

killing, stealing, shouting, and doing the things historians usually record, while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks. Historians are pessimists because they ignore the banks of the river." This is the conclusion of a man who is obviously at heart an optimist, in spite of all the history he knows. Others knowing an equal amount are pessimists—perhaps because of their own emotional biases.

One of Will Durant's pleasures as a writer has been to drop cynical remarks and to coin aphorisms. Many of these are clever and provocative:

"A supreme and unchallengeable faith is a deadly enemy to the human mind."

"Man is by nature polygamous, and only the strongest moral sanctions, a helpful degree of poverty and hard work, and uninterrupted wifely supervision can induce him to monogamy."

"Religions are born and may die, but superstition is immortal. Only the fortunate can take life without mythology. Most of us suffer in body and soul, and Nature's subtlest anodyne is a dose of the supernatural."

"Beliefs make history, especially when they are wrong; it is for errors that men have most nobly died."

These examples of the Durantian philosophy are taken from several of the earlier volumes. Their number drops off in the last three, and in *Rousseau and Revolution* there are only a few. The decline in wit and general bounce is not a serious handicap, but it does mean that *Rousseau and Revolution* seems even longer than it is. The Durants admit in their introduction that "Unquestionably our integral and inclusive method has led us to give most of these volumes a burdensome length." This is most conspicuous with *Rousseau and Revolution*, which covers the shortest period of time in the series (from 1715 to 1789) and is the longest volume of the lot.

The result of this copious comprehensiveness is that all the volumes in the series can serve as reference books in which major topics and the lives and significances of great men can be looked up. It isn't necessary to read everything the authors tell us about Pombal's dictatorship in Portugal, the reign of Ferdinand VI in Spain, or the music of Christoph Willibald von Gluck. But it is a pleasure to read the Durants on the Old Régime in France, the reign of Catherine the Great in Russia, and the Industrial Revolution in England, this last an admirably concise treatment of a formidably complicated subject.

On all the key topics which properly belong to the years covered, such as the importance of the physiocrats and *phi-*

losophes in France, the parts played by the enlightened despots, the ideas, religious beliefs, customs, manners, sexual morality, fashions, economics, literature, art, architecture, and music of the time, the Durants are informative and interesting. I think most readers will agree that they are less interesting about the course of civilization in the peripheral states of Europe—Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, and Italy (the eighteenth century was not the peak of Italy's curve)—than they are about the major countries where history was being made—France, England, Prussia, and Russia.

AND, as always, the Durants excel in the sketches of great men, their artistic achievements and their ideas. The two longest biographical essays are on Rousseau and Goethe. The authors find Rousseau less repulsive as a man than some do. Their analysis of his ideas, which were instrumental in producing both the Romantic movement and the French Revolution, is first-rate. About

Goethe they are equally penetrating, although, like others, they find it difficult to convey to those who can't read German why *Faust* is a great poem.

There must be about 100 biographical sketches in *Rousseau and Revolution*. All are able; many are superb, entertaining as well as educational. Some of the best are those of Louis XV, Louis XVI, Mme. de Pompadour, Voltaire, Goya, Cagliostro, Casanova, Frederick the Great, Joseph II, Catherine the Great, Kant, George III, Burke, Fox, Joshua Reynolds, Burns, Gibbon, and Goldsmith. However, not everybody who was important in his own era and place seems important 200 years later, so a few of the sketches are a trifle dull.

The volume ends with the fall of the Bastille; the Durants say that in old age they cannot struggle with the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the nineteenth century. One sympathizes and understands. Their achievement is great, and insures them a prominent place among the writers of their own time.

Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich and David M. Glixon

THOREAUVIAN

Foraging in Thoreau's writings, on his sesquicentennial, Gilbert Byron of St. Michaels, Md., has turned up signs of the nature-lover's own foraging. All you need do is chuck each fruit and nut into its proper bin or, in quiet desperation, turn in nonviolent protest to page 84.

"We stewed these berries for our breakfast the next morning, and thought them the best berry on the mountain." ()

"When chestnuts are away, I am inclined to think them as good as they . . . I feel the stronger even before I have swallowed one." ()

"Of course you will shake the tree first, if there are any on it." ()

"A sort of manna falls in June, and in the meadows they lurk at the shady roots of the grass." ()

"What more encouraging sight at the end of a long ramble than the endless successive patches of green bushes . . . fairly blackened with the profusion of fresh and glossy berries." ()

"I find a few . . . which the farmer thinks is not worth his while to gather." ()

"The dark purple _____ are the sweetest of the berries I have tasted." ()

"I get a handful, dark purple with a bloom, as big as a good-sized grape." ()

"They are of the form of a small lemon . . . and have a rich nutmeg fragrance." ()

"I pick splendid great bunches of the purple ones." ()

"They have neither the beauty nor the fragrance of apples, but their excellence is in their flavor." ()

"I had gone out before sunrise to gather _____ fresh, dewy . . . much cooler and grateful at this hour." ()

1. black walnuts
2. apples
3. mountain
cranberries
4. Amelanchier
(Juneberries)
5. white oak
acorns
6. wild grapes
7. chestnuts
8. blueberries
9. wild
strawberries
10. beach plums
11. huckleberries
12. peaches

Bestiality Behind Bars

Tattoo the Wicked Cross, by Floyd Salas (Grove. 351 pp. \$5.95), shows the destruction of a fifteen-year-old gang leader's personal values in the brutal climate of a California prison farm. C. Michael Curtis has written essays, reviews, and comments for *The Atlantic*, *National Review*, and other publications.

By C. MICHAEL CURTIS

THERE are two basic themes in prison stories: the brave man who resists, often at considerable personal cost, the corrosive pressures of institutionalized depravity, and the sexually ambivalent man—already alienated from the world at large—who finds that prison life, if hardly to his liking, at least offers an outlet for his proclivities.

Tattoo the Wicked Cross is an extraordinarily evocative novel that avoids both of these predictable themes while con-

firms the partial relevance of each to the prison experience. Its truth lies in its demonstration of how prison life, far from reinforcing the moral conventions of free society, denies their validity at the outset, and, for those practical men who grasp the logic of every situation, substitutes a value system which reduces all motives to the level of survival.

Aaron D'Aragon, fifteen-year-old gang leader and brawler, is sent to a California prison farm for juveniles, where Barneyway, his "sworn blood-brother," is already serving time. Aaron and his friendship for Barney are quickly and brutally tested by a powerful bully, who sexually molests Barney and threatens to do the same to Aaron.

Floyd Salas's juvenile hero is wedded to the conventional virtues: he believes it is necessary to protect his friend, though Barney refuses to defend himself or to join forces with Aaron in resisting the tyranny of "Buzzer," the sadistic cadet captain. After being beaten and

violated, Aaron methodically works his revenge, measuring himself, finally, only in terms of what will bring him stature in the prison community.

The message is plainly that the Aristotelian virtues are not applicable to prison life. If anything, they emphasize its meanness and invite its predatory malice. And if prisons are a place to ponder the folly of antisocial behavior, how ironic that the alternatives should be so frankly alien, denying even the bitter satisfaction of nobility.

Floyd Salas's book is neither an anti-prison tract nor a refutation of the value of right-thinking. It has the troublesome authenticity of a tragedy well rehearsed. Salas is described by his publisher as a product of West Coast city streets, a juvenile detention home, a county jail farm, and a Salvation Army institute for children from broken homes. He won a boxing scholarship to the University of California in 1956, and earned an M.A. degree from San Francisco State College ten years later.



BUT the likelihood that Salas knows the milieu of his novel all too well is largely beside the point. What he has accomplished is a wholly convincing exploration of the oppressiveness of jail and the ambiguities of adolescent rebellion. Aaron's ethical posturing (defending the honor of his gang) gets him into jail, as well as into hopelessly unavoidable combat once he's there. Barney, who submits to the abuse he cannot repel, is both more and less dangerous—less, because he is willing to rationalize offenses to his dignity; more, because he can be made to care only about his own survival. With Aaron, a child suckled on honor rather than love, simple pride becomes egregious vanity. After he has turned his back on the values that connect him with his family and a sympathetic girl, he is lost to society.

What Salas has to say about prison life is plain enough; what he has to say about adolescent rebellion is clear by implication. His most disturbing intimation may be that we are well short, as a society and as individuals, of either the perception or the generosity needed to find an alternative way. *Tattoo the Wicked Cross* may be one of the best and is certainly one of the most important first novels published in America during the past ten years.

Answer to Wit Twister, page 91.
sliver, silver, livers.



"One day the leaves fell and there he was."