

Reflections During Our Twentieth Anniversary Year

Has it been Worthwhile?

THE FIRST ISSUE of *Modern Age* began with an "Apology" in which its co-founder and first editor, Russell Kirk, set forth his objectives for the new review. These included: to represent the conservative position, to stimulate discussion of the great issues of the day, and, as he put it, "to search for means by which the legacy of our civilization may be kept safe." The twentieth anniversary issue would seem to be an appropriate occasion on which to consider the extent to which these objectives have been fulfilled, and, as well, whether *Modern Age* has made a contribution to American life which justifies its existence.

The first article in the first issue, Richard Weaver's "Life Without Prejudice," was a beautifully written and carefully reasoned defense of prejudice, properly understood, as an essential element of order. "Life without prejudice," Weaver wrote, "were it ever to be tried, would soon reveal itself to be a life without principle. For prejudices . . . are often built-in principles. They are the extract which the mind has made of experience." Beginning with this straightforward, unabashed contribution to orderly thinking, *Modern Age* went on, in issue after issue, with articles by such people as Russell Kirk, Frank Meyer, Wilhelm Röpke, Willmoore Kendall, Stephen Tonsor, William H. Chamberlin, Francis Wilson, Will Herberg, George Carey, among others, to enlarge and clarify the body of conservative thought. That *Modern Age* has made a substantial contribution to the development of conservatism as a coherent and vigorous intellectual movement there can be no doubt.

As for the search for "means by which the legacy of our civilization can be kept safe," it seems fair to say that the legacy of our civilization is in greater danger now by a considerable degree than it was when the first issue of *Modern Age* appeared. What *Modern Age* has done, however, both specifically and in the attitude and general point of view it has represented is to demonstrate that we have inherited a civilization, for all its faults, that is worth defending, and in the age of alienation and brainless destructiveness, this is an accomplishment that is not to be taken lightly. In such an article, for example, as "On Classical Studies," (Winter, 1973) Eric Voegelin, by showing how much we owe to the classical tradition and how much it has to teach us still, gives us a sense of the continuity of the Western tradition. In quite a different way, Felix Morley, in his wonderfully relaxed, witty essay "Not a Great Divide," (Winter, 1969-70) using the circumstance as a starting point that *Lorna Doone* was published in 1869 and *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1969, by showing the manner in which literature reflects the attitudes of the time, adds to our appreciation of the role of literature in civilized life.

Has it been worthwhile? From a practical standpoint, probably not, but as Wilhelm Röpke once said, "The highest interests of the community and the indispensable things of life have no exchange value," and the highest interests of the community, now more than ever, need every defender they can get. And where else, it is fair to ask, would the two articles I have just mentioned been published but in *Modern Age*, or the two recent articles by Eliseo Vivas in which he demonstrates, from his

own teaching experience, the appallingly destructive influence a modern university can have? The book review section alone of *Modern Age* would have justified its existence; in no other area are such standards of integrity and critical judgment as have characterized the reviews in *Modern Age* more needed than in the reviewing of books.

How great the influence of *Modern Age* has been it is impossible to say. It does have a wide ranging readership, but if it had been read by no one else than the writers of its articles it would have been worthwhile: to maintain standards in such a time as ours is an undertaking that is worthwhile in itself, if only to demonstrate that it is still possible.

—HENRY REGNERY