

become a casualty of the Civil Rights movement and been withdrawn. First issued by Lippincott in 1899, a tremendously popular juvenile, it may still be found in public libraries, and in book shops for \$1.50.

Immediately after checking on this matter, I saw a news report from Lon-



don that a manuscript and drawings for a book prepared by Helen Bannerman were "recently discovered in a safe in her lawyer's office." It is called *The Story of Little White Squibba*, and already is in circulation in England. Mrs. Bannerman died some twenty years ago.

J. Edgar Hoover joined the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1921, and for forty-two years he has been its head. Though the author of numerous articles and a few books, he has not yet, at age seventy-one, written his autobiography.

This is certainly not for lack of interest on the part of publishers. I venture that the largest offer made to him was in 1961, when Ken McCormick, on behalf of Doubleday, and I, on behalf of *McCall's*, suggested a price of \$1,000,000 for book and serial rights.

Max Raab, secretary of the Cabinet during the Eisenhower administration, agreed to make the approach. "Mr. Hoover," he reported, "is flattered—and interested, but not now. He wants to wait a while. Maybe he won't ever want to tell the full story. But if he does, it won't be while he's still in office."

He's still in office.

Accustomed as everybody is to extravagant claims for books, perhaps the ultimate has been reached in Farrar, Straus & Giroux's advertisement in *Publishers' Weekly* for Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer*. This novel, says the ad, will "last as long as books are read."

—HERBERT R. MAYES.

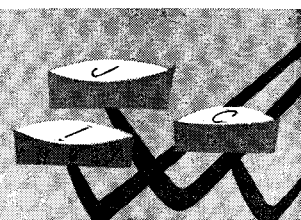
SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
KINGSLEY DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 1688)

THORNTON WILDER:
THE CABALA

(Quote sugg. by Mrs. John T. King, Jr.)

I spoke of how a line of Euripides drove mad the citizens of Abdera; of Terence pleading that people come to him rather than to the tight-rope walkers; of Milton, in his old age, holding a few olives in his hand to remind himself of his golden year in Italy.

Manner of Speaking



Shock Language: A good question is never answered. It is not a bolt to be tightened into place but a seed to be planted and to bear more seed toward the hope of greening the landscape of idea. The difference between a seed and an inert speck can be hard to see, but only one of them will grow and return itself in kind and be multiplied.

Last week, in the course of scolding Bert Lahr for "purifying" William Arrowsmith's English text of *The Birds* of Aristophanes, I tossed off a speck of a question that has turned out, I now believe, to be some sort of seed. At least it has multiplied in my mind. Why, I asked, are we so uneasy about the root words that describe bodily functions? By what extraordinary conditioning—to extend the question a bit—is it obscene to utter a colloquial and usually short sound when referring to certain bodily parts and their functions and products, while it remains respectable enough to refer to them by uttering a more formal, clinical, and usually longer sound? What is happening within the mores of a society when one shudders at a word as being "obscene"? What reaction is that? And what are its sources?

These are all parts of a single question, another small part of which I once asked in a footnote to my Englishment of Dante's *Inferno*. There, in something like 4,500 lines, Dante uses four or five of what we call four-letter words. Almost all of Dante's English translators have carefully circumlocuted those usages. But Dante put those words there for a purpose. They arise from his idea of style, *il bello*, which was itself an Aristotelian idea of fit proportion.

The manner of the writing, to state the gist of it, should be in harmony with the matter. In the *Paradiso*, excepting only a few harsh references to the sinfulness of stubborn mankind, the style is all polish and sublimity. But in the *Inferno*, which is the book of the sinful soul's depravity, Dante occasionally coarsens the texture as befits his subject.

In my own depravity, I was inclined to believe that what was good enough for Dante was good enough for me. I was not prepared to assume that my moral choices, tastes, and sensibilities were nicer than his. I rendered those few coarsenesses into their English root-equivalents, and added a footnote to explain this principle of Dante's style—one footnote among at least 500. Yet, to date, at least a dozen or so readers have ac-

cused me of being preoccupied with filth.

The trigger words I rendered from Dante were all references to the simplest actions and substances of our daily lives. The things and the acts to which they referred could not be shocking in themselves unless one insists on being offended by the life process itself. A doctor could have discussed the same things with his patients in a medical vocabulary, and your Aunt Maggie could have repeated them to "the girls" in her own round evasions that evade nothing. It seems to follow that the shock occurs only when certain arbitrary sounds are used to indicate referents that are not in themselves shocking.

IF that is so, something much like a primitive word taboo must be operating. I am no scholar of such things, but let me guess in the amateur way that follows from dabbling through a book or two that those who observe taboo do so for powerfully emotional reasons whose sources they do not know, though they think they know them.

Language is a substantial part of how men act. Since Man seems to have the impulse toward taboo in him, it is natural enough that he should develop language taboos, and that he should then overlay them with all sorts of plausible but irrelevant reasons. There is a real reason for language taboos in societies that have developed beyond a belief in primitive word-magic: they are there because we need them.

By ethnic agreement, it is not only shocking to use taboo language but it is sometimes held to be sinful and sometimes even held to be criminal. It is, therefore, exactly such taboo language that will best express our feelings when we are enraged or socially mutinous.

A man of moderate impulse may summarize his feelings with a "Tut!" when a snowball knocks off his hat. A saintly man may manage a total expression by going so far as "Tut-tut!" when the snowball smashes his glasses. But even a saint is likely to be moved to a fuller style when the snowball comes through the window spraying glass and dirty snow over his just-acquired and still unmounted British-colony mint plate-blocks. Eventually, there has to come a situation that calls for particularly emphatic expression.

The shock language of Christian Europe was originally blasphemy, and in strongly Catholic countries it is still

blasphemy that gives man the rhetoric of his full emotional range. The proverbial Spanish mule-skinner is a man with a vast formal structure of shock language available to him. The words that refer to bodily functions are nothing to him except as he is able to apply them to his limitless hagiography. In his hour of outrage he need only start at the top of the hierarchy, assured by the knowledge that his rhetoric can outlast the fit.

IN English, however, blasphemy has lost much of its shock value ("God is Dead" theologians, please note), and English-speaking people have limited their emotional means by agreeing to reserve certain names for the parts, functions, and products of the endocrinal and digestive systems as their shock language. Obscenity has replaced blasphemy, and the difference is certainly religious rather than ethnic, as witness Chaucer's need to scold riotous and dissolute men for rending Christ's holy body with such blasphemies as "Zwounds, Zblood, Znails, while permitting himself a light-hearted use of the common four-letter words.

Are these considerations pertinent to whatever question is trying to ask itself? I have watched the courts of America sputter and fume and stupefy themselves in a stuttering effort to define obscenity. They might just find the right entrance to the question if they began by thinking of obscenity as a particular vocabulary we suppress from normal usage in order to have it available for times of intense disturbance. And if that is the case, in what way is a man behaving when he becomes emotionally upset by another man's use of the language society has reserved to his use in moments of stress?

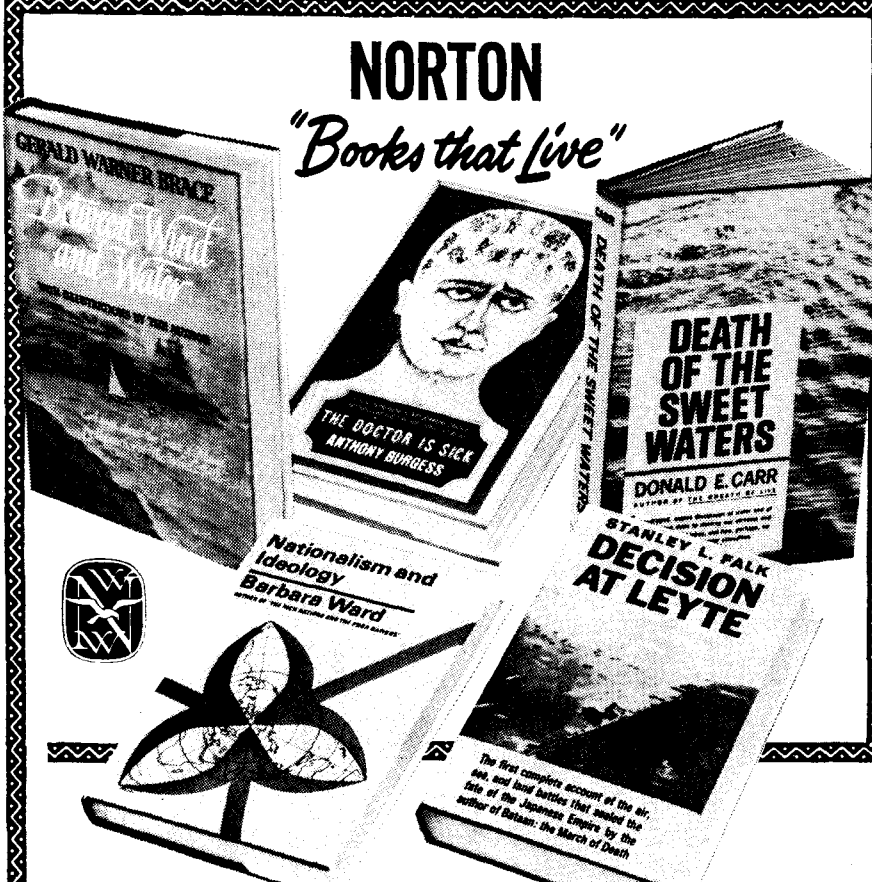
I could even guess that the answer to that second question has something to do with the way our young are conditioned to shock language. But I am not in the business of answering questions. That is the marketing end of things. I don't sell these flowers of inquiry: I simply raise them—in, if you like, the hothouse of my psyche.

But let me think I have raised this one to something like a first asking-point. Let me even hope the next judge maundering through a book censorship case will ask it of himself (and all unbenched sniffers of righteousness of themselves), if only for a practice session outside their own categories. I doubt that we will find firm answers to ourselves as a species, but we do take a lot of asking. And there is always the hope that when we have asked enough about ourselves and of ourselves, we may find that we have asked our way to something like an answering grace.

—JOHN CIARDI.

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NATIONALISM AND IDEOLOGY

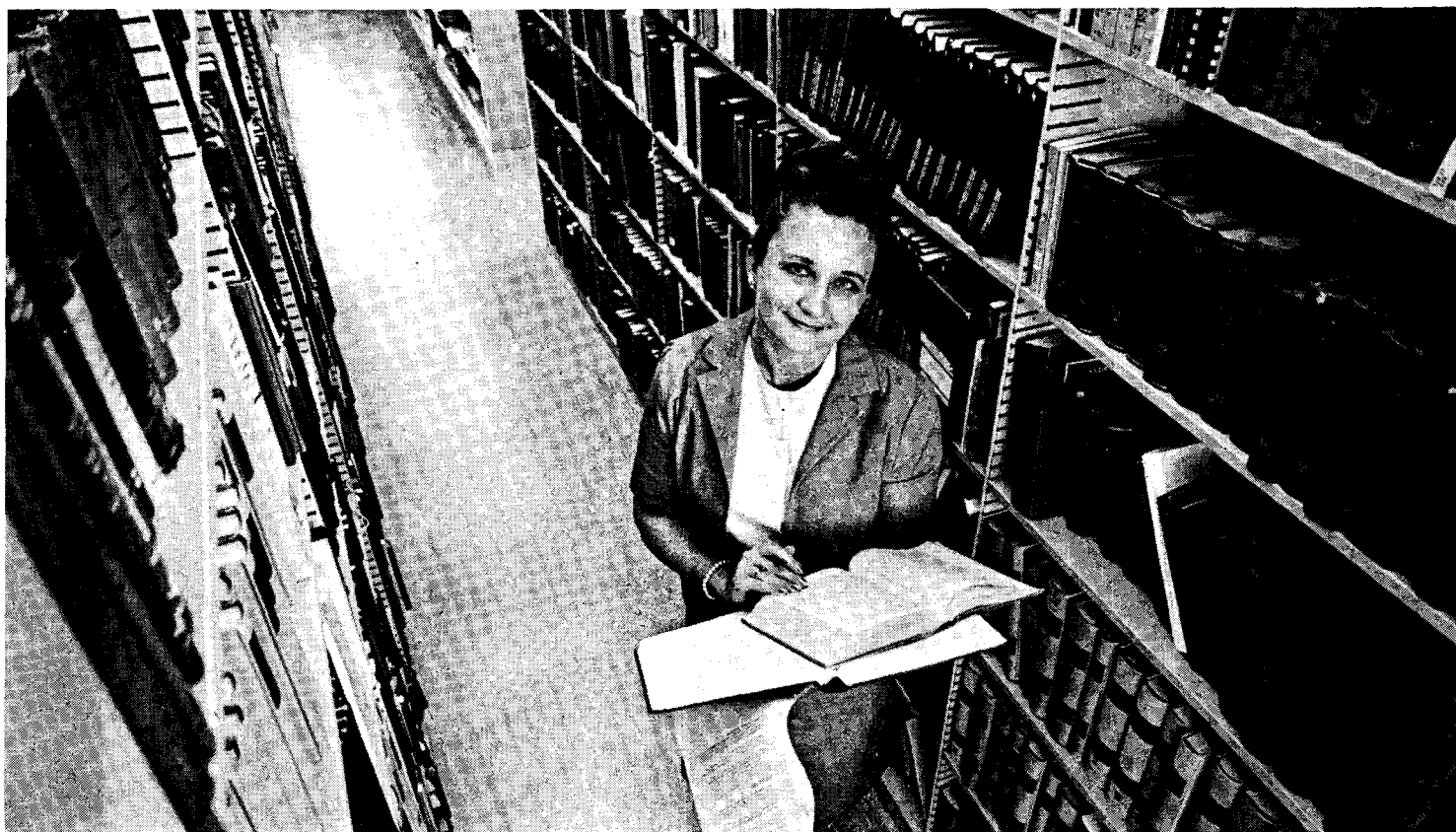
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Danger: Utopia Ahead

Would anyone want to live in an “ideal” society? Some irreverent thoughts on the question, and a reminder that blind pursuit of perfection may carry its own curse.

By JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

EVERY schoolboy (well, let's say every graduate student of English) knows that Samuel Johnson added the following four lines at the end of Goldsmith's *The Traveller*:

How small of all that human hearts
endure,
That part which laws or kings can
cause or cure!
Still to ourselves in every place con-
signed,
Our own felicity we make or find.

Victims of Hitler or Stalin, or even anyone who has ever heard of these victims, may find it hard to believe that Johnson's contemporaries could accept his pronouncement as a tenable thesis. It is as clear today as it was at any other unhappy time in the world's history that kings and laws can cause a good deal of “all that human hearts endure.”

If Johnson could write the lines and readers could admire them, that proves, among other things, that the Englishmen of his day had far less reason than we to know just how much unnecessary human misery kings and laws can cause. No government of which they had any intimate knowledge had ever been as bad as a dozen governments have been in the course of the twentieth century. In that respect the world has become for a great many people a much worse place to live in than it was in Johnson's time.

What he said was a half-truth, and since it seems that we can never believe more than one-half of a truth at a time, today the assumption, almost everywhere tacit and often explicit, is that all, or almost all, that human hearts endure is somehow traceable to laws, rules, or—to use the most conveniently vague and inclusive term—society, or better yet, “the system.”

It may be that extreme situations created by bad laws and bad rulers are tending to develop more and more frequently in more and more parts of the earth. But it is still true that in the United States we make or find most of our own felicity. Despite the Depression and despite our laws, most of this generation (with the exception, of course, of combat soldiers) has owed its most intense moments of happiness and its deepest moments of sorrow to causes that had little to do with the personalities or policies of our government. We may have fretted over them. We may, in other words, have borrowed trouble. But borrowing trouble certainly comes under the head of infelicities we make or find.

A CHEERFUL view of our private situation, of man's destiny, and of the universe he lives in is certainly one of the things—perhaps the most important single thing—that makes for happiness or its opposite. But such a cheerful view does not always depend upon any of the things that society increasingly (and I think properly) tries to provide us with. In the Middle Ages, when life was hard, and suffering was the common lot, it was generally agreed that God is good. The more secure and comfortable we became—until recently, that is—the more this conviction faded away. We are now assured that God obviously doesn't exist and the universe is meaningless.

We plan to abolish poverty, and of that determination I approve. But I remember nevertheless that the suicide rate is higher among the rich than among either the poor or the moderately well off; that it is, according to the California statistics, almost unknown among the destitute. I do not conclude that we should undertake to reduce the suicide rate by increasing the number of the destitute. Kings and laws can indeed

have a good deal to do with creating the conditions under which it would seem reasonable to suppose that people would be happy. But kings and laws cannot actually make them so, and it is my conviction that in today's society, where affluence touches a majority of Americans, economic inequality is responsible for far less unhappiness than are the weaknesses and follies of many of those who share its benefits—such as keeping up with the neighbors, spending beyond income for superficialities, and false values of various sorts.

Irving Howe, one of the most often quoted commentators on the contemporary social and political scene, is fond of insisting that our thinking is not sufficiently utopian. The preceding paragraphs may have helped to explain some of the reasons why my opinion is precisely the contrary. Utopian thinking assumes that perfect justice can be achieved, and that man not only *can* be almost perfectly happy but also that he can be *made* so—whereas nothing in human experience justifies any such an assumption. To make it leads simply to frustration because so much is expected of every improvement or reform that even the benefits that result seem to amount to no more than a failure. Another statement made by Samuel Johnson comes nearer unqualified truth than his addition to *The Traveller*. It is: “The remedy for the ills of life is palliative rather than radical.” And to “of life” he might have added “or government.”

To the utopian, of course, any such conviction means too ready an acceptance of the status quo. But that it should do so is no more necessary or inevitable than is the frequent tendency of utopianism to end in an exasperated recourse to a dictatorship that proposes to drag people into felicity by the scruff of the neck.

No system of government, no matter how utopian the thinking that plans it,