status similar to that which the British had given to India and Pakistan. While this would eventually have probably led to complete independence outside the French Union, there might well, it seems to me, have been sufficient time to build up a strong, stable Vietnamese régime which could have had a good chance to resist the Communist subversion of today. But no, the French insisted on keeping all, and, as did the Dutch in Indonesia, ended by losing everything. A strong case can be made for the assertion that the French and the Dutch have done more to advance the cause of Communism in Southeast Asia than either Moscow or Peking.

PROFESSOR Bouscaren's chief villain is the American press or, rather, that part of it represented by young, idealistic, and politically naïve correspondents such as David Halberstam of the *New York Times*. The anti-Diem campaign indulged in by these young men is credited by the author with giving strength to a State Department group who were influential in getting policies adopted which resulted in getting rid of Diem. The young correspondents did not understand the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of setting up a modern, American-style democratic government among the illiterate peasants and the

authoritarian-minded élite, to whom the French had given no experience of representative government.

The exaggerations of the press, which appeared to give substance to the charge that Diem's Buddhist opponents were waging a religious rather than a political war, are detailed and castigated. Bouscaren claims that all the agitation about the closing of the Buddhist pagodas was the result of the closing "of about a dozen" out of some 4,000. The Buddhists have been infiltrated by the Communists, according to the author. Professor Bouscaren also implies that Thich Tri Quang, who has been one of their chief leaders, is, if not a card-carrying Communist, at least a strong sympathizer. His brother is said by the French to be working in Ho Chi Minh's headquarters in Communist Vietnam where his duties are the direction of subversion in South Vietnam. And much stress is laid upon the fact that after the anti-Diem coup, the war in South Vietnam took a decided turn for the worse.

Whatever the truth may be regarding such matters, the author does succeed in persuading the reader that Diem was a personally honest, intelligent, and dedicated Vietnamese patriot who had the long-term interests of his people at heart. It is not claimed that he was a true democrat but instead that he knew enough about his country and people to realize that what the author calls "the little-comprehended idea of democracy" was too weak a weapon with which to beat Communism. For Diem, the defeat of Communism came first; democracy could come later. Only history will tell whether he was right, although Professor Bouscaren's book attempts to give the answer now. He is not completely convincing but his book is worth reading for what it tells about the dangers of letting emotion and prejudices take the place of understanding, sympathy, and firmness in dealing with peoples of Southeast Asia.



—U.P.I.

President Diem talks to General Taylor—"democracy could come later."