

Editorial: Commentary

CENSORED

Eighty-three years ago, Louisa May Alcott spear-headed a drive that knocked "Huckleberry Finn" off the Concord, Massachusetts library shelves. Moral indignation, you see, could abide only so much and no more. The Concord Library Committee feared for the minds of innocent youth. They acted with the swiftness and certitude that could come only with the proper amount of righteousness. Of course, the genteel tradition was still very much in vogue. So, public opinion was solidly behind them. That was in 1885. In 1968, Miss Alcott, et. al., roll over in your uneasy graves.

Our moral arbiters must be asleep at the switch. In print and in the area of mass communications, the creative types have license to do virtually as they please. We think this attests eloquently to democracy's merits. Some will say we've forsaken our intolerant Puritan heritage. Frankly, we can recall no valuable inheritances from these worthies unless one counts as important the best way to kindle witches and the efficient operation of dunking stools.

Should our forefathers return to visit us, they would break out stakes, matches, and immediately start searching for a convenient pond. Looking at television, they might find certain commercials confusing and disturbing. These even baffle moderns.

We needn't give names since the gentle reader will recognize them at once. The product is either a car, gasoline, or shaving cream. Confusion arises over what is being sold in such cases. Is the inevitable willowy silken-voiced blonde or the manufactured merchandise available for purchase? Another example of television advertising's appeal to the prurient is the toothpaste that promises the viewer a mouth Casanova or Cleopatra would envy.

The movies, too, have tech in them, figuratively speaking. While much work of artistic merit is being done, there is a good supply of trash as well. Titillation is a growing enterprise. Epidermis and blood are the order of the day. Equally important as the arterial flow is the method used to induce it. Proper dashes of sodomy, bigamy, or prostitution add verve to otherwise dull pictures about ordinary people.

Of course nobody is really normal and we see evidences of this in our literature. One might call it "box-office" prose. Hacks work fulltime to be more sensational than anything on the theater screens. Profit is their inspiration. Does all the above mean we need strong censorship laws and stringent control of the arts?

Not at all. We've had more than enough preservers of good taste already. A discriminating public is what we must have. Complete artistic freedom should be part of a genuinely free society. People who have something important to say may need to use heavy doses of sex and violence. They may tell us some basic truth about ourselves. On the other hand, pure sham may have no word stronger than "gosh." Still, it offends because it is unfelt and insipid. And, incidentally, isn't it true obscenity for a nation's leader to show off a post-operational scar on television while other men wage war?

Election Reminders -- "The only distinctly native American criminal class is the politician," Mark Twain.

An Apology

Last issue's unsigned letter was a technical error. The writer was Allan Ross of Greenville, South Carolina, a freshman at Montreat-Anderson last year. Allen, a colorful sort, now owns a '49 white Cadillac hearse and works the "graveyard" shift at a 24 hour service station. Apparently, a job and a weird car aren't everything. He wants to return to Montreat.



SOME CHOICE!

DEAR EDITOR

Many discussions about George Wallace end with the comment: "Well, at least he is honest." Since the observation refers to a man who claims he has no racial bias, it is highly questionable. Moreover, the implication is that honesty is missing in the two major candidates for the Presidency. They, it is claimed, make dishonest compromises with power groups to assure their election (see letter in the last issue of "The Cavalier.")

A good case can be made, however, for the virtues of compromises as "the essential heart of democratic politics." An unbending stand on principle coupled with an intolerance of any political viewpoint other than one's own, fosters attitudes which lead to an authoritarian state.

Compromise in politics need not involve a surrender of principle. In our competitive and violent society it is to be commended as the best way to keep groups as well as individuals from each other's throats. Furthermore, the politician who can tolerate the principles of others has this virtue - he recognizes that no human is infallible, not even himself. The political world is a very ambiguous place.

Donald R. Mitchell

I would like to comment on a strange turn of events in this election year. This year Dr. Billy Graham has chosen to associate himself with a presidential candidate. In the past, he has refused to back or to associate himself politically with any candidate.

Richard Nixon, a long-time friend of the Grahams, has been showing up at places like the home of Dr. Graham's mother and the Pittsburgh crusade. Mr. Nixon even had Dr. Graham participate in one of his television commercials.

Dr. Graham has done everything but publicly endorse Nixon, yet there is little or no doubt that he is an avid Nixon supporter. Some reference to Richard M. Nixon seems to occur in most of the sermons Dr. Graham has preached recently in the United States.

I think that Dr. Graham should preach religion in his pulpit and leave his politics at home. His association of religion and Mr. Nixon is revolting to anyone who believes in the separation of religion and politics.

E. H. Davis

Editor's Comment: There are two schools of thought about the relationship of religion to politics. Paul Little, an evangelist who brings the Christian message to college campuses in forty-nine states, sums up one viewpoint with his comment: "Americans are practical atheists." On the other side of the question are people like Everett Dirksen who say religion should embrace all phases of our national life.