

States of America. Entirely free of pedantry and parental admonitions, he read his son's essays with eager interest, suggested improvements in thought and expression, minimized disappointments, and provided counsel that would benefit any aspiring collegian today.

When Joseph Ruggles Wilson writes to his son he addresses not a youth but a mature man whose intelligence delights him. When Wilson is sorely hurt by failing to get into the junior oratorical contest at Princeton, his father tells Tommy the blow will bring out his mettle, asks him to replace ambition with industry, and commends patient study of mathematics, languages, science, and philosophy. "Can you hope to jump into eminence all at once?" He urges Wilson to acquire the habit of cautious thinking, "thinking which has mental eyes for looking all around and all through a subject, and which indulges in no statements for the support of which there is not good proof." Oratory was close to the young man's heart; the fundamentals that his father stressed in these letters

served him well in later life, when he used his persuasive powers to move the nation from isolation to militant defense.

Janet Woodrow Wilson enfolds her son with a mother's love, worries about his food and clothing, and encourages his efforts to learn and excel. Her letters reflect the warmth of family life. "What sort of eating have you?" she asks. "Is your food wholesome? I have feared that your silence on the subject was rather an unfavorable sign." Born in Carlisle, England, she was five when brought to Ohio, where her father became a Presbyterian pastor. One brief paragraph in a letter to her son in 1878 opens a subject for speculation. She asks whether Tommy would like to settle in Nebraska after completing his studies; they have "some very beautiful land near Fremont," and she thinks they might go there and perhaps find a good opening for him. The notes indicate Tommy was weighing possibilities for a future career. Suppose he had settled in Nebraska? This is one of those unanswerable questions that attend destiny.

fulness everywhere, particularly about race relations and the preservation of our cities and countryside, the essential mood of his book is one of civilized optimism. He finds that Big Business and even Madison Avenue are more responsible than ever before. He considers the fact "that youth has refound its political voice, however raucous a voice, is occasion for rejoicing." And he even risks the disapproval of his *New Yorker* colleague Dwight Macdonald, the deplorer of "midcult," by maintaining that "tele-



vision, books, magazines, cultural events, even half-grasped psychoanalytic concepts have tended to widen our field of vision. . . . The case that the mass media have forced nearly all of us into a single mold is a weak one."

The only problem with *The Great Leap*, readable and judicious as it is, is the sense of seeing images reflected and re-reflected, as in an old-fashioned barber shop where facing mirrors seem to offer infinite vistas in depth which turn out to be based on a single real object. Mr. Brooks is forever quoting someone whose analysis may have been based on observations by someone else. His sources cover the entire range of tireless measurers and observers of American life, from the Lynds and Margaret Mead to Vance Packard and William H. Whyte, Jr. The author himself seems to be aware of this phenomenon when he refers to foundations as "vintage navel-contemplators." But, characteristically, he describes it with another man's phrase—Eric Larrabee's "the self-conscious society."

But the scope of *The Great Leap* makes such reliance on other sources inevitable. To those who will find fault with the careful symmetry of the interpretations, it should be made clear that Mr. Brooks's main goal is coherence rather than firm conclusions. And if he is open to charges of shallowness by specialists and of blandness by the general reader, it should be noted that there are no shortages of narrow scholarly examinations or overheated popular exposés of American life. *The Great Leap* is rare and valuable because it tries to see us whole in cool and civilized perspective.

#### LITERARY I. Q. ANSWERS

1. Corot. 2. Chardin. 3. Géricault. 4. Fragonard. 5. Ingres. 6. Renoir. 7. Audubon. 8. Turner. 9. Caravaggio. 10. Modigliani. 11. Toulouse-Lautrec. 12. Gauguin. 13. Delacroix. 14. Degas. 15. Velásquez. 16. Goya.

## A Manifest Destiny of Change

***The Great Leap: The Past Twenty-Five Years in America*, by John Brooks (Harper & Row. 382 pp. \$6.95), while regarding the past quarter-century as a period of unprecedented change in our national life, resists generalizations about the cultural explosion, the organization man, and mass conformity. Robert Stein is editor of *McCall's* magazine and chairman of the American Society of Magazine Editors.**

By ROBERT STEIN

THE MOST categorical statement to be found in *The Great Leap* is its title. John Brooks contends that the past quarter-century "has seen such rapid and far-reaching changes in many aspects of American life as are not only unprecedented in our own national experience, but may well be unprecedented in that of any nation other than those that have been suddenly transformed by the devastation of war or plague."

Curiously but happily, this sweeping generalization is supported by a series of carefully balanced essays on various aspects of American life that are far removed from the usual hyperbole of popular social critics and social historians. In fact, one of the charms of *The Great*

*Leap* is its calm and often wry determination to resist swallowing whole such propositions as the cultural explosion, the organization man, the growth of social conformity, and the flattening of our tastes and thought by the mass media.

Mr. Brooks does assert that the United States has grown infinitely bigger, richer, and more powerful since 1939; that we have become largely an urban middle-class nation, and that these changes have profoundly altered our lives in many ways. All this is obvious enough, but Mr. Brooks brings a rare combination of talents to his broad portrait of the social landscape. As a writer on economics he deftly sketches in the statistical dimensions; everything from personal debt to the national budget seems to have increased tenfold or more in twenty-five years. As a cultural reporter, he traces the changing emphasis in art, literature, and music from formal communication to spontaneous self-expression. And with a novelist's eye he lights on small but significant detail: the real end of anti-Semitism in this country was marked by Emily Post's prescription of the proper form of invitation for a Protestant-Jewish wedding. ("When the formidable Mrs. Post was explaining *how* to do it, surely there could no longer be any question about the social correctness of doing it at all!")

While Mr. Brooks qualifies his hope-

# Neighborly for the Common Good

*As a City Upon a Hill: The Town in American History*, by Page Smith (Knopf, 332 pp. \$6.95), examines the ways in which the small community has shaped our national culture. Biographer and historian Margaret L. Coit hails from the town of West Newbury, Massachusetts: population, 2,000.

By MARGARET L. COIT

THE SMALL town as myth and reality is the subject of Page Smith's thoughtful, challenging, but occasionally unsatisfying book. As the nineteenth century looked back to Jefferson's independent yeoman, so the American of today looks back to the small town of his roots or his dreams.

For purposes of definition, Dr. Smith, prize-winning biographer of John Adams, sees the United States as settled by two kinds of towns. One, the cumulative town, just grew, because a river was there or a railroad was going to be there or a trading center was needed for the farmers. The other, the covenanted town, dates back to John Winthrop and the Puritans. It was settled by a group covenanted to the ideal of advancing God's kingdom on earth. Towns of this kind were being founded well into the nineteenth century. When the old faith faded, there were new causes; for years temperance did very well. Few historians, Smith contends, have paid attention to how this type of community has shaped our national culture.

Smith sees the town as a far more formative part of the American experience than the frontier. The frontier moved on; the towns and town-builders remained. He goes far to explain the innate conservatism of so much of the American West and Middle West: the area was colonized by Easterners, often fleeing to preserve orthodoxy rather than in defiance of it. Thus, these colonized or covenanted towns fought sin, cities, Sabbath-breaking, anything that endangered the common safety. God ruled as the Father, and the sin of one member of the community might bring down His wrath upon all.

And here is the paradox. The small town, not the New Deal or the Great Society, was the original welfare state. From the time of Winthrop, townspeople had looked upon themselves as

knit together, of "one bond," and had seen God's intention as that "every man might have need of each other." Never did the small towns dream that capitalism and the city would ever be equated with "the American way of life." It was in the city that "rugged individualism" flourished, that you "got rich quick," where you looked out for yourself and guarded yourself against your neighbor. The cities, according to McGuffey's *Reader*, then as now were sinkholes of poverty and corruption.

But in the towns the community, the common good, was of more importance than the individual. In the towns was virtually a classless society, neighbor cared for neighbor, helping each other in misfortune. It was axiomatic that "members of the community must be provided for . . . if they were not able to take care of themselves." A cow might be bought, doctor's bills paid, clothing furnished, employment found. But help was for the "deserving poor"; poor and deserving were not, as they

are now, synonymous terms. Those who refused to work were made to work.

On the other hand, cumulative towns, whose ideal was success, sometimes found it, as did Holyoke, Massachusetts. At the same time, its disease and death rate tripled and it was unable to provide for its paupers. Little towns whose ideal was making a living rather than learning to live often went the same way. Towns pretending to represent the country parroted the cries of the cities, and even the covenanted towns eventually became suburbs.

STILL another paradox: according to President Johnson's most recent polls, over 50 per cent of Americans today would prefer to live on a farm or in a genuine small town. Yet 70 per cent actually live in cities or suburbs, with more streaming in all the time. Special inducements may have to be offered to our rural population to maintain our normal food supplies. People may want to go back to the farm and the small town, but those who are there do not want to stay.

Now, what were once genuine small towns are filling with refugees from the cities. Philosopher Martin Buber has said that a town is a community only when one's relation to it overrides everything else. For all his hankering for the town, the newcomer's loyalty is

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