

claims that his is "a reading of Burke which far from seeking to discredit him hopes to enhance and enrich our understanding and appreciation of his life and thought." This new Burke offers "nothing less than a pivotal insight into that great turning point in our history—the transformation from the aristocratic to the bourgeois world. He does this not only in his ideas, but also in himself. He personifies this transformation. It is in this that his importance and even his greatness consist."

Thus, what purports to be a book about Edmund Burke is in fact a work of psychosocial typology designed to account for that irrational and obsessive "rage" which Professor Kramnick believes to be "at the heart of conservatism" and to help us understand and appreciate "the eternal longing of the conservative for the elimination of rational thought from politics." It is this underlying polemical purpose which explains Professor Kramnick's attempt to

classify Nathan Glazer, Irving Kristol, Edward Banfield, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, James Q. Wilson, Allan Bloom, Andrew Hacker, and the late Alexander Bickel with such Burkeans as Peter Stanlis, Russell Kirk, and Francis Canavan. Kramnick finds his Burke "fascinating" because, by disposing of one psychosexual misfit, he believes that he can dispose of all of liberalism's contemporary critics.

In and of itself, Professor Kramnick's silly book is not worthy of notice—but the fact that it was written by a reputable scholar and published by a respected commercial press should arrest our attention. There was a time when psychohistory was regarded with disdain by members of the historical profession: That time has passed. The publication of this Marxist psychobiography of Burke illustrates an important and powerful trend—one best described more than a century ago by Tocqueville. "In aristocratic ages," he observed, the historian's attention "is con-

stantly drawn to individuals." In a democratic age, he will "attribute hardly any influence to the individual." Instead, he will "assign great causes to all petty incidents" and lead men to believe that the world's "movement is involuntary and that societies unconsciously obey some superior force ruling over them." This tendency has two roots—the fact that "general facts serve to explain more things in democratic than in aristocratic ages," and the fact that history which does justice to the few great individuals is offensive to democratic sensibilities. In arguing that Burke's ideas "should be treated as *products* of historical and personal experience," Professor Kramnick is denying the possibility of reflective detachment and suggesting that Burke's thought obeys "some superior force" ruling over it. In so doing, he panders to the worst prejudice of our time—that which suggests that because most men are captivated by the spirit of the age, all men must be. □

#### BOOK REVIEW

##### *Six Men*

Alistair Cooke / Alfred A. Knopf / \$8.95

Terry Eastland

About a third of the way through this splendid book, I had the feeling that somehow the television had come on and there was Alistair Cooke, speaking the very words that I was reading. I shouldn't have objected had this in fact happened, inasmuch as any one of the memoirs that make up *Six Men* could agreeably be read aloud, even over the air. That is, in fact, precisely what distinguishes this book: It is written for the ear. And because it is, one happily lingers over phrases, sentences, and even whole paragraphs. Any writer should seek this effect, but especially a memoirist, since at his best he will enforce something like adagio speed on the reader, the better to allow him to take in the life being remembered.

Each of the six men—Charlie Chaplin, Edward VIII, H.L. Mencken, Adlai Stevenson, Bertrand Russell, and Humphrey Bogart—were good friends of Cooke or subjects for a lot of his by-lines. About them one learns a variety of things, ranging from the odd bit of fact to traits, habits, and dispositions. One learns, for example, that Chaplin was as unaware of his rising fame early in his career as he was later on of the \$900,000 that had piled up in a checking account; that Edward inherited from his grandfather a sensual, sybaritic

*Terry Eastland is an editorial writer for the San Diego Union.*

side but from no one did he get that necessary attribute of royalty, a sense of duty; that Mencken was a compulsive hand washer and rarely wrote a piece without retreating to the washbasin five or six times; that Stevenson could not commit what his political managers asked for—at least one grammatical error a day during a campaign swing through California; that Russell figured Gladstone, not Lenin, was the most terrifying man he ever sat opposite; and that Bogart, though afraid to say so, was at bottom an incurable puritan.

One learns about these men, moreover, with good humor and irony and without gush or whitewash. It is the absence of these latter that credits Cooke as a memoirist, since the temptation of the genre is to indulge the person written about. Particularly does Cooke avoid this temptation in his treatments of Edward and Russell, possibly the best memoirs of the lot, and so worth noting.

Cooke tells the story of Edward's abdication, brought about by his insistence on marrying an American divorcée, a Mrs. Simpson, and then moves on to comment on Edward's 35 years in exile. Here Cooke might have adopted that attitude towards Edward which the former monarch himself came to adopt, namely, that "he had been condemned to exile for nothing but his great love." Cooke might have written as Shana Alexander, whom he quotes, once did: "On this side of the water, the entire

affair can only make sense as romance. As history, it was outrageous, medieval in its cruelty...beyond all human comprehension."

But no: Cooke likes Edward, all right, but cannot admire the self-pitying Edward in exile. Edward "had not been simply a lover defied but the mainspring of a constitutional crisis." It was his insistence on marrying Mrs. Simpson that raised the issue of whether there may not be some ways in which a king has independent political power. Had Edward known what happened in 1688, he would have also known that there were none; that, indeed, his marriage to Mrs. Simpson touched the public interest and so was subject to scrutiny by Parliament.

Ignorant of history as king, Edward was similarly ignorant in exile. He failed to understand that "in the British system the monarch is the vessel of the monarchy and that once the vessel is changed the old monarch has at best a dubious status." Edward was no more than a washed-up king, and yet in his self-pity he wanted the perquisites of royalty; he did not get them, and Cooke wisely does not indulge him now.

Concerning Russell, the temptation is to say on the subject of the man's goatish ways that he was a great lover, and then to say no more. But Cooke perceptively notes that the puritan in Russell and his "very conscious intellectual nature" forced him "to explain every sexual call of nature as a

fated invitation to a mystical union of souls, an incurable form of rationalization that got him into perpetual trouble." The implication is that Russell sought the lofty explanation when downright lust may have been—and probably was—all that was at work. That is not a flattering notion about a man who hated hypocrisy and made much of the importance of honesty; but it is an accurate one.

The dustjacket notes that in reading *Six Men* one will come upon a seventh—Cooke himself—and I would be remiss were I to let him go unattended. Yes, there are spots throughout the book where Cooke necessarily pops up, as in the anecdotes in which

he co-stars. But I should think that the more interesting glimpse of Cooke is suggested in the two sentences that close his prefatory "A Note on Fame and Friendship": "They [the six men] all seem to me to be deeply conservative men who, for various psychological reasons, yearned to be recognized rather as hellions or brave progressives. Perhaps that is their real link with this writer." Well, there's no use trying to get inside Cooke's head to discover whether he yearns, or once yearned, to be the hellion or the progressive. But on the other matter, the style and substance of *Six Men* leave no question: Cooke is conservative, in the spiritual and social sense

of that word, and in that sense more "deeply conservative" than some members of the sextet he writes of. Edward failed in having both a sense of duty and a knowledge of history, and Russell lacked—Cooke's term—horse sense.

Because qualities such as these often are missing in our public men, and in our journalists, I venture that their presence in Cooke accounts for a great deal of his popularity. If so, it is more evidence that the New World likes what the Old periodically and graciously seems to deposit in its midst: a civilized and civilizing man. *Six Men* is distinctively the work of such a man. □

---

## BOOK REVIEW

*A Rumor of War*

Philip Caputo / Holt, Rinehart, Winston / \$10.00

Edward J. Walsh

Of the American writers, it was probably Stephen Crane, in *The Red Badge of Courage*, who first described the sublime camaraderie of men in battle. Crane wrote: "There was a consciousness always of the presence of his comrades about him. He [Fleming] felt the subtle battle brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting. It was a mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death."

A century had passed since the end of that most tragic of American wars when Marine Second Lieutenant Philip Caputo led his rifle platoon at a jaunty double-time down the ramp of an Air Force transport onto the tarmac at Danang, Vietnam. His unit, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, spearheaded the introduction of American ground troops, in the spring of 1965. Of the Marines, traditionally the "first to fight," the 9th MEB was the first to dig foxholes in the muddy clay of 'Nam, the first to hear sniper fire about its ears, the first to shed the illusions wrought by John F. Kennedy's proud mythmaking.

Caputo survived almost a year in the hot wet jungle, watching his fellow Marines kill, and die. *A Rumor of War* is his bitter-sweet memoir. The book is a chronicle of modern war: shorn of glamor, but not heroism; punctuated often by cowardice and awful malice, but with acts of true nobility and manly tenderness as well. It is the unending contradictions which mark Caputo's book most conspicuously. For him, the war was neither evil nor virtuous,

---

*Edward J. Walsh, who served as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps, works for the United States Industrial Council in Nashville, Tennessee.*

but, one suspects, a terrible adventure he undertook, seeking no more than adventure and material for a Hemingwayesque novel, living out his tough-Marine fantasies, but getting more than he bargained for. The best passages are the descriptions of Marine Corps training which the author, for all his agony, thoroughly enjoys in the retelling, as do all Marines; and the battle episodes:

The last helicopters were taking off, climbing nose down, banking sharply as they climbed, with the dark-green mountains in the background. Marines were fanning out across the rice paddies, some in extended skirmish lines, some in serried, staggered ranks, the mortar shells bursting among them. An enemy automatic rifle tack-tacked from a row of grassy mounds, west of the landing zone....

Ten years after leaving the Corps, Caputo has finished his war story. It is all too true, told without melodrama, every fact in place. We learn—or, for those who were Marines, are reminded—of the Marine Corps policy, cast in iron, of using black ink, never blue; of the archetypal gyrene platoon sergeant, who rules by intimidation—and well; of the heart-rending eagerness of young men for war—the blood-swollen god, Crane called it.

We remember, too, that in 1965 there were few who thought twice about sending ground troops to Vietnam—to plod through glue-like mud in jungles, carrying mortars and 25-pound machine guns, chasing an enemy who lived there but did not mind dying if it helped kill or mutilate an American. As the Marines bore the brunt of the fighting for the first two years of the war, they took casualties: to booby traps and disease, to insects and misplaced friendly

fire, as much as to the Viet Cong. Caputo, like many of our friends and neighbors, went along; he was lucky enough to come back.

But for all the searing emotion of collecting the wounded, for all the gripping suspense of waiting in foxholes on endless pitch-black nights, it is the handwringing ambiguity of the author's loss of faith that finally dominates, and dilutes the genuine power of his book. Two-and-a-half years after America's humiliation in Indochina, there are few left who would defend our policy there; even fewer—probably no one—who would defend the way Caputo and his men were forced to fight. But Caputo plays out his disillusionment with the war as if he had to sell it to the reader. His objections to the Vietnam adventure are not particularly original: He wonders why we were there, what with the corrupt Saigon regime; he laments what the war did to the good, average, small-town boys in his platoon; he despises, understandably, the body-count syndrome. With a few moving exceptions, his protest is the same as that heard on college campuses in the late sixties. After his discharge, Caputo participated half-heartedly in the antiwar movement, mailed back his medals, etc., all of it tortuously replayed in *A Rumor of War*. Which is a shame; the book could have been a poignant work of art.

At the same time, the author is candid. A veteran of countless firefights, he confesses that he, like many who shared his experience, is unable to detach himself from the compelling thrill of combat, with its mystic lure of danger. "Under fire, man's powers of life are heightened in proportion to the proximity of death, so that he [feels] an elation as extreme as his dread," he tells us. Crane may have been more