

rence), and made himself heroic with a last-minute rescue of Colonel Lawrence just as the movies were tearing him limb from limb.

Weintraub's account of the relationship between Wilde and Turner shows London delirious with joy over *The Importance of Being Earnest*; shortly thereafter it was delirious with self-righteous hate against the man who rejected the first law of the empire: heterosexuality with publicity, homosexuality without. Wilde's revolt was esthetic; he won but his troops melted away. He could not believe London would take back his victory. Turner, almost alone among the followers, remained to give Wilde what help he could, both financial and, to use an indelicate but customary word in this context, moral.

Courteous to old ladies and young, Turner was ugly, extremely witty, kind and charming, with a translucent, minor



—Carl Van Vechten.

**Reginald Turner at sixty-five  
—a translucent, minor talent.**

literary talent; he was all Weintraub has put down on paper, and more.

## To America, with Some Regret

*Starting Out in the Thirties*, by Alfred Kazin (Atlantic-Little, Brown. 166 pp. \$4.95), is "a memoir of a crucial era in our moral and intellectual history." Emile Capouya teaches English and American literature at the New School in New York.

By EMILE CAPOUYA

**G**OD IS good, say the French, but he is not a good-natured slob. Can we in justice say less of Alfred Kazin? If the attractiveness of his literary personality is notorious, it is not that he is incapable of giving offense in a good cause. Indeed, the wonder is that a writer who has so strong and characteristic a bias, and the habit of expressing it pointedly, can be so winning withal—at least for the reader who is disposed to agree with most of his judgments. I am that reader, mainly. Since the time during the Second World War when I fell upon Mr. Kazin's first book of literary studies, *On Native Grounds*, in its ineffable paperback Armed Forces Editions incarnation, and read on a sand spit in the Western Pacific his essays on Hawthorne, Melville, Howells—news of home.

But it was years later before I caught his essential tone during a radio discussion in which Mr. Kazin attempted to persuade those fiery evangelists, James Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry, to somewhat abate their fire and concede that Faulkner might be a great writer

still, though a white Southerner, and Negro nationalism be nationalism, though Negro. In the context, those were unpopular theses—unpopular with me, too, I should add—but Mr. Kazin presented them in a spirit so respectful of his Negro friends and antagonists, so identified with their best aspirations, that it was patently inappropriate to reproach him with being that stumbling block, a white liberal. He was not so reproached, and that was an example of the power of the Kazin nectar—sweetness and light with a kick like white mule.

It is a complicated enough position, difficult to maintain, I should think, for almost anyone but Mr. Kazin. The same mild and implacable face that he turned that day to his allies on the left he habitually shows to his antagonists on the right, and even exhibits for the inspection of the great incurious mass for whom left and right are mere troupers of the familiar abomination-as-usual. Is that the most effectual attitude in every case? Probably not, but it looks more like justice over the long haul. And for that reason I must allow myself conquered by Mr. Kazin's second work of autobiography, in which that most remarkable decade, the Thirties, is the real protagonist. In any other context I would challenge some of his conclusions about the significance of the period. Presented in his own words, those conclusions do not propose themselves for challenge. As a memoir of a crucial era in our moral and intellectual history, Mr. Kazin's book is compelling as it is informative.

Mr. Kazin began contributing book reviews to the *New Republic*, under Malcolm Cowley's literary editorship, when he was himself nineteen, just out of City College, his briefcase "full of college essays on Henry Vaughan, T. S. Eliot, Thomas Traherne, John Donne, and other Anglo-Catholic poets who had come into fashion. . . ." The very same gentle ruthlessness that distinguishes his judgments of men and books was applied to keeping him unemployed, except at purely literary and not overremunerative labors, despite the pressures of fiancées and the American Dream generally. Mr. Kazin says that he sometimes made as much as \$20 a week by writing reviews. Rates have gone up since—would that the standard of reviewing had kept pace.

But during that hungry decade Mr. Kazin was absorbing his real education, literary and political, and perfecting that unpopular habit of justice that provokes me to admiration and revolt. He met a good proportion of the radical intelligentsia of the country in those years—which is to say, the soul of the country. How irrelevant the country's soul has since been to the country's business is one of the unstated themes of *Starting Out in the Thirties*.

The song says, "Now, you so beautiful, but you gonna die some day." That is precisely not Mr. Kazin's tone. The patent mortality of the American empire severed from the inspiring American ideal is much too present for him to permit such easy cynicism. It lends to these memoirs—recounted with enormously evocative energy, filled with living portraits of contemporaries, instinct with unselfconscious enthusiasm for ideas and personalities—an air of elegy. We shall not soon see another book so good-humored, spirited, and sad. Our business is to take it to heart.



**Alfred Kazin—a gentle ruthlessness.**

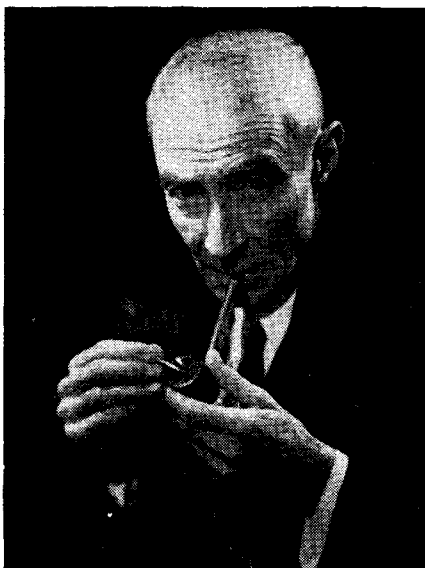
# National Security, Global Safety

**Oppenheimer: The Story of a Friendship**, by Haakon Chevalier (Braziller. 219 pp. \$5), attempts to set the record straight regarding the author's involvement with an alleged breach of national security in the early Forties. Nat S. Finney as Washington correspondent of the Buffalo Evening News, and earlier as a member of the Washington staff of the Minneapolis Star & Tribune and the Des Moines Register & Tribune, wrote extensively about the development of atomic weapons.

By NAT S. FINNEY

THIS personal story of Haakon Chevalier's acquaintance with Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer has two parts, and it seems appropriate to comment upon them separately. The first part is Professor Chevalier's account of the Oppenheimer he knew on the Berkeley campus of the University of California in the months before the young teacher and nuclear physicist undertook the direction of the Los Alamos laboratory in the Manhattan Engineering District. Professor Chevalier calls this "The Time of Innocence," and his prose glows with the reflected light of Oppenheimer's special brilliance. It is a fetching portrait, but it lacks depth and roundness and poses some question about how well Chevalier really knew Oppenheimer. Any reader interested in fleshing out the portrait can read Dr. Oppenheimer's own biography in the opening section of the now famous Hearings; and might find the testimony of two witnesses interesting. The first is Dr. I. I. Rabi's testimony beginning on page 451 of the transcript, and the second is the testimony of Dr. Wendell Mitchell Latimer on page 660.

Chevalier gets to the meat of his story in his fourth chapter, which he has entitled "Cat's Paw." This is a decidedly obtuse recitation of how George Charles Eltenton, a Shell Oil employee in San Francisco, solicited Haakon Chevalier's help in getting Oppenheimer's cooperation in forwarding information about the Los Alamos laboratory to Soviet scientists, and about how Chevalier broached the matter to Oppenheimer in the course of a dinner party at Oppenheimer's home. In retrospect Professor Chevalier's



—Gaby from Montreal (Pix).

**J. Robert Oppenheimer—  
in need of no defenders.**

conception of the innocence of the incident is close to incredible, yet the balance of the account is to a degree persuasive that he—a Romance Languages scholar—lived and still lives in a dream world.

The Oppenheimer-Chevalier story has been endlessly complicated. But in the context where it belongs it is simple enough. Dr. Oppenheimer procrastinated for months before he tried to alert Manhattan District security people to Eltenton's activities, and then in an apparent attempt to keep his project from becoming involved in a hoorah, he lied about details of Chevalier's initiative. Neither he nor anyone else can quite recapture now his reasons for fabricating a story, but the one he used to keep counterespionage officers off Chevalier's neck put Chevalier's indiscretion in a more serious light than if Dr. Oppenheimer had told the simple truth.

What is lost is the essence of the situation that existed when Oppenheimer became director of the Los Alamos laboratory. The United States was under deadly pressure to get "the bomb" before Germany could get it, and Oppenheimer's job was to recruit the people who could do it, whether they were white, black, yellow or red, Republican, Democrat or Communist. To accomplish what he had undertaken, Dr. Oppenheimer undoubtedly felt he had to protect his people against the zeal of security people, who, in retrospect, appear

to have preferred to be dead than red.

The rest of *The Story of a Friendship* is the dreary litany of an individual tainted by what we all came to call "derogatory information," and of his struggles to strike free from an ambiguous incident in his personal past. The incident itself, despite how endlessly it has been belabored, doesn't amount to much. Nor do Haakon Chevalier's tribulations if compared to the damage others suffered from derogatory information fished out of their pasts. It all somehow reminds this reviewer of the frontiersman who, when asked his opinion of tripe, allowed that it was eating the critter up a bit close.

The tale has its fascination, of course. But it is a borrowed fascination: borrowed from monumental events and transcendent accomplishments to which it has very little relevance. And it is marred by insignificant inaccuracies. J. R. Oppenheimer was not "head of the atomic bomb project," but director of one of its laboratories. Nor is it true that nothing was done about George Eltenton. Under the prevailing security arrangement Eltenton was the FBI's pigeon, and he was closely watched. Worse, Chevalier's tale is soured by a singular shortfall of charity and human understanding toward Oppenheimer. One is somehow reminded of a flash of insight supplied at the Hearings by Dr. Rabi, who said: "We have an A-bomb and a whole series of it . . . and what more do you want, mermaids?"

Despite all attempts to explain why Dr. Oppenheimer's clearance should have been lifted, the move still seems irrational. The Hearings explore the real reasons only by indirection. Dr. Oppenheimer had mortally offended the Air Force in an article in *Foreign Affairs Quarterly*, in which he bluntly described Air Force views of continental defense as "folly." And the havoc wrought by Senator Joseph McCarthy and his minions at the Fort Monmouth laboratory had provided a frightening object lesson in what could happen to the atomic establishment if McCarthy's investigating subcommittee ever got loose inside its security barriers. Were the Hearings held to forestall this?

There was an interlude after the Hearings when it was the fashion to defend Dr. Oppenheimer as if sanity depended upon his exoneration. A high point was publication of Charles P. Curtis's *The Oppenheimer Case: The Trial of a Security System*. It seems doubtful that Dr. Oppenheimer much relished this or any other defense. He knows, much better than his defenders, what his "trial" was all about, and he has signified this knowledge by characterizing the Hearings as, not drama, but farce. No doubt he uses the term farce (Continued on page 112)