

Balancing the Books

**Gardner's Book:
Some Hope Left**

By Father John S. Kennedy

Has the United States seen its best days, and is it now in decline? This question engages the attention of John W. Gardner, secretary of health, education and welfare in the Johnson administration, in his new book, "The Recovery of Confidence" (Norton, \$5).

Not to keep anyone in suspense, Gardner thinks that our society is ill, but not mortally so. Troubles there are, many and grievous. But the situation is not irretrievable.

Indeed; "we may even be on the mend . . . We were in greater peril in the complacent years, when all of the present evils were in existence or brewing but were layered over by our natural smugness."

Gardner maintains that the blame for our plight cannot be laid upon this or that group, as, in self-exculpation, we like to place it. It is attributable to all of us, in some measure. Our author does some vigorous finger-pointing at particular types of offenders.

He is especially severe on the apathetic and the extreme. In the former category are those innumerable average citizens who enjoy advantage and security in our society, "but will not turn a hand or make a sacrifice or risk discomfort to help solve its problems." Those in the second category he stigmatizes as executioners, when the need is for physicians.

We are accustomed to mere routine repairs in our society. But something more is required now: a drastic overhaul and a genuine renewal, to effect a society to man's measure. It is not a matter of discarding old values, but of finding new solutions which will preserve the precious old values. A complex interweaving of continuity and change is the work clamoring to be done.

There is at present a climate of nay-saying, which must be cleared away. Gardner sees it as caused by (1) hostility to institutions because of their atrophy and ponderous slowness to meet fresh needs; (2) the expectation-despair syndrome, in which the demand for impossible instant performance leads to instant disillusionment; (3) the breakdown of every sort of authority.

Certainly he would not hold any of our institutions to be beyond criticism. But he contends that every sort of institution needs both needling and nurturing. "In the absence of criticism, every organization ends up being managed for the benefit of the people who run it." But criticism should be informed, specific, and right on target. It should be continuous, and there should be devices for its being heard and made to count.

Self-styled revolutionaries play on the expectation-despair syndrome. Some of them are mountebanks chiefly interested in a theatrical performance which draws attention to themselves. Others appear convinced that the system must be destroyed. "Violence," Gardner warns, "evokes — even seeks — a violent answer. Coercion invites countercoercion." Those advocating anarchical solutions will bring about not liberation but repression.

Government authority has fallen into some disrepute because of its failure to perform. Gardner, with his experience in the President's cabinet, says that our federal government is huge but largely ineffective, and that it does not concern itself with the nation's future as it should. He is deeply concerned, too, about the immobilization of state and local government.

But he also declares that the schools and colleges teach young people to be derisive of leaders as corrupt compromisers, "morally less worthy than those who toil in the antiseptic environment of the laboratory and the study."

Hence our most gifted and idealistic young people are turned away from providing public leadership. And then there is complaint because buffoons and counterfeiters move into the void. Apathy and negativism toward authority result.

Gardner is hard on the fashionable alienated posture which "has discovered that the 'alienated' position is profitable, diverting, and a great ego-inflator . . . How ironic it will be if history records that the most democratic educational system in the world produced an educated class that scorned the rest of society outraged the sensibilities of the man in the street, and could not lead because it could not conceal its contempt for the people who might have been its followers."

Speaking of violence, Richard Maxwell Brown has, under the title "American Violence" (Prentice-Hall, \$5.95), brought together 32 writings describing instances of violence in American history, from the 17th century through the 20th. These have to do with riots, lynchings, assassinations, slaughters, terrorism, organized crime, etc. It is a very unlovely array, making one realize that ours has never been a perfectly peaceful society.

In the epilogue, we are told that "in numbers of political assassinations, riots, politically relevant armed group attacks, and demonstrations, the United States since 1948 has been among the half-dozen most tumultuous nations in the world . . . In total magnitude of strife . . . the United States ranks first among the 17 Western democracies."

Margaret Powell's book "Below Stairs" (Dodd, Mead, \$4.95) is not merely a personal memoir but also, if unintentionally, something of a social document.

Mrs. Powell, now about 60, is an Englishwoman who, at the age of 15, went into domestic service. Figure it out, and you conclude that this was in 1925, give or take a year. Not Victorian times, surely, nor the Edwardian era, either.

She was a member of a large, poor, but self-respecting and lively family, did well in school, but could not continue because she had to be self-supporting as soon as possible.

Hence she became a kitchen maid in an establishment that had eight servants. Her wages were 24 pounds a year, something less than \$120, her hours were endless, her work onerous. She had a dreary room at the top of the house, cold in winter, stifling in summer. And she was treated as if she were a thing.

But she was irrepressible, went on to be a cook when 18, and finally succeeded in marrying and getting out of other people's houses. Her three sons are university graduates, and she herself embarked on a course of adult education when in her 50s, attending lectures and evening classes.

She seems to be a happy person, but she is still indignant at the lot of servants in the now vanished days when the English had servants. That that day had to end is obvious from Mrs. Powell's grimly detailed and very earthy account of her years below stairs. She is, by the way, quite anti-American. What did we ever do to her?

**Uniforms OK
In Theatrics
Mocking Army**

Washington —(NC)— It's no longer a crime for an actor to wear a U.S. military uniform in a theatrical portrayal mocking or discrediting the armed forces, according to a unanimous Supreme Court decision.

The court struck down a federal statute that shields actors from prosecution for wearing the uniform only if their roles praise the army.

Applying the ruling to a skit presented by an antiwar protester, the court held that demonstrators cannot be prosecuted for wearing articles of military uniforms in on-the-street skits that mock the Army effort in Vietnam.

A general statute makes it a crime for unauthorized persons to wear a distinctive part of a military uniform, with the exception of actors.

'Esperanto' Mass

Buenos Aires — (RNS) — A Roman Catholic Mass in Esperanto was held here, sponsored by the Argentine Catholic Esperanto Society. It was offered at the chapel of Pius IX College.

A spokesman for the society said it marked the first time an "Esperanto Mass" had been held in the Western Hemisphere.

Mrs. Hope to Get Degree

Winooski Park, Vt.—(NC)— Mrs. Dolores Hope, wife of comedian Bob Hope, will receive an honorary doctorate of humane letters at St. Michael's College graduation ceremonies here June 8. Mrs. Hope is being honored for her activities in a number of welfare and charitable organizations.

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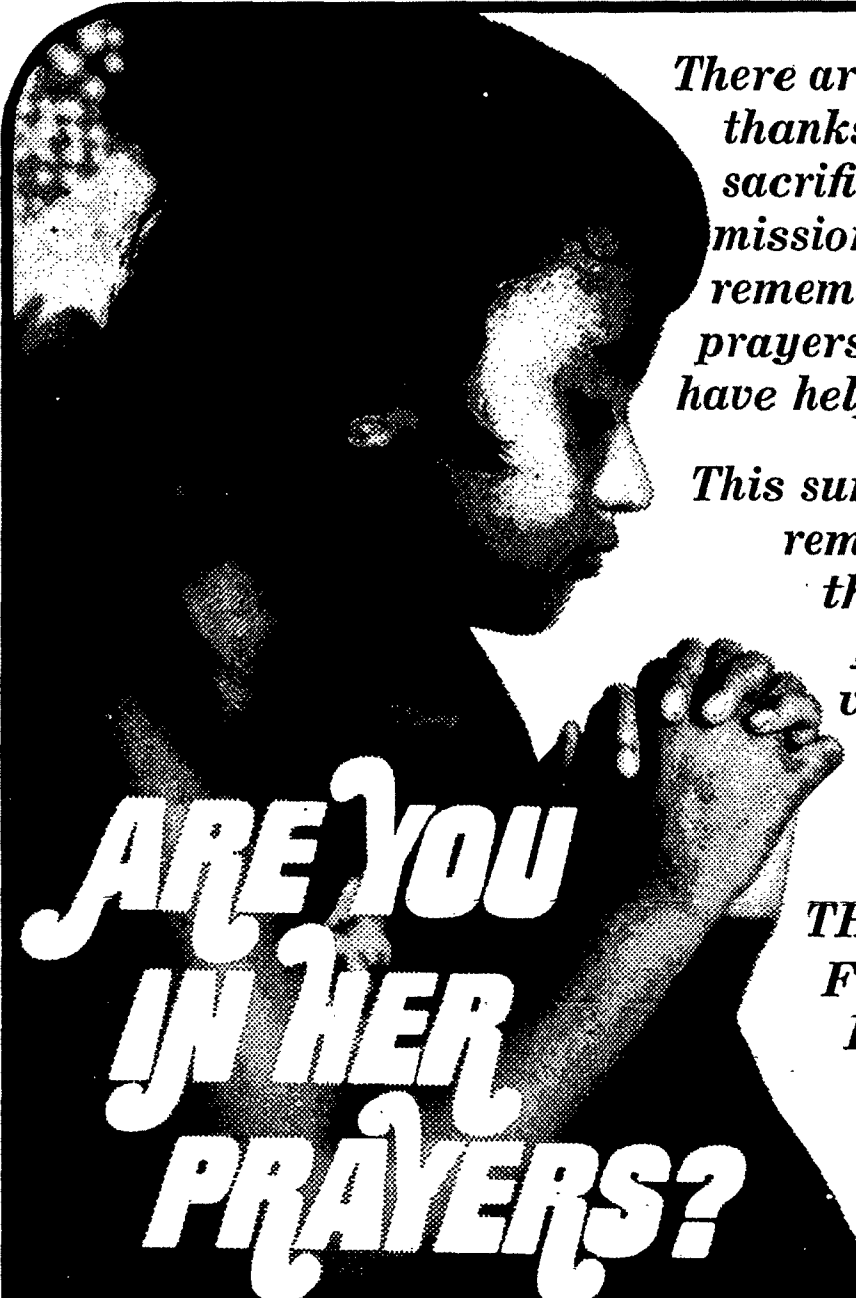
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