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stood the work of writers "who emerged out of the first world war," that he was not a "reliable" critic of poetry or the theater, that he could be snobbish, cold, and callous "toward the average human being." But at the same time he often extenuates Mencken's lapses and searches for the degree of truth in his exaggerations. Granted that Mencken was not always right or reasonable, still, Fecher argues, "the things he attacked deserved to be attacked," and whatever his faults, his immense influence on his times "puts him among the giants in our cultural history."

Fecher has made a good case for Mencken as a powerful cultural force, a writer of extraordinary inventiveness, a humorist comparable to Mark Twain. He has also revealed him (sometimes inadvertently) in such a way as to qualify strongly his own claims for Mencken's universality. He knows Mencken's work thoroughly and writes about it with authority. He is less trustworthy in his comments on American history and culture and seems quite content to accept uncritically many of Mencken's judgments about America's literary past and the situation of the arts in the United States when Mencken began to challenge the cultural custodians. James and Howells and Paul Elmer More were better literary critics than either Mencken or his disciple allows.

And who is Fecher to say that Mencken's three pieces on James Huneker are more interesting now than all of Huneker's writing, or (more preposterously) that "The whole collected works of Thorstein Veblen are probably of less importance—and certainly less readable—than the great essay 'Professor Veblen and the Cow.'" There were areas of American literature and thought that Fecher was less often in such enthusiastic agreement with the Baltimore Sage.

These objections notwithstanding, Fecher's book is an excellent introduction to the ebullient iconoclast who peers out at the reader from a series of evocative photographs and

is heard in hundreds of expressive passages. Fecher may have palliated some of Mencken's grosser prejudices, but he has done justice to his rectitude and professionalism—and above all to his astonishing intellectual voracity and verbal energy.

Adlai Stevenson and the World

JOHN BARTLOW MARTIN

Doubleday, \$15 [946 pp.]

Grassroots

GEORGE McGOVERN

Random House, \$12.50 [307 pp.]

ROBERT K. LANDERS

Inauguration Day, 1961. Adlai Stevenson and the others who were to be in the Cabinet sat on the platform and watched as the torch was passed to the new generation willing to pay any price and bear any burden. "After the ceremony," John Bartlow Martin writes, Stevenson "alone, of all the Cabinet, had no limousine to pick him up. He blamed the 'Irish Mafia' of Kennedy's staff. Afoot he started out to make his way in the biting wind up Pennsylvania Avenue to the reviewing stand at the White House. It pleased him to note that the crowds on the sidewalk gave only perfunctory applause to Kennedy and the dignitaries who drove by in the parade but when they recognized Stevenson on foot among them they cheered."

John Kennedy had drawn, directly or indirectly, some part of his public self from Stevenson's, but the relationship between the young President and his Ambassador to the United Nations was, as Martin puts it, "uncomfortable and sometimes almost painful." Stevenson, to his (as it now seems) credit, did not really feel at home on the "pragmatic," "tough," "decisive" New Frontier. "Stevenson seems to have thought Kennedy cold-blooded, even heartless," Martin writes. "He thought Kennedy's de-

cisive approach to problems led him to such disasters as the Bay of Pigs and said that one of these decisive and impulsive young men could bumble us into nuclear war. He thought Kennedy too sure of himself." And, in fact, Kennedy and his cohorts did bumble us, not, to be sure, into nuclear war (although in the Cuban missile crisis, they came close), but into Vietnam, a bumble about which Stevenson himself, alas, as Martin judges, "probably was ambivalent."

Martin, in this second volume (no less excellent and only slightly less engrossing than the first one) of his definitive biography of Stevenson, takes his subject from defeat in 1952 to death in 1965. When, on that cold day in January, 1961, the torch was passed, but not to him, Stevenson's career altered course; as Martin moves him across the ensuing years, the author honorably tries to remain impartial as between the ambassador and his successive presidential masters. For the most part, Martin succeeds; yet at times, his admiration for those masters seems to distort, if only a little, his view of their servant. He neglects, as an instance, to note that Robert Kennedy, from whose account of the Cuban missile crisis Martin is not otherwise reluctant to quote, wrote of an offer made by Premier Khrushchev during that crisis, that it "was not unreasonable and did not amount to a loss to the United States or to our NATO allies." Had Martin paused to question President Kennedy's refusal to accept this clear and "not unreasonable" offer to remove the Soviet missiles in Cuba in exchange for removal of the U.S. missiles in Turkey, he would have strengthened the impression that Stevenson, in earlier suggesting, to much criticism and little avail, a similar swap, had been not just courageous, but wise.

"After the Cuban missile crisis," Martin quotes George Ball as saying, "Adlai was only going through the motions. His role had become ritualistic. From then on he knew he was not going to have an impact on foreign policy—which was what was

most important to him. Washington was a force of its own and he was not part of it. . . . He was going through the motions, making speeches, yet with a feeling in his heart that it didn't make any difference to the world if he fell over and had a heart attack. I found it unattractive and terribly sad. . . . Adlai was a terribly unhappy man. History had passed him by. His life had passed him by. He had no place to go. He talked about leaving the UN but he had no place to go." In fact, however, there was a place for Stevenson: the leadership of the then growing opposition to the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. It was a place he was urged by a few to take; but he didn't do so. It is this failure (which perhaps he would have rectified, had he lived), and not so much his estrangement from power in Washington or the various shabby humiliations to which he was subjected, which makes this great man seem to have been, near the end, so sadly lost.

George McGovern remembers that, his wife and children asleep, he was painting the living room of their apartment near Dakota Wesleyan University (where he has been teaching history), when he heard Stevenson deliver his post-midnight acceptance speech at the 1952 Democratic convention in Chicago. "That was it," he recalls: He put down his paint brush and entered Democratic politics. (McGovern's account of his pre-1972 years, in his autobiography, *Grassroots*, is interesting, although it would be more so had Robert Sam Anson not provided a fuller and better written account of them in his 1972 biography, *McGovern*.)

The man from South Dakota, however, was a rather different sort from Stevenson. No one would ever caricature McGovern as a wishy-washy Hamlet. "Temperamentally," McGovern notes, "I am not a very good temporizer." He was not ambivalent about Vietnam: he assailed our "policy of moral debacle and political defeat" there as early as September, 1963. *Right from the start*, as his

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vote for Proposition 13, the fact is that only 27 percent of eligible voters in California voted for Proposition 13. Only 42 percent of the 15.5 million eligible California voters took the trouble to vote at all. That is, 6.5 million voters cast their ballots on Proposition 13. Of these, 2.3 million voted against it. And 4.2 million voted for it.

A good many of them are sorry they did.

For we are only beginning to feel the effects on our schools, our child care, our health care for the elderly, and in many other ways that will soon become apparent. JERRY VOORHIS

East Meets West

Jackson Hgts., N.Y.

To the Editors: My wife and I were amused to read James Baker's reply [Aug. 4] to John Moffitt on the subject of certain disputed facts in the unfortunate death of Thomas Merton, in which Moffitt was described as having a "western" mind. If true, Moffitt so far has been doing a good job of disguising his condition. To begin with, he was a member of a Hindu monastic order for 25 years. But it is in his writings that he should best be revealed: perhaps in the mystical thread that weaves through and connects four volumes of poetry, two written while a Hindu, and two since becoming a Catholic; there was also his seminal book on Eastern spirituality, *Journey to Gorakhpur: An Encounter with Christ Beyond Christianity*. Readers of these books, I am sure, would have no trouble in agreeing that, if not exactly "eastern," there is something assuredly "non-western" at work here. By the standards of the age, Moffitt must be painfully quiet, if I may judge from the fact that he never seems to want to call any attention to himself; as a result the general public may not have heard enough of what must be one of the most authentic spiritual quests in our midst.

In reading Moffitt, I am always made aware of the western egotistical

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MOURNING FOR AN UNKNOWN POPE

It is easier to mourn the death of Pope John Paul I than to assess his brief reign. Those who know the Vatican well are saying that, with a few symbolic gestures, he may have left a mark on the papacy that is nearly indelible. For most of us, however, Albino Luciani was an unknown pope. We followed, first with eagerness and then with a growing sense of the ridiculous, the strenuous attempts to discover who he was. He smiled, his father was a socialist, he rejected the tiara for a simple stole, he spoke informally at his audience; as Patriarch of Venice, he had urged parishes to dispose of their jewels, he liked to walk and bicycle and even, *Time* gravely reported, "carrying a cake in a pink box . . . once walked 25 minutes . . . to the meeting of an ecumenical commission."

In all this sifting of portents, there was something both embarrassing and misleading. Embarrassing because it reflected a church still not candid about the conflicts of viewpoint and the complexity of deliberation that lie behind its official postures. What with the secrecy of the conclave and the official reticence to admit openly the plurality of opinion in the church, observers were reduced to poring over the new pope's words and gestures in a manner more typical of the coverage of regimes in Moscow and Peking. And this exercise was misleading besides, first because it so often assumed the premise that a good and holy man would necessarily be a good pope, a premise that history has belied, as recently as the reign of Saint Pius X; and second because the reading of portents was almost always colored by the desperate longing of everyone that the new pope fit their own particular model of the leader that would best serve the church and world.

Is it then as a man, and not as a pope—as the holy pastor he so clearly was and not the pastor he might yet have been—that we mourn Albino Luciani? No doubt the simple fact of human identification with this humble individual has played a great part in the world's grief. "If a clod be washed