

Books to Grace a Vacation

VACATION TIME! Vacation time in the land of the free — the mere thought of it invariably wears me down. Across the mind's eye parade visions of campers, boat trailers, and station wagons bulging with baggage and cussed kids; all are in a vast frenzied convoy hurtling toward tawdry vacation lands.

Once arrived, vacationers rush to fast food joints and amusement centers. It is all too arduous for me. Nor is this bedlam unique to America. At this time of year it is experienced all over the Western World. How painfully I recall being trapped by hordes of vacation-bound Italians as my taxi crawled along a highway to Rome's Leonardo da Vinci airport. Leisure time, once the great promise of industrial society, is now full of toil and annoyance.

A change of scenery is agreeable to be sure, but the frenzy of the modern-day vacation is my vision of hell. Rather, show me

some sunshine, some well-aged beverages, books I have been wanting to read, and some agreeable companions to discuss them with. Then give me sleep.

For the past few years I have been repairing to Kitty Hawk, N.C., for my rest and rehabilitation, and while the adepts of the strenuous life career along the highways, I read. Then I drink.

THIS YEAR THERE ARE a lot of fine books that one might bring along. George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty* is a readable discussion of capitalism that has the imprimatur of the White House. For those who would like to familiarize themselves with the opposite of Galbraithian flumdidle I suggest this book. It offers a fresh look at capitalism and an incisive critique of recent welfare policy.

Claire Sterling has written a splendid book about one of the most curious topics of our time, international terrorism. Why has terrorism suddenly become such a problem in the world? Why was the world not troubled by it 15 or 20 years ago? Who are the terrorists and where do they get their tools? Is terrorism to be a permanent feature in the excitement of modern life? Claire Sterling is a veteran foreign correspondent. Her book, *The Terror Network*, elucidates the appalling network of killers and fanatics whose carefully thought-out atrocities are going to become a powerful force in world politics over the next few years. It will give its readers a solid foundation from which to view the atrocities as they take place.

There are other interesting and useful books, of course. *The Socialist Phenomenon* by Igor Shafarevich is a solid dissection of socialism that in the eyes of one reviewer is "certainly the most significant essay in political philosophy to come from Russia in recent years." Agreed, and let us raise a toast to poor Igor for his indiscretion.

Jefferson and His Time by Dumas Malone brings to an end a six-volume biography of Thomas Jefferson that has been applauded more loudly with the arrival of each new book. The Sage of Monticello was a fascinating fellow even if he was given to great leaps into poppycock. Remember his experiments with indoor plumbing? In the twilight years he was even more attractive, and Malone is a fine historian.

A less celebrated book about an equally fascinating world figure is *Winston Churchill and His Inner Circle* written by the great man's long-time aide and private secretary, John Colville. Colville writes beautifully. His judicious reminiscences revive just enough of Churchill's friends and adventures to remind us of the salutary effects of brandy and cigars — in a time of



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health food hysteria the reminder is deeply gratifying.

ALL THESE BOOKS have recently given me pleasure, and I am sure that no intelligent reader would find them a disappointment. Yet some vacationers just want to laugh, and what civilized observer of the national scene can blame them? There are many books that make us laugh: *Don Quixote*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, to name but three. Yet this year's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is also very funny and apparently this was the author's intent.

I speak of *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole. Have you read it? The learned Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, arch-reviewer in residence at *The New York Times*, found it "distasteful." Can you think of a better recommendation? *A Confederacy of Dunces* is now in a Grove Press paperback; and much to Mr. Lehmann-Haupt's indignation it has been the object of adulation by many reviewers, more than a few of whom say "it made me laugh aloud." Well the book may not be "a masterwork," and I doubt that it is "one of the funniest books ever written," as a reviewer in the *New Republic* shouted. Nonetheless, it is indeed an excellent novel.

It is the tale of a grotesque and grandiose stonehead, Ignatius J. Reilly, who, like the monumental Quixote, leaves a host of amusing innocents bruised and incarcerated in his wake. Grandiosity being one of the most common characteristics of our era this book might be more than a mere amusement. It might be a tool for understanding our eminences and enthusiasms. Moreover, its author was a gifted writer. There are scenes here that will remain vivid in the mind for years. That is the mark of an accomplished story-teller. And now to the beach.

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