

# He Raised Cain and Columbia

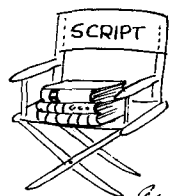
**King Cohn: The Life and Times of Harry Cohn**, by Bob Thomas (Putnam. 381 pp. \$6.95), describes a cave man in the evolution of the motion picture. Arthur Knight criticizes films for SR.

By ARTHUR KNIGHT

THERE is a Hollywood story, probably apocryphal since it turns up nowhere in Bob Thomas's singularly well-documented account of the late head of Columbia Studios, that when Harry Cohn died, one of the mourners reported that some 2,000 people had turned out to attend the funeral. "Oh," came the cool reply, "what did they serve?" (Thomas does, however, quote Red Skelton's far more famous observation, "Well, it only proves what they always say—give the public something they want to see, and they'll come out for it.")

No mistake about it, Harry Cohn was not loved in his lifetime; and when in 1958 he shuffled off this mortal coil, the sigh of relief in the movie colony could be heard as far as Malibu. He was, as Thomas makes abundantly clear, an arrogant, uncouth, lecherous, and rarely benevolent despot who ran his studio with an iron will and fist—the kind of man who doesn't have ulcers, but gives them. He was famous for the slashing invective that he loosed upon his hapless subordinates; and his favorite method of indicating his approval of a script was to hurl it full force at its author's stomach.

Why, then, a full-scale biography of such a monster? Because, like Bosley Crowther's *Hollywood Rajah* of a few years ago, documenting the not dissimilar life and times of Louis B. Mayer, *King Cohn* provides a valuable insight into the origins of the motion picture industry itself, and the kind of tough, buccaneering, aggressive self-assurance that it took to organize and run a major studio. Significantly, Mayer was a junk dealer, Cohn a song-plugger before destiny brought them to the movies.



They were of the people—and movies, particularly in their formative years, were the popular entertainment. Cohn was probably righter than he knew when he declared, "I have a foolproof device for judging whether a picture is good or bad. If my fanny squirms, it's bad. If my fanny doesn't squirm, it's good." In a somewhat more elevated parlance, this would be called "the common touch."

But movies have been changing rapidly in the decade since Harry Cohn's death. Undoubtedly, his fanny would not merely squirm but writhe at films like *Blow-Up*, or even Columbia's *Man for All Seasons*. The autocratic vulgarian who can drive a writer up the walls because his own basic vocabulary is large-

ly limited to four-letter words, or reduce an actress to tears by insisting on personally designing her bra, has little place, in an era where literacy, perceptiveness, and sophistication have become the primary assets of custom-made pictures.

As Bob Thomas well demonstrates, Cohn had a special talent for blandishing, bullying, and brow-beating popular pictures out of the people he held under contract. It is also true, as Thomas points out, that many of these film makers performed their best work while at Columbia (although it does not necessarily follow, as Thomas implies, that this was due solely to Cohn's abrasiveness). But in writing this biography Thomas has also written the epitaph for an era that has almost passed—the era of the all-powerful studio production executive. He was probably essential to the creation of the industry in its earlier phases; however, we can all be just as pleased that, like the Tyrannosaurus of another age, with its powerful frame, savage instincts, and tiny brain, he no longer prowls this earth.

## He Inspired the Death of God

**The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1935-1939**, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, edited by Edwin H. Robertson (Harper & Row. 272 pp. \$4.50), and **I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, edited by Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith (Harper & Row. 238 pp. \$4.95), assemble excerpts from the writings of the German theologian and memoirs about his life by teachers, fellow-students, and other colleagues. Jaroslav Pelikan is professor of religious studies at Yale and a co-author of "The Place of Bonhoeffer."

By JAROSLAV PELIKAN

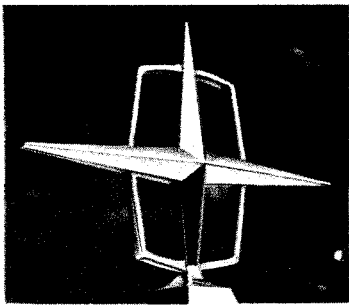
THE BRIGHTEST new star of recent Protestant theology is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Like the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin, Bonhoeffer began to address a world audience only after his death; but, unlike Teilhard, Bonhoeffer has addressed the world also through his death, for he was hanged by the Nazis on April 9, 1945, for his part in the plot of July 20, 1944, to assassinate Hitler.

Bonhoeffer was just thirty-nine when he was murdered. Thus, had he lived, he would only now be in his prime as a scholar and thinker. Yet in the two decades since his death his writings,

letters, sermons, diaries, and lecture notes have been collected, published, and studied in Europe and America. College students who insist that they are not very religious stay away from chapel and read Bonhoeffer; theological students who are bored by traditional dogmatics have formed little Bonhoeffer coteries at various seminaries; and a couple of pages from his *Letters and Papers from Prison* have become, quite distortedly, the program of those who announce "the death of God."

*The Way to Freedom* presents translations from the second volume of the German edition of his works, as *No Rusty Swords*, published in 1965, did from the first volume. *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer* assembles memoirs and tributes from his teachers, fellow-students, and other colleagues. Several of his larger works have been translated, and at least one more volume from the German collection is still to appear. There is to be a biography by Eberhard Bethge, who is a contributor to *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, plus several full-length studies of his thought.

These two books help one to understand the remarkable phenomenon that a theologian whose work was unavoidably so episodic and preliminary should now command such attention. An epigram here and a question there will state precisely the nature of a theological or moral problem and summarize



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the antitheses. Thus of Jesus's words to Judas before the betrayal ("That thou doest, do quickly") he asks, "Does it mean that [Jesus] loves him as the fulfiller of the divine will and yet knows 'Woe to that man by whom it comes to pass'?"

Again, "orthodoxy confuses confession with a theological system. The confessionless confuse the church's confession with the testimony of piety." Seeing what Bonhoeffer could and did do when he developed a theme *in extenso*, one can only grieve that the Gestapo and the S.S. cut off the possibility for many of these inchoate arguments to achieve fruition.

As so often happens, however, Bonhoeffer's death has given special power and poignancy to these arguments. The man is clearly more than his ideas, and *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer* is a remarkable monument to him as a person, as his friends and admirers bring their wreaths and tell their anecdotes. One of them recalls "his refusal to play tennis with me after I had acknowledged that I had no expertness at the game. His view was that my incompetence was an obtrusive pre-emption of the court from those whose serious and practiced playing of the game entitled them to it." The physician who witnessed his execution declares: "In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

Sometimes the hagiographic tone of the reminiscences seems a little much, as when a classmate calls him "this young 'Doctor of the church,'" or when a fellow-prisoner tells us that several months after Bonhoeffer's death "I returned to my home, which had been destroyed by bombs. . . . Only one book lay undamaged among the bricks and mortar: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship*."

There are also some inevitable slips. When Bonhoeffer's diary for June 22, 1939, speaks of reading "an interpretation of Christian ethics," this is certainly a reference to the book of that name published in 1936; and therefore the Niebuhr mentioned is not (as the index would have it) H. Richard Niebuhr of Yale, but Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary. Even a reader who is fairly conversant with German and American theology in the 1930s and '40s will not recognize all the proper names mentioned in the two books; yet only the actual contributors are identified.

Bonhoeffer's teacher, Adolf Harnack, once observed, discussing the church father Tertullian, that in the presence of a martyr everyone is a layman. But in the presence of this martyr everyone becomes a student, if not a disciple; for "he being dead yet speaketh."

## Reappraisal in a Raging Sea

*Under the Eye of the Storm*, by John Hersey (Knopf, 251 pp. \$4.95), places a conflict between a doctor and a "computer nut" in counterpoint with the collision of a ship and a hurricane. James F. Fixx, a writer, editor, and occasional yachtsman, is convinced that the best way to ride out a storm is in the clubhouse.

By JAMES F. FIXX

JOHN HERSEY has an uncanny knack for telling two stories at once. He has, first of all, a shrewd eye for adventure and can spin yarns with the best of them—tales that race along from crisis to throat-catching crisis. *The War Lover*, published in 1959, was of that sort, and so is his newest novel, *Under the Eye of the Storm*. But Hersey can also do something else, and he does it here with a sustained control that is little short of astonishing: He can weave into the very fabric of his adventure a mean-

ing that grows directly out of it and yet represents a great deal more. The effect, especially when he is at the top of his form, frequently comes very close to the subtlety and complexity of life itself.

Consider, as a case in point, the story Hersey tells in *Under the Eye of the Storm*. Two couples—old friends—go for a sail on the *Harmony*, a yawl owned by a thirty-four-year-old physician named Tom Medlar. They start out from Martha's Vineyard, bound for Block Island. It is to be "a happy cruise." En route, however, a hurricane that has been lazily harmlessly about off the Georgia coast gathers speed and begins moving toward them. It now turns out that Tom is concerned not only because of the imminent storm but also because he has unaccountably failed to have the *Harmony* hauled out of the water that spring and a crucial nut on her keel tightened.

Is the story, then, just another adventure tale? For the answer, you must peel back the deceptively simple surface. Medlar, we are told, is a man grown

## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich and David M. Glixon

### NOBEL MEN

Up to the present, thirteen winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature have been authors writing in the English language. Milanna Ain of Sherman Oaks, Calif., lists here the title of one work by each, scrambled into a cryptic phrase. Unscramble the anagrams, and assign each title to its author. Solutions on page 38.

- |                       |                              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| John Steinbeck ( )    | 1. CANINE COMERS REGLUE TOMB |
| Ernest Hemingway ( )  | 2. HE TEAR HOT DOG           |
| Winston Churchill ( ) | 3. WEE TROTH                 |
| Bertrand Russell ( )  | 4. WAG SPEAR FORTH           |
| William Faulkner ( )  | 5. LET DANTE WASH            |
| G. B. Shaw ( )        | 6. HEAT FRETS YOGAS          |
| Pearl Buck ( )        | 7. LAME SWART LOAFER         |
| Eugene O'Neill ( )    | 8. I RAGE AND RAM OR SLAM    |
| John Galsworthy ( )   | 9. THE RAW RED COWL NODS     |
| Sinclair Lewis ( )    | 10. ROSES IN LACE            |
| T. S. Eliot ( )       | 11. RAT OR SIS               |
| W. B. Yeats ( )       | 12. RAM IS WORTH             |
| Rudyard Kipling ( )   | 13. MY LION GAP              |