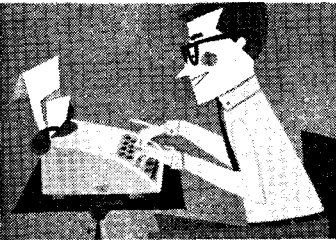


Top of My Head



Arms and the Disturbed Man

THE SECOND Amendment to the Constitution says: "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

The Fifth Commandment says: "Thou shalt not kill."

Congress for five consecutive years has been hearing argument for and against gun control legislation. During that time a President, his assassin, and an American Nazi leader have been among the victims of uncontrolled guns in the hands of uncontrollable citizens. To say nothing of the other vital statistics which show that last year in this country guns were used in 6,400 murders, 10,000 suicides, and 2,000 accidental deaths.

Most of the lobbying against a federal gun control bill has been carried out by the NRA. This is the National Rifle As-

sociation and is not to be confused with the NRA of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: the National Recovery Act. Very few people who have been killed by guns recover.

The thinking in our Congress is divided and not a little obfuscated. For instance, Senator Frank Church of Idaho speaks out against a gun control bill because in his state hunting is a popular sport. In a speech in Congress he is quoted as saying: "A hunting rifle and a gun are kept by most Idaho families for hunting. They are as popular as a fly rod or a spinning reel."

On the other hand, Senator Church came out with a speech against our country's selling guns to underdeveloped nations. Although guns play a great part in the popular sport in most of the underdeveloped countries we've been reading about. There they are even more popular than the fly rod and spinning reel.

It is not quite clear how a federal law restricting the sale of guns and rifles by issuing permits to those who want to buy them would in any way place restrictions on actual game hunters, as opposed to those who have something else in mind. Such a permit would clear up what the gun or rifle buyer wants to do with the weapon. The salesman at the sports counter has a customer:

"I want to buy a gun or rifle."

"Yes? And what do you want a gun or rifle for?"

"I'm going hunting."

"Hunting what?"

"I'm hunting for the guy that's been running around with my girl."

"Permit for gun or rifle denied."

The NRA claims this is unfair to sporting goods stores. Such a reason for wanting to buy a gun or rifle would cause the store to lose a sale, the NRA feels.

Not at all; depends on the salesman:

"Permit for a gun or rifle denied. But how about a fly rod or a spinning reel, which are just as popular?"

"Naw, I want a gun or a rifle to get this guy I'm after. I'm going to teach him a lesson."

"But look, sir, if you happen to kill him, what kind of a lesson is that? He'll never know about it. But if you get your man with a fly rod or a spinning reel, you can inflict enough damage on him that not only won't he be able to run around with your girl, or anybody else's, but he won't be able to sit down to dinner for months."

A tempting alternative that no man whose girl is being run around with could possibly resist.

When Moses went up Mount Sinai—and he didn't climb it just because it was there—he accepted the Decalogue and didn't ask anyone to chisel into the Tablet an amendment to the Fifth Commandment. There was no dialogue about the NRA or the popularity of guns vs. fly rods and spinning reels; or of amending any of the Commandments.

Our Constitution did not fare as well. The Second Amendment declared that a well-regulated militia was necessary to our security and, therefore, the right of the people to bear arms should not be infringed.

Would you say that the people who have been doing all this sniping in our cities, or the man who shot down innocent people indiscriminately from a tower in Texas—or Oswald—bore arms because they thought through some derangement, that they constituted a well-regulated militia? I wouldn't.

And I'll shoot anyone who does. Or better yet—I'll get out my fly rod and spinning reel.

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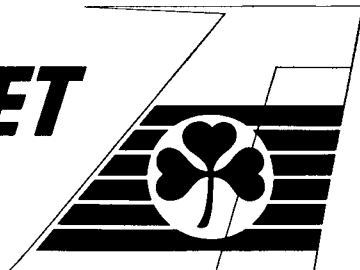
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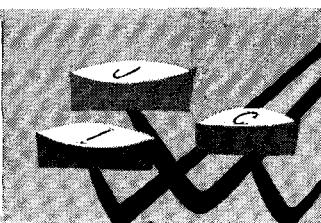


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Manner of Speaking



In and Out of the Attic: I see I am fated to spend the rest of my life in the attic. There is, of course, a romantic power and presence in the idea of souls in garrets. I know of poets who have had their chance to move out and who turned it down. True to tradition, they stayed on in the garret and simply had it remodeled into an attic study. I even know one poet who turned his garret into a penthouse.

Toward such distinctions as are possible, I understand a garret to become an attic-study when it is heated and air-conditioned. It becomes a penthouse when one reaches it by elevator and/or when it acquires something called *décor*, and especially when the *décor* spills out onto a terrace. Penthouses tend to such optional features as paneling, built-in hi-fi, modest but exquisite collections of paintings, or at least of etchings, and (though only for the frivolous) bars made of old barn siding.

Other possibly useful distinctions come to mind. In a garret there is likely

to be no line between what one hopes is a wall and what one knows is a ceiling. In an attic study the ceiling slope stops at some point and drops a vertical that may sometimes be called a wall. In a penthouse, of course, the ceilings are parallel to the floor.

I do not come by these distinctions lightly. For twelve years, I tried to work in what was technically an attic study. At least it was partially heated and partially air-conditioned. Its slopes, however, were definitely garretish, and, in consequence, most of my books ended up on the floor. The trouble with such a book arrangement is that it turns a man into a four-legged hunter huffing about with a flashlight in his teeth (it can be done with one of those pocket-size Gulton rechargeables) as he tries to track a title from one illegible book spine to another. In a lost golden age, my stacks had all turned their bindings in one direction and were in approximate alphabetical order. But in twelve years of yanking out the second-book-

from-the-bottom, I had started too many avalanches, destroying thereby the order of alphabets. Toward the end I was down to playing beater in some sort of seriously taken snipe hunt: if I could not drive a quotation from Augustine into the bag, I would settle for one from Zola, and no matter. The word is the word and in it Alpha and Omega are one.

Nevertheless, and though I had a habituated fondness for attics, that fall from grace to all fours was more than I was willing to tolerate as a permanent condition. Though the avalanche destroy all first gardens, are there never to be book-lined rooms a man can walk upright, aligned to the alphabets of creation, where he is able to lay his hand on a title at will?

Attached to the house was a two-car garage we used for storing a tangle of bikes and power mowers, and as a private dump for junk too good to throw all the way out. I can testify that no car had ever been in it. Why bother? Come turn-in time no dealer ever asked me if I had loved and sheltered my car. He wanted to know its year of birth: all else was written in his book.

I decided to move from the attic to the garage, and, to make the move in proper style, I called in an architect. "These are interesting ideas," he said as I explained my scrawl sketches and my itemized dream specifications. "How far do you want to go?" he added, a bit warily, I thought.

But I ignored his wariness. This was dream stuff, and heady. "Beyond," I said.

Some weeks later he was back with plans strewn all over the dining room table. "I would estimate \$3,500," he said, "Maybe \$4,000."

They were elegant plans. I pinned them to a sloping ceiling in my soul and dreamed on them. "It's a deal," I breathed.

The contractors, too, were ready for deals. I called in something like the full local series offered by helpful friends and the Yellow Pages. And the lowest bid I got ran only a shade under \$10,000. Nor were any of the contractors impressed when I pointed out that the room—basic ceiling, basic walls, and basic floor—was already there. Had they thought I meant, perhaps, to build a house? It turned out they *had* understood. I seemed to be the only one who was out of touch with contractual reality, though I still had sense enough to say "no deal."

"I'll buy another house first," I told the last man in with a five-figure bid. "It will be cheaper."

It turned out to be not exactly cheaper but not much more expensive, either. The house we found turned out to have seven bedrooms. Surely a man with seven bedrooms has left the attic slopes for-

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