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# Are We Really Masters of Our Fate?

## Erich Fromm Argues That Modern Man Is Society's Slave

THE SANE SOCIETY.

By Erich Fromm. 370 pp. New York: Rinehart and Company. \$5.

Reviewed by JOHN DOLLARD

ERICH FROMM attempts in this book to evaluate the condition of man in the Western World and more particularly in the United States of today. He brings to the task a great amount of skill and learning. He is at once sociologist, philosopher, historian, psychoanalyst, economist, and anthropologist—and, one is tempted to add, lover of human life, poet and prophet.

Fromm believes that our society is sick, in the sense that its design and arrangements are such as to stifle the full development of human personality. Man finds himself the slave of economic and political institutions which he has created to free himself from coercion, want and fear. The result, Fromm says, is that men are more and more feeling powerless and helpless. Not being truly involved in the social process, not feeling they can act, decide and control, men are becoming passive witnesses of social forces. They are fiercely bored. Fromm feels, in their roles as spectators of life, literally "bored to death;" and there is the danger that men who cannot master their own fates may seek a kind of perverse self-realization by causing general destruction.

In the economic sphere most men work at silver jobs whose function and relation to the total work process they do not understand. They have no voice in determining what is produced and no human satisfaction in the vision of others consuming what they labor to create. "Work" is an affair isolated from the other issues of life. The anonymous coercion of the market orders economic activity. As a consumer modern man has no time to decide, to judge, to value; he is manipulated and excited. Fromm thinks, to yearn for new gadgets and doodads, to wasteful pursuit of novelty; the result is that he must scramble faster and faster in the treadmill of production, with the menacing possibility ever in mind that to stop scrambling may bring the machine to a halt altogether.

American man, at least, has learned to fit into this scheme very handsly: he is punctual, orderly, obedient, conformist. He feels free, nothing visible pushes him around, he has plenty of things, and he is a great consumer of radio, movies, television, crime news, sex and sports. But he has stopped being, or being on the way to become, an integrated, judging human being before whose inner court the world itself is brought to bar. He is a dissociated stranger, ill at ease in the crowding contacts of his life, yearning for an integrity of self and unity with others which he cannot find. He is, Fromm says, "alienated," shorn of his power to judge and control, helpless before the institutions he has created and on which he has conferred his powers. Fromm believes that this social disease of alienation is shown at its worst in the totalitarian states and especially in the blistering tyranny of communism;

our gentler form of control is far more hopeful since it offers the possibility of a spiritual awakening and gradual evolution of a better form of life.

Fromm believes that there is a way out. We must find some way to organize our economic, political and social life so that man-as-a-whole participates. Institutional arrangements must serve man, and not the reverse. The productive process, he believes, can be broken up into small work groups. Workers must be taught the relation of

their piece of work to the end product, and the relation of their product to the whole of economic production. They should have a voice in control of production which will be heard at the level where overall decisions are made. Similarly, in the political sphere, small, face-to-face groups, armed with information, could meet to discuss policy—and their decisions should affect policy at highest levels. Owning the means of production is not the important point. What is important is full involve-

ment in economic and political tasks, actual ability to influence one's fate, being masterful and creative and feeling oneself related to the whole world of masterful, creative and independent men.

Thus, Fromm. For myself I will say that this utterly sincere, unselfish and loving book comes as something of a shock to me. I hadn't realized that the situation was so bad or that the remedy need be so radical. I have been proud of American capitalism as a marvelous work of human invention, obliterating want, reducing drudgery, relieving pain, showing a wedge of welfare under the feet of every man—here, and eventually everywhere. I had expected its end result would be the virtual abolition

of compelled work, and permanent vacation conditions for all. Just what man I would do with himself then, I had thought, we would figure out when we got there. We still have lots of time before the happy day. Now Fromm insists that in order to be healthy man has to stay heavily and permanently involved with income-producing work. Maybe. Has he considered what kind of situation will be created when energy (equals food, clothes, medicine, heat, power) becomes free? Can we measure, and thus verify, the prevalence of ennui? You'd better read Fromm's book and see what you think.

John Dollard is Professor of Psychology at Yale.

# Lightly Imprinted Footsteps on the Sands of Time



IT ALL STARTED WITH EUROPA.

By Richard Armour. Illustrated by Campbell Grant. 119 pp. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company. \$2.75.

Reviewed by DAVID McCORD

"IT ALL STARTED WITH EUROPA" is a funny book. It is essentially in the Sellar-Yeatman tradition, just as Robert Benchley was in the Leacock tradition. But it is just as original as Benchley was original; just as American as "1066" is British. Since history remains both realistic and tragic, no cockeyed view of time and a continent can omit the tragic—and it is not here omitted. Hemlock and torture and the guillotine are clearly neglected leitmotifs — "somebody took a tumble on the cobblestones, and the women laughed themselves into stitches."

But the more cheerful and the

silly things in history form the delightful background of this book. At his best Mr. Armour is it anything funnier than his English compeers: "One of the best things about being a monk was that you could stop around all day in your bathrobe;" "Arabic numerals made it easier to divide 48 by 8 than XLVIII by VIII, and looked better on class sweaters;" "It tickled Mona to be painted, and



she had a hard time keeping a straight face;" "As befitted a man (Napoleon III) who came to power by a coup, he was captured in a Sedan;" "When Rousseau brought



Illustrations by Campbell Grant from "It All Started With Europa"

out his 'Confessions,' a number of important people turned at once to the index."

One should take it in small doses. The pyramids, says Mr. Armour, "were large at the bottom and got smaller and smaller at the top, because their builders

got tired." This is a book to be chained to the bedside. "His classmates voted [Stalin] the Student Most Likely to Blow Himself Up,"—a warning to those with weak stomachs. Campbell Grant's many illustrations are sheer genius.

# Around an Operating Table

LIVE TILL TOMORROW. By Carola Haas. 316 pp. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company. \$3.50.

CAROLA HAAS' "Live Till Tomorrow" is rooted in the lives of a number of white-robed persons whose skill is challenged at an operating table.

It is Mitsuo Watanabe, a young Japanese woman, who is the magnet which brings together the major characters of the book. They are Dr. Petrie, a handsome woman doctor in her thirties; Dr. Talkkes, brilliant chief surgeon of Musurus Memorial Hospital; Dr. Stull, his assistant, and Dr. Stirbu, young resident who acts as anaesthetist.

Because of the special, personal plea of Dr. Petrie who for a time had been his mistress, Dr. Talkkes had agreed to operate on Mitsuo. But when he failed to arrive at the scheduled hour, Dr. Stull, able, efficient and not professionally ambitious, took over. Excellently Miss Haas describes the dramatic details of the operation with anxious doctors and nurses helping and watching the hands of the chief actor. Not until the

final moments when Dr. Stull has put a clamp on the rotting aorta does Dr. Talkkes enter the scene and then it is too late.

The death of Mitsuo makes the hub from which the details of the novel radiate. In turn, Miss Haas explores the personal lives of each of the individuals who were present at the woman's final moments: She tells the story of Dr. Talkkes who felt a harrowing personal defeat when his son Garth gave up a career as a surgeon to enter a monastery; of Dr. Stull who failed in his love for the show girl—had married; of Dr. Petrie caught in the conflicts of a career and fulfillment as a woman; of Dr. Stirbu, the East Side boy, who loved her. Each has his frustrations and angers at his failures, each in some way is caught up in the tragedy of Mitsuo.

Some of the personal problems Miss Haas resolves in her book, but she indulges in no unreal happy endings. All that she indicates at the close of her novel is that her characters are wiser and more sentient persons after their experience.

# Of a "Suicide" and a Search

THE LITTLE WALLS. By Winston Graham. 256 pp. New York: Doubleday and Company. \$3.50.

WINSTON GRAHAM has always been a sound hand at constructing the gentler sort of psychological suspense novels.

Phillip Turner returned to England from the United States because his elder brother, Grevil, had been found dead in the canals of a slum area in Amsterdam. Witnesses swore it was suicide, and even Grevil's wife accepted the verdict. But Phillip was not convinced that his brilliant archeologist brother would have killed himself in these sordid surroundings, and he went to Holland to look into the matter himself.

In Holland he found three clues to his brother's death. There was a mysterious man named Buckingham who had been with Grevil in Java and returned with him to

Amsterdam, but has now disappeared. There was a woman named Leonie who had written an ambiguous letter which they found in the pocket of Grevil's clothes. And finally there was evidence that certain criminals and prostitutes were involved with Grevil's death. Phillip Turner definitely wanted to know more. He followed a trail which led to Leonie in Capri and to an international set, any one of whom might be the unknown Buckingham. But Leonie herself was not the sort of woman Phillip had envisioned and he found himself falling in love with her, to the confusion of his search.

The mystery, finally unraveled, is something less than satisfactory because Mr. Graham becomes more involved with his characters than his plot. But these characters are thoughtful people and they give more than the usual distinction to this story of mild suspense.