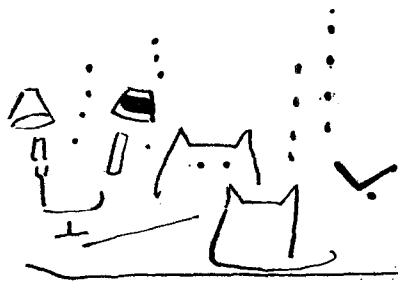


massing" of the Vietnamese population into these strategic hamlets. Several of the American authors under review would also agree that Diem and the Saigon government lost the peasants' support through this action.

According to seemingly authentic documents and statements in these books, the Vietcong claim that their main job is to establish themselves "in the hearts of the people." As the American authors emphasize, this is the real problem in Vietnam: political and psychological victory as much as military success in the "paddies and hamlets," as Mecklin puts it. And Browne and Halberstam both warn that there is much more to the Vietcong than terrorism and "something more to winning a revolutionary war than helicopters." The theme of "a war of men and ideas," in Halberstam's phrase, threads its way through these books, spotlighting the need for effective political action in village and countryside.

Halberstam believes that the mistakes of the Vietnamese and Americans caused the war to deteriorate seriously in 1962 and 1963, to the point of near loss. He severely indicts the Ngo family—particularly Mr. and Mrs. Nhu—on many counts which this reviewer endorses. He sums up the tragedy of a good man when he says that Diem, "who could never have been corrupted by worldly goods, became corrupted by power and pride." That explains his final fall, despite his earlier services to Vietnam's nationalist revolution.



What began in 1954-56 as a nationalist revolution ended as a mandarin state of repression, whose fatal cancer was Nhu—husband and wife. Browne, Mecklin, and Halberstam all expose the Nhuses' pretentious ambitions and morbid suspicions that poisoned official relations between the Americans and the Vietnamese and alienated practically all urban Vietnamese, as well as many in the countryside. Mecklin also correctly portrays Diem as neither a popular figure nor a good administrator. He became not only the Nhuses' accomplice, but their prisoner during the last months of his life. While these books all question the wisdom of our embracing Diem in the first place, they agree that we could never have separated the two brothers to save Diem or avoid the inevitable débacle. The real issue, as Halberstam notes, was whether the U.S. would have done better in that period to attach important political conditions to its aid and insist on Diem's and Nhuses' accepting them, rather than backing down as we apparently did.

The Diem débacle is excellently re-

counted nearly minute-by-minute by Halberstam and Mecklin. A popular revolt, crystallized into the so-called Buddhist movement, became an attractive and feasible rallying ground for opposition elements as the Nhu repression grew. Both authors indicate an apparent lack of American contact with Vietnamese opinion, not only in this particular crisis but during the entire period under review. Perhaps American officials who were there at the time would strongly disagree; but it is disturbing to read the judgment of these authors that Americans failed to reach the people or to keep in touch with what was really happening politically, or even with the actual movements and operations of Vietnamese military units. There seems also to have been a vertical communications gap between the American Mission in Saigon and its many civilian and military advisers and technicians out in the field. This is probably the inherent blind spot in an orthodox approach to social upheavals.

WHAT emerges even more significantly from the coup of 1963 is the evident failure of the Americans and Vietnamese to be ready with a new political program and a better political organization. The rule is never to "coup" without follow-through; and we will pay for that lapse for a long time.

Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins, while portrayed as likable, dedicated, vigorous men, are criticized too hastily, I think. They were executing policies determined in Washington: first to restore and maintain some semblance of a working relationship with Diem as long as possible, and then to carry out the Kennedy-McNamara-Taylor counter-insurgency program on a massive and immediate scale. Despite some criticism of him, Ambassador Lodge, who was playing a difficult new game, is also sympathetically cast in these books. We must remember that it is hard for men in such positions during fast-moving, critical developments to knock the team while cheering it on. No one scores touchdowns that way.

These books make valuable contributions by telling us much about the "enemy" or the "other" side, and about ourselves from the Vietnamese viewpoint. Some of this may be hard to take, but it will test our mettle and prove our maturity if we can go on to learn from our mistakes. All these authors consider Vietnam vital. Except for Burchett, they end on a hopeful note for us: they believe that by learning our lessons and improving political and military operations we can achieve success, although they do not define it.

As David Halberstam concludes, "We do have something to offer these emerging nations."

To Eric, Not to Make Too Much of Time

By Harold Witt

SELL Kool Aid always on the summer road—no, just for now be glad you're not yet nine, watching those tadpoles sprouting into toads, coming through sunshine and leafdappled light. All boys but Peter Pan stop running home goldhanded, holding rapture's butterfly.

But for a little while yell to all those grime green kids and grown ups going by, "Delicious flavors, cheap, 2¢, ice cold," and wondering, bend, before you're old and sly, as tails drop off and toadfeet slowly grow; dig the dirt deep, my still nine summers' boy.

Myth maker, player with a bow, arrowing apples from the timeworn tree, eyeing TV; you don't fool me, I know how much you wish for cruel maturity of size and age, and do not want to be, even one summer, only eight or so.

What's Going On Way Up North?

O Canada: An American's Notes on Canadian Culture, by Edmund Wilson (Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 245 pp. \$4.95), branches from our northern neighbor's literature into his politics. A former Canadian newspaperman, Robert T. Elson was the first editor of *Time* magazine's Canadian edition.

By ROBERT T. ELSON

EDMUND WILSON pays Canadian authors a compliment they rarely receive in their own country or elsewhere. In this book, a reprint of his Canadian articles in *The New Yorker*, he finds many of them underestimated in the world of contemporary literature—and the whole Canadian literary scene alive and stimulating. Americans generally accustomed to regarding the gray Canadian scene as a cultural back bay in the English-speaking world may be surprised by some of Mr. Wilson's judgments just as his unaccustomed praise infuriated one Canadian critic. Canada, it has often been said, is a triumph of politics over geography and economics—and sometimes it seems over common sense.

Canadians can often be childish in their resentment of things American, as was the Toronto critic who terms Mr. Wilson's praise of Toronto's Morley Callaghan "the effrontery of American imperialism." But, as Mr. Wilson observes, the main reason for the common underestimation of Mr. Callaghan's work "may be the general incapacity for believing that a writer whose work may be mentioned without absurdity in association with Chekhov and Turgenev can possibly be functioning in Toronto."

Mr. Wilson's book is not a definitive study of Canadian writing but exactly what he says it is—a series of notes on the Canadian scene which branch from literature into politics. He argues that Canada is passing through a triple crisis: (1) a struggle with the United States, which is primarily industrial and financial but also moral; (2) a struggle between French- and English-speaking Canada, which has resulted on the part of the former in a movement for complete independence; and (3) a drive for drastic reform within the Catholic Church in Quebec, set off by the innovating policies of Pope John and the breakup of the old boss system with the death of

Quebec's boss of bosses, the long-lived Maurice Duplessis.

Ever a man for the underdog, Wilson sees English Canadian resistance to absorption by the United States as "an instinct for self-preservation against the prodding and encroachments of centralized power." But this, of course, has been the central fact of Canadian history: Canadians do not want to be Americans. There was a time, indeed, when there was a real American threat to Canadian independence. It exists no longer and in recent years, it has seemed to me, Canadians have had a regrettable tendency to exaggerate the dangers of American economic investment, which has contributed largely to giving them the second highest living standard in the world. They have never understood the extraordinary economic pressures that would be mobilized in the U.S. Congress against any bill for the political

union of Canada and the United States.

The new move for independence in French Canada is serious and tragic for it does threaten the existence of Canada as we know it. On the other hand, transforming the province of Quebec into independent Laurentia could only result, in the long run, in the retrogression of a society that is just now emerging from a narrow and parochial past.

Mr. Wilson finds that the predominant tone of English Canadian comment on these preoccupying issues is, "Well perhaps we ought to take stock and find out what we've really got"—while the tone of the French Canadian is one of "anguished solicitude." In Canada Mr. Wilson says he was made aware of the importance of nationalism as a stimulating force in literature. "One finds oneself here in a world which though more inbred and limited is subjected to higher emotional pressure—a society in which writers have the stimulus of a common discontent, a common interest in preserving their language and the excitement of a common animosity."

Mr. Wilson has written a provocative report on a country which at this time merits more American interest in what is really going on there.

In the Footsteps of a World Spirit

Journey to the Morea: Travels in Greece, by Nikos Kazantzakis, translated from the Greek by F. A. Reed (Simon & Schuster. 190 pp. \$4.95), records the novelist's search for the roots of his own art and being in the timeless culture of his native Hellas. Kimon Friar, editor of *Greek Heritage* magazine, was recently *Regent's Lecturer in classics at the University of California in Berkeley*.

By KIMON FRIAR

ABOUT two years ago a young American telephoned to inform me, in Greek, that as a result of reading my translation of Kazantzakis's *Odyssey* he had gone to Crete and there learned the Cretan dialect in order to read Kazantzakis in the original, and perhaps translate some of his works. The young man was F. A. Reed, and the first fruit of his act of dedication is this excellent translation of *Journey to the Morea* (the Frankish name for Peloponnesos). It has a fine epilogue in which he demonstrates that not only this book but all the works of Kazantzakis are tributaries flowing into the turbulent ocean of the *Odyssey*.

And, indeed, each of Kazantzakis's works is either a prelude to or an elaboration of one of the main themes brought to maturation in what he considered his *magnum opus*.

Kazantzakis was his own hero, Odysseus, restlessly wandering through the world in an attempt to penetrate beneath the varied and contradictory mores of numerous civilizations to the essential spirit that unites not only all mankind but all the universe. In Greece he had for years no reputation as novelist or dramatist, and certainly not as epicist; but Kazantzakis's travel books on China, Japan, Russia, England, and Spain, as well as Greece, were highly extolled.

Kazantzakis traveled through the Peloponnesos five times between 1915 and 1937, and in *Journey to the Morea* he distills the essence of each trip through Sparta, Mistra, Megalopolis, Monemvasia, Olympia, Mycenae, and the medieval castles and fortresses. At every site he was overwhelmed by the accumulated memories of the past; and for this reason he thought that for a Greek a journey through Greece was "a fascinating, exhausting ordeal," an attempt to convert the single moment into eternity, for Greece, from the Stone