

• The Bookshelf •

CONDUCTED BY HENRY C. TRACY

THE AMERICAN MIND—WHO SHAPES IT?

MAKING THE AMERICAN MIND. By Richard D. Mosier. New York: King's Crown Press (Columbia University). 207 pp. \$3

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. By William Ernest Hocking. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 243 pp. \$3

Reading Dr. Mosier's book, one may feel a faint regret for the passing of an age when a basic code of morals, of social attitudes and economic outlook could be distributed so painlessly, and so eagerly accepted by the nation, through its school readers. In his research study of the McGuffey Readers, the author shows that for a period of eighty-four years—from 1836 to 1920—children of all ages were under the influence of this popular series. The books sold 122,000,000 between those dates, were praised for their indoctrination of virtues such as modesty, restraint, and temperance, and loved for the charm of their stories. But this study discloses that there was, pervading the entire series, a subtle influence in defense of property and privilege, with a slant toward the view that rule is for the rich and the wellborn, and that the poor cannot be trusted. Revealed also is fear of change, and distrust of reform. None seemed needed in a McGuffey world, believed in by thrifty and industrious folk in a land teeming with opportunity and heedless of industrial problems in the making. Painstaking analysis and liberal quotations from the Readers verify Dr. Mosier's findings.

Today another medium—the press—holds the secular field, and no one not a

recluse can escape its influence. In his report for the Commission on Freedom of the Press, and as its spokesman, Harvard's Professor Hocking (Philosophy, Emeritus) shows that this new and high-powered medium has assumed functions not foreseen in our Bill of Rights, such as that of umpire and of emotional interpretation; shows too that while in theory we are free to accept or reject decisions of merit, we have no fair basis for our reaction if some of the facts are withheld or distorted; nor are we free to set up printing presses and publish our own views, since all that is now in the hands of powerful organizations. These in turn are subject to pressure groups, if not themselves agents of political pressure. That leaves the public at the mercy of organizations who have uncontrolled liberty (if they choose to use it, and some do) to breed rancor in the world by maligning an ally or spreading international falsehood, then plead "freedom of the press" to cover their treasons. The report is against direct government control of the press as in the Soviet system, but redefines its freedom so as to include responsibility to the public, just as freedom is redefined for a drunken driver on the public highway; suggests legal checks for patent abuses. The condensed findings of the Commission are given as an Appendix, clarifying the concept of liberty as applied to the press.

Harvey Ferguson's *People and Power* (Morrow. \$3), a study of political behavior, in tune with the findings of the Commission, shows the American mind so hampered by old concepts of freedom

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that it cannot act to save what remains of it for the common man. Right in believing individual liberty to be the very heart and life-spark of democracy, men yet think of it in terms of a bygone age. To take old anarchic notions of freedom that have become folk-beliefs and trim them down to the concise meaning required today is a task calling for nice perception and large experience. The author has both. Of immigrant stock, bred in the Southeast, schooled in the South, proved (as journalist) in the Midwest, and free-lancer on the West Coast, versed in regional modes, Fergusson finds common everywhere the urge "to get back" to a free state long lost, an urge played upon by those who preach "freedom of private enterprise" even while they take more and more of it into their own hands by assuming control not only of the machinery of enterprise but of the means to possess any of it. *People and Power*, widely read, could advance voting intelligence by fifty years.

Henry Seidel Canby's *American Memoir* (Houghton Mifflin. \$5) recalls a time (1880-1900) when we did not long "to get back." We were already there, so we thought; had just the country we wanted; believed it would be the same forever. Part I tells of the town of the author's youth and how life was lived there, reveals its charm and also the flaws that would widen soon and break the pattern. Such a flaw was the kind of educa-

tion that gave us neither discipline, power, nor culture, at common school levels. At the next level, Dr. Canby describes college life as valued chiefly for its social advantages and, so seen, "exactly the right education for those who wanted the wealth, the position, the individual power that was being worshipped just then in America." Not wanting those things, the author himself emerged as a scholar and critic, concerned to interpret for the common reader the books written by writers groping for some meaning in life during an age of confusion, from the 1920s on. These books mirrored the plight of the men they typed—Babbitt among them, who strove hard but found in the end (to quote the *Memoir*) that all he had was "mileage without a destination."

Read *The American Experience* by Henry Bamford Parkes (Knopf. \$3.50) for further light on the genius and spirit of an American mind that would not abide an old-country yoke. Released from class notions, a selection of European stocks found here the right conditions for a new basic pattern that gives scope to the gifts and energies of the common man. Hence the democratic idea grew in spite of adverse pressures, launched the world's greatest social experiment, but fell short of perfecting it for want of a clear consciousness of its aims, and for lack of a coherent philosophy of political behavior. (See Fergusson's *People and Power*, above, for a study on that theme.)

FRIENDLY ATTITUDES

In *Approaches to Group Understanding*, a symposium edited by Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, and R. M. MacIver (Harper. \$5), Rachel Davis-Dubois

leads off the discussion: says that ways to develop friendly attitudes among all sorts of people can be learned better in the U.S. than elsewhere, for we already have