

of *Everyman III* will, nevertheless, seek non-violently to enter the harbor and speak to the Russian people.

There must be many Americans who will recognize the unique importance of this enterprise and will wish to support it. Further information may be obtained from Committee for Nonviolent Action, 325 Lafayette Street, New York 12, New York.

A. J. MUSTE

National Chairman

Committee for Nonviolent Action

New York, New York

Mayer's Homespun Truths

Dear Sirs:

I read *The Progressive* primarily for Milton Mayer's occasional contributions. He is your ablest writer by far; even when I am disagreeing with him, I am grateful for his way of bringing homespun truths about flesh-and-blood people back into the discussion.

In "The Giant Economy Size," Mayer is at the top of his form. He states what is really a very sophisticated and reasonable position on one of the most cliché-ridden issues of our time—and says it all so deftly that it could pass for light entertainment. That is writing!

DICK FREDERICKSEN
Chicago, Illinois

September Issue "Tops"

Dear Sirs:

The September issue of *The Progressive* is "tops." I thought it relevant to have the notes on "Congressional Hypocrisy" in the same issue as Milton Mayer's splendid article, "The Giant Economy Size."

Certainly our present Congress is not much concerned about the three great evils in our society, Jim Crowism, Know-Nothingism, and militarism.

WILLIAM E. BYERLY
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Library Subscription

Dear Sirs:

I gave a file of *The Progressive* to the Portland city library a year or so ago. They had some kind soul who had given a subscription and evidently it expired. The librarian telephoned me, asking if I wanted to "carry on." So herewith it is. She said they had quite a lot of readers, which makes me feel that it is well worth it.

STAN R. PIER
Portland, Oregon

Good Try, But No Cigar

Dear Sirs:

I see the great likelihood of a game—a guessing game, and a sizeable one—developing among your readership. Before this thing gets started, and possibly grows to quite unmanageable proportions, why don't you nip it in the bud and tell your readers that Theophrastus Such is James R. (*The Rule of Folly*) Newman?

THOMAS BRODERICK
Schenectady, New York

BOOKS

Kahn's Apologia

THINKING ABOUT THE UNTHINKABLE, by Herman Kahn. Horizon Press. 254 pp. \$4.50.

Reviewed by

James E. McDonald

IT is easy to see (and to understand) that the thunderous volleys which were fired from all sides at Herman Kahn upon publication of his ponderous 1960 volume, *On Thermonuclear War*, are still ringing painfully in Kahn's ears. His latest book has clearly been assembled with one principal objective in mind: to try to provide an *apologia* for the existence of those who, with Kahn, are systematically thinking about the unthinkable possibility of thermonuclear war. On balance, I would say that he achieves that objective.

Some of Kahn's past critics, upon sensing that the above purpose dominates this book, will caustically urge that the whole thing is only a project-proposal-at-large for Kahn's newly established Hudson Institute, which is dedicated to thinking about the unthinkable in the no-holds-barred manner which Kahn illustrates in the rambling interior of this book.

Those same critics will find far fewer juicy quotes than before to document their view that Kahn is not man but monster. For the most part, Kahn is now much more non-committal about tactics and strategies, because his main goal here is merely to illustrate their innate complexity. He has also become noticeably less matter-of-fact about ticking off megadeath options associated with his long lists of alternative policies and war plans. Only in a few

scattered passages does he indulge in that casualness about catastrophe that so maddened many who read his earlier book. Example: "It is difficult to visualize—at least in the Sixties—a likely sequence of events that would set back either the population or the wealth of the world by more than a generation or so."

Some will damn a brand of thinking that admonishes us to "readjust to reality without being confused by past experience;" but a sober, careful reading of what Kahn is trying to say leaves me with the fear that there is more truth than sarcasm in that admonishment. In his main thesis that we'd better not hide our heads in the sands of past history, Kahn is only urging what so many other writers are telling us today. Thus, Hedley Bull, in his *Control of the Arms Race*, published last year, warns against putting thermonuclear war out of mind on any grounds that it cannot occur because it is just too horrible. Bull's words are worth quoting to underscore Kahn's thesis: "This view—is not often made explicit, but . . . lurks unstated in much of our thinking, and provides even the least metaphysically minded of us with a furtive source of comfort. However, history is littered with catastrophe unthinkable and unimaginable to its victims, who placed their trust in a logic of history which deserted them in their hour of need."

The best chapters of Kahn's book are the first and last. In the first, Kahn is fencing with critics of his earlier book in a lively and effective way; in the last chapter, Kahn, with none of his customary glibness, reveals deep concern that our sands are running out faster than we think. The bulkier interior of the book is devoted to what France's Raymond

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Aron, in his introduction, gently terms "Kahn's favorite method of exhaustive enumeration of hypotheses." All too often these are more exhausting than exhaustive, and in one or two instances it seemed to me that Kahn chose to illustrate his plea for strange new aids to imaginative thought by using examples that are utterly unconvincing, even ludicrous.

Yet for all these technical shortcomings, the bulky interior is meant to spell out the important argument that the future is complex and unfamiliar, and we had better do all we can to think it out and to see that there are diverse groups and institutions devoting all their energies to this urgent task. Since Kahn here surely does have his own Hudson Institute's interests in mind, even the reader who agrees that there are weighty problems crying for attention must be allowed a cynical question: Why doesn't Kahn make a more convincing argument that agency-supported "think-factories" will not be subservient to their supporting agencies? Kahn passes off this danger with a few perfunctory remarks, yet my own experience makes me pessimistic on this crucial score. I believe that Hudson Institutes and Rand Corporations and the ilk serve useful purposes; but as safeguards against subservient and inbred thought, I see need for a wide base of support crossing many agency boundaries and extending into the private foundations. And to insure open criticism of favorite policies and strategies, I would like to see many study groups and policy research projects established within the great American universities where there still rests a degree of independence of thought that the think-factories profess but have yet to document by example.

In his new book, Kahn again speaks out strongly in favor of much more Federal attention to civil defense, but Representative Albert Thomas' long knife took care of that one while this book was in press. Much less emphatically, Kahn seems to come out favoring the kind of Counter-force Plus Avoidance strategy that falls so close to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's Ann Arbor proclamation of June 16; but, to repeat, Kahn grinds no one strategic axe in this book. Where

Kahn does take a strong new stand (and this may surprise some of his past critics) is in the matter of world government: he is adamant that if weapon diffusion proceeds, we have at most a few decades in which to adjust to the idea of world government, or else.

Kahn seems to me to emerge from the pages of this book as a man sincerely trying to think about the unthinkable. Though he has in the past appeared over-glib or callous in his analytical remarks on our thermo-nuclear future, I believe that even some of his stronger critics will, on reading his newest book, grudgingly admit that perhaps he is not really a monster after all—just misunderstood all too easily.

Civil War Gore

PATRIOTIC GORE: STUDIES IN THE LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, by Edmund Wilson. Oxford. 816 pp. \$8.50.

Reviewed by

Richard N. Current

EDMUND WILSON has read "a certain amount of history," he says, and he has seen a Walt Disney movie of life in the ocean depths. In this film he was particularly impressed by the sight of a sea slug "gobbling up smaller organisms through a large orifice at one end of its body." When two sea slugs meet, he learned, the larger "ingurgitates" the smaller, even though the size difference be slight.

"Now," Wilson goes on, "the wars fought by human beings are stimulated as a rule primarily by the same instincts as the voracity of the sea slug." Men use "morality" and "reason" to justify what they do, though in wartime they actually lose their senses and their morals. People then behave with the unanimity of (Wilson likes those metaphors of marine life) "a school of fish."

These views on war he presents in his introduction to a series of essays on the lives and writings of some thirty men and women who took part in, or felt the impact of, the Civil War. He quotes so extensively from the writings that his book has some of the qualities of an anthology. Yet it

is essentially a work of collective biography and literary criticism, and the mark of his personality appears on every page, in his choice of selections as well as his comments. The title, incidentally, comes from the Confederate war song, *Maryland! My Maryland!*—"Avenge the patriotic gore/ That flecked the streets of Baltimore."

From the introduction, the reader expects to find a debunking spirit in the discussions of Civil War literature that follow. From the moment he gets into his subject itself, however, Wilson seems to forget his thesis and to lose himself in fascination for the people he writes about. This fascination will infect any reader who has, to begin with, the slightest interest in American literature or history. Such a reader will feel, when he reaches the last of the approximately 800 pages, that the book, though long, is not nearly long enough.

Instead of caricaturing Harriet Beecher Stowe and ridiculing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Wilson gives a compassionate account of the experiences that compelled her to write, and he praises her book as one that, for all its faults, remains powerful. Instead of dismissing Ulysses S. Grant as a butcher, Wilson admires him as a natural gentleman and a clear thinker and writer, the author of "hard and pellucid" memoirs.

Instead of treating Abraham Lincoln as the oaf that Edgar Lee Masters once portrayed, Wilson respects the great man's abilities, though he is by no means a Lincoln lover, even when he says (in one of his many quotable asides) that "the cruelest thing that has happened to Lincoln since he was shot by Booth has been to fall into the hands of Carl Sandburg." Instead of emphasizing George Washington Cable's somewhat prudish traits, Wilson practically idolizes Cable as a lonely and dedicated Southerner working for Negro rights after the war.

As the foregoing illustrations suggest, Wilson not merely departs from his stated thesis; he quite effectively disproves it. He shows that, before the war, men and women on both sides impelled themselves and their fellows to conflict not just for the love of power but for a variety of considerations—considerations as dif-