



Books

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LITERARY HORIZONS

Eye on the Peace Corps

WE HAVE not had a novel from Mark Harris since he published *Wake Up, Stupid* in 1959. That was his sixth novel, following the youthful *Trumpet to the World*, the three baseball novels (*The Southpaw*, *Bang the Drum Slowly*, and *A Ticket for a Seamstress*), and *Something About a Soldier*, which is my favorite. There were no books for four years, and then came a play, *Friedman and Son*, with a long and revealing autobiographical preface. Next came a piece of journalism with a good deal of autobiography in it, *Mark the Glove Boy*, an account of Harris's experiences while covering Richard Nixon's campaign for Governor of California. Now we have *Twentyone Twice* (Little, Brown, \$5.95), which describes the author's adventures as a special investigator for the Peace Corps. From this, incidentally, it appears that what Harris has chiefly been working on during this period is an autobiography.

Twentyone Twice is in the form of a journal, and the entries were supposedly—and, for all I know, actually—written day by day from November 8, 1964, to February 2, 1965. Harris, it appears, had kept a journal sporadically for a long time, circulating copies of it among several friends, according to an elaborate formula described here in detail. This is the first paragraph of the first entry: "Sunday, November 8. Today, on the fourth anniversary of the election of John F. Kennedy as President of the United States, I resume my Journal, it having lain idle since August 10, 1963. The event the present Phase is designed to cover is my journey somewhere in the world for the Peace Corps, an arm of our government, an instrument of what Kennedy called 'national purpose.'"

The opening entry is necessarily a summary of what happened to Harris while the journal lay idle. He tells about his literary activities, his trip to Japan, and the beginnings of his Peace Corps mission. On July 28, 1964, he had a telephone call from Sargent Shriver, who said that he had liked *Mark the Glove*

Boy and felt that Harris was "the kind of person who could examine the work of the Peace Corps and say useful things about it," strictly for "internal" circulation. (I understand that many such investigations are carried out in the course of any year.) Harris having expressed interest, the bureaucratic machine began slowly to roll.

The book is divided into two parts, the first and longer being called "United States Phase." For five months Harris was kept dangling while he was being investigated by the FBI and by a psychiatrist and while the Peace Corps administration decided what, if anything, it wanted to do with him. Finally, on January 8, he set forth for an African country he calls Kongohno. Although it had been expected that he would spend at least five weeks in Africa, he was there less than half that time. When he got home, he decided to submit his journal in lieu of the expected report.

Harris suggests that the Peace Corps administrators were not exactly delighted with his efforts as an investigator, and I see no reason why they should have been. I don't suppose that there are more than fifty pages in the book based on actual observation of the Peace Corps workers and their labors in Kongohno, and these are not particularly revealing. One point Harris did make. In Washington he was told about certain workers who were classified as "Risks" and asked to talk with them. He met them, and he liked them, and he was convinced that most of them were doing a good job. Moreover, he saw and said that the Peace Corps, by its nature, was bound to attract the kind of young people who are likely to be regarded as "Risks" by the FBI, and that it could not fulfill its purposes without them.

In general, however, we learn more about Mark Harris than we do about the Peace Corps, and he is more interesting on the first topic than on the second. He does not present himself in a heroic role; on the contrary, he is as much the butt of his own humor as any of the

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characters in his novels. We see him as cantankerous, crotchety, whimsical, self-pitying, quick to take umbrage, and in many ways a bad boy. If he made only a superficial investigation of the Peace Corps, he studied himself with care and candor.

In explaining why he was a problem for the FBI, Harris writes: "I want to observe that the politics and the mental state are related, that I was disgusted in the army by the contradictions between proclamations of democracy on the one hand, and the treatment of Negroes on the other. This was in the South. I couldn't ride with this contradiction emotionally, and the emotions turned to politics, so that for several years thereafter I flirted with the Communists."

Trumpet to the World was his only specifically political novel, but the theme that was to occupy him for years was dissent. His second book, a biography of Vachel Lindsay, *City of Discontent*, presents an idealistic poet who will not compromise. Henry Wiggin, hero of the baseball novels, is not only a first-rate pitcher and an excellent wisecracker; he is a rebel, and he learns compassion. *Something About a Soldier*, which must

be largely autobiographical, tells what happens to an idealistic boy in the army. The hero of *Wake Up, Stupid* is in rebellion against both the academic and the literary establishments.

In the preface to *Friedman and Son* Harris wrote: "That summer, 1959 . . . my emptiness had begun to worry me. I was composed and mellow, and the living was easy. All that had been on my mind I had discharged in a novel, *Wake Up, Stupid*, published in July, and so successful in its way that it was soon to carry me beyond accustomed comforts. All my useful grievances were submerged beneath this new experience, transforming my petulance to amiability."

What the Peace Corps experience did was to convince Harris that he really hadn't gone soft and conservative. Even while he was being investigated by the FBI, he cautiously supported the demonstrating students in Berkeley. The fact that the FBI men seemed to look on him as a dangerous radical boosted his self-esteem. Best of all, the young people in the Peace Corps, the ones classified as "Risks," accepted him as one of themselves. The journal, he says, shows "how my youthful instincts remain with me though I am twice my age." I hope he feels better from here on.

The book also shows that there is a lot of idealism left in the work, whatever cynics say. The idealists, as Harris makes clear, are often hard to get along with, and their motives must always be scrutinized, by themselves and by others; but it would be an even lousier world without them. —GRANVILLE HICKS.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT No. 1209

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1209 will be found in the next issue.

L ZATM BLI XISZT MKMJE-

PNAIW; L TNJMZR SIM, MKMJE-

VSRE. —LISIEBSDT

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1208

We can only pay our debt to the past by putting the future in debt to ourselves. —JOHN BUCHAN.

LETTERS TO THE Book Review Editor



Joy Through the Years

THANK YOU FOR TREATING US to the bright and shining face of Alice Dalgliesh in *SR* Sept. 17. Since her article in *Books for Young People* indicates that the occasion for the picture is her retirement as editor of this section, this seems a good moment to express my joy through the years in her advice on children's books. Though my sons all prefer to choose their own books now, I am a devotee of children's literature for life, and have found Miss Dalgliesh a delightful kindred spirit.

MRS. GEORGE CLIFFORD.

Pelham, N.Y.

No Challenge from NRA

ALTHOUGH WILLIAM E. BAILEY [*SR*, Sept. 17] chooses to comment on the review of *The Right to Bear Arms* [*SR*, Aug. 27] he quite obviously has not read the book itself. For in it I devote an entire chapter to describing in detail how the National Rifle Association managed to kill Senator Dodd's bill (S.1975) while professing to support it.

Mr. Bailey is equally misinformed—and naïve—in his belief that the NRA is not beholden to the gun industry for support. As my book also points out, about one-quarter of the NRA's income currently comes from the makers and vendors of firearms and related products. The NRA has not to date challenged this or any other statements about it in the book.

The fact is that the organization, while piously expressing support for legislation to keep guns out of the hands of felons, fugitives, juveniles (such as teen-age hopheads) and the mentally incompetent, has for the past four decades opposed and managed to scuttle all such legislation.

To prove this once more, I have but to cite the latest Dodd bill (S. 1592) bottled up in the Senate Judiciary Committee for almost a year and a half. This proposed law, aimed at eliminating the mail order interstate traffic in handguns, would require anyone desiring to buy a pistol or revolver to do so through a licensed dealer in his state of residence. It would also require handgun customers to prove that they are at least eighteen and are not felons or fugitives. The bill has the endorsement of President Johnson, the Attorney General and, according to public opinion polls, nearly 80 per cent of the American people. Yet the NRA has adamantly opposed the bill with what the Attorney General and Senator Robert F. Kennedy have termed "preposterous" and "misleading" arguments which have misled the hundreds of thousands of NRA members, including Mr. Bailey.

Harold Lavine, the reviewer of my book, is quite right in stating that one of our two federal laws dealing with the sale of firearms "does not touch pistols, revolvers, rifles, or shotguns." In spite of the exception

cited by Mr. Bailey, the law (The National Firearms Act) does not cover conventional guns of these types, or the only ones being currently advertised and sold.

And, as Mr. Bailey well knows, the U.S. postal laws do not in the slightest interfere with the mail order or over-the-counter sale of handguns in his own state of Arizona, where two out of three murders are now carried out with guns, double the rate of that in New York, which has some semblance of firearms controls.

CARL BAKAL.

New York, N.Y.

Gospel Interpreted

BOTH THE REVIEW OF *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* [*SR*, Aug. 20] and the reader reaction to it show once again the illogical futility of arguing over parts of a translation of a compilation of documents, the New Testament, without reference to the historical context, original language, and time span for compilation.

Beacon Press recently reissued in paperback the companion volumes, *Jesus of Nazareth* and *From Jesus to Paul*, by the late Joseph Klausner of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Among the many stimulating and enlightening indications of Professor Klausner's research are these: 1) Pontius Pilate was in actuality one of the cruelest of all the Roman procurators to serve in Palestine; 2) Pilate had no interest in or real understanding of Jewish customs and beliefs; 3) the handwashing ritual in question was typically Jewish and extremely unlikely to have even been conceived by Pilate; 4) the New Testament manifests both the early Jewish Ebionite and Nazarene Christian doctrine and the later Pauline Christian doctrine. For reasons which Klausner discusses in detail, the Pauline writings were deliberately anti-Jewish and at times included interpolations into the earlier writings. The implications in the four indications alone are vast and complex. Hopefully, the open-minded and intellectually curious will be interested in exploring these views.

WILLIAM G. LYFIELD.

Venice, Calif.

WHAT DO THE GOSPELS actually say? A mob was raised in the early morning to condemn Him before the Romans. Jesus was delivered to the high priests by the official government's appointed judge. A Roman detachment nailed him to the cross.

Nowhere does it say that the Jews as a people, religion, nation, or race, were responsible. Nowhere does the Bible condemn them. After all, as Matthew especially repeatedly makes clear, Jesus was a Jew; all his disciples were Jews; not for fifty years after the death of Christ were there many goyim in Christianity.

WESLEY W. WEINHOLD.

Madison, Wis.