



AMERICA LAST

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

When one has reached the advanced age of the Holy Man Ruhollah Khomeini, the professional services of the weatherman become very important indeed. Allah and all his esoteric blah doubtless remain diverting, but a septuagenarian grouser's preeminent concern is with the dance of the barometer. And what of the humidity? How blow the winds? Will the temperature remain benign?

Let the barometric pressure dive, and a geezer is ambushed by sudden inflammation of the nasal mucosa, painful swellings in the joints, and, as every subscriber to the *New England Journal of Medicine* knows, constriction of the blood vessels. A vagrant chill in the wind is but a prelude to paresthesias of the most exotic and unenviable variety. Things tingle. Things go numb. Suddenly there is a surge of gas in the upper gastrointestinal tract, a burning behind the eyes, perhaps dizzy spells. Does the Holy Man go about his daily ministrations amid a gaggle of prostrate followers? Well, why should he not pause occasionally to boot one in the arse? They get in the way, and wait until *they* get up in years. The Holy Man Khomeini can tell you that, as the shadow of one's years lengthens, a bout on the prayer rug is no picnic, and, should the barometer heave suddenly, there can be flatus, perhaps worse.

Precisely what the weather was in historic Qom during the first weekend in November, I do not know. Our American newspapers no longer carry all the important foreign news, and our newly reformed CIA would have difficulty spotting a major earthquake in the area, so humane and progressive has it become.

Whatever the weather, it is apparent that it took a drastic change on November 4. Before that date the days must have been halcyon, for the venerated Mullah was relatively quiescent: sweetly lapping up his luncheons of bread and gravy, perhaps mulling over plans for a few new

prisons, but nothing more. In far-off Mexico the Shah, attired in his ever-present glamour shirt, discoed lewdly, but the cerebral chambers of the Holy Man remained free of fever. Then on November 4 he filled with an inexplicable fury. Why?

He should have been purring with holy contentment. Doubled up with gallstones, the Shah had been flown to New York Hospital. There he had his gall bladder removed in a two-and-one-half-hour operation, and—Allah be praised—cancer was reported. Painful therapies were a certainty. The Holy Man should have been kicking up his ancient heels and dispensing cigars to his entourage of

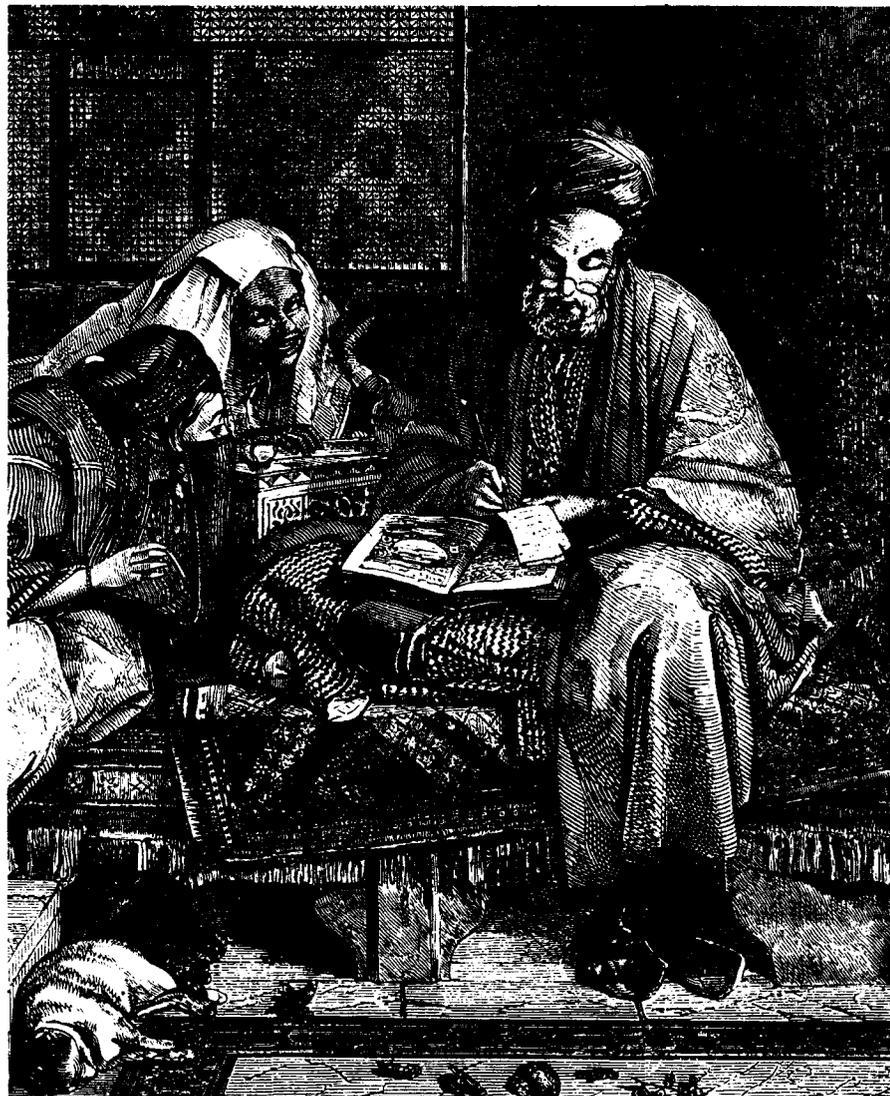
yokels. But no. Fury descended on him.

Soon he was bashing his old head into the holy rug, foaming with imprecations against our Great Republic, and defenestrating wastepaper baskets. Under his homiletics, the *crème de la crème* of Iranian studenthood—all middle-aged, inflamed, and some speaking Russian—went marching, and the entire U.S. Embassy was kidnapped. Iranian radio roared with the sacred vituperative of this gifted "Islamic philosopher." The land of the free and the home of the brave became "The

Great Satan," the "Enemy No. 1 of Humanity," and, well, indelicacies so shocking that even members of the League of Women Voters would not utter them. Why such furious allegations against us and not our neighbors, the hospitable Mexicans? Our CIA analysts, busily pondering their meager evidence and pestering the Library of Congress for more facts, remain in the dark. They should not rule out the weather. Perhaps a sudden fall in the barometer constricted the flow of blood to the Holy Man's ancient ruin of a brain. Inflammation of the mucosa cannot be ruled out. Still, despite the great saintliness Brother Young spied in him, I wish he were dead.

It is significant that our President chose Mr. Ramsey Clark, of all the political corpses in America, as our envoy to Iran. And it is more significant still that the dyspeptic Holy Man left him blubbering and scratching his noodle in Istanbul. Last January Clark, a tireless and unctuous sympathizer for some of the most barbaric so-called liberation movements, returned from a personal conversation with the Rev. Khomeini, carrying away no hint of the man's lunatic viciousness. Instead, he and his traveling companions, Professor Richard Falk and Mr. Don Luce, returned with praise for Khomeini, admonitions against impending American deviltry, and scorn for the Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar, by all accounts a decent liberal intellectual who was then a staunch opponent of the autocratic Shah and has ever since shown himself to be a brave friend of liberty.

These three meatheads are significant because they so wondrously represent the foreign policy mentality that has reigned in the Wonderboy's White House. It is a mentality whose ancestry dates back to the days of Henry Wallace. Founded on the most absurd fatuities, it always assumes the innocence and higher morality of our enemies: They are in the right, we are in the wrong; accommodation



is our only proper response. Today this mentality stands exposed in all its decrepitude. In the Southeast Asian holocaust and in the Iranian hysteria, we see the utter discrediting of the sometimes guilt-ridden, sometimes self-righteous appeasers who have reigned atop our foreign policy estab-

lishment since Vietnam. Their nostrums have lead to literally millions of deaths and could lead to millions more. Now these nostrums and the beliefs underpinning them have been exposed in all their lurid vacuity. To persist in advocating them is to declare oneself a fanatic in behalf of idiocy.

One has to be an idiot to believe, as some piously do, that America's war in Southeast Asia persuaded Pol Pot to destroy his own nation. One has to be an idiot and a drunk to believe, as Mr. Luce does, that there would be no boat people had the United States and the refugees been more coopera-

tive with Hanoi. And to think that the Shah was our "puppet" and that we were responsible for his policies—well, here one has to be less than an idiot: One has to be Garry Wills writing his syndicated column. There

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## C A P I T O L I D E A S



### KENNEDY'S HEARING AIDES

by Tom Bethell

Wherever Senator Edward M. Kennedy goes, he is surrounded by a tight cluster of petitioners and protectors who maneuver for positions around his bustling person. Some call out, "Senator... Senator..." as they trot along in his wake—the whole convoy proceeding at well above normal walking speed. Others carry briefcases and wave memoranda, while still others have little insignia in their lapels and wear large-cut suits to accommodate the bulges under their armpits.

And here they come, Kennedy leading by a nose, rounding corners and now clattering down the final straight, which is an echoing flagstone corridor in the center of the United States Capitol building. Kennedy is on his way to the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing room, where he will preside over a markup session of Senate bill S.1722 (formerly S.1).

A "markup session" is what happens when the senators on a committee get together and debate among themselves various proposals to amend pending legislation. S.1722 is an elaborate attempt to rewrite a section of the criminal code, and it has been winding its way through the legislative labyrinths for eight years at least. The draft bill is over 400 pages long, and very few people in America have any idea what the

whole thing means or why in fact it is necessary to rewrite the criminal code. Judging by their reactions at today's markup, quite a few senators don't know either.

The hearing room is plainly too small for the number of people in it. A long table with microphones in front of each chair awaits the senatorial arrivals. In front of Kennedy's

chair, at the end of the table, there is a little wooden gavel. The room is already packed with senators' aides and reporters. The latter carry notepads, but are probably more interested in Kennedy than in the bill under consideration. The numerous legislative assistants, who outnumber the senators two or three to one, are more interested in trying to influ-

ence the bill this way or that. It is true to say of most of them, if not all, that a portion of their daily routine is devoted to imagining that they actually are senators, in which capacity they find that they easily outperform their employers.

Kennedy enters the room and pops a cigar into his mouth. Heads turn and there is a subtle change in the noise level. When a celebrity shows up at a crowded party, the decibel level rises. But this is more complex. The murmur level rises. A Secret Service man takes up station by the door, and Kennedy moves over toward his chair, taking his jacket off. The jutting line of his back-corset is plainly visible beneath his shirt.

His face is salmon-pink, his hair somewhat tousled. Kennedy has about him an air of slightly disreputable, roguish charm. You get the feeling that were it not for the accident of heredity he would today be far, far away from the tedium of a Judiciary Committee meeting—perhaps tending bar somewhere in South Boston or rollicking about with half a dozen pals at the racetrack. It is possible even to feel sorry for him—driven by circumstances more or less beyond his control into a public life for which he is probably unsuited by temperament, and which he probably does not enjoy.

Sitting next to him is the aged Senator Strom Thurmond, an extinct volcano most unlikely to erupt. Very



Drawing by Elliott Banfield, from *Public Nuisances*, Basic Books.

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