

MODERN AGE

A QUARTERLY REVIEW



Thirty Years in Retrospect: A Foreword

WHEN THE FIRST ISSUE of *Modern Age* appeared in the summer of 1957, we were in the second half of the Eisenhower administration. The country was at peace, prosperous, and relatively tranquil. The Korean War had been brought to an end, in an armed truce, it must be said, rather than a settled peace, but the fighting at any rate had stopped. Korea was as cruelly divided as it had been when the war started, a symbol, one could say, of those other divided countries which are with us still as glaring indictments of the decisions that followed the victory in the war our leaders promised would bring peace to the world. The New Frontier, the Great Society, and the War on Poverty were still in the future, as were Viet Nam, rock music, the assault on the universities, trillion-dollar budgets, and the changed position of our country from a creditor to a debtor nation, with all that this implies.

It was the hope of the small group who launched *Modern Age* that we might help to identify the forces and the influences that have determined the history of our time, together with the illusions and the stupidities that play their own peculiar role in the destiny of nations, including our own. In a time seemingly dominated by mass communications this may have appeared to have been an impossible task for a modest, indeed, a very modest, quarterly journal. But we were thirty years younger then and had recently experienced the remarkable impact of three scholarly books which had made a decisive change in the intellectual climate of the postwar world, all published without fanfare of any kind and by unknown authors: F. A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (1944), Richard M. Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948), and Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* (1953).

In 1957 the time seemed ripe for what we hoped to accomplish: to restore realism and principles to the discussion of the great issues of the day. We were under no illusion that we were going to bring the rule of reason to public life or to revive the traditional values of Western society, but, by appealing to the minority who are willing and able to acquaint themselves with what goes on beneath the

surface of events and their deeper meaning, it was our hope that we might have a positive influence and make a modest contribution to the strengthening of right reason.

To what extent we may have succeeded in our aspirations is hard to say. The fact that an avowedly conservative candidate was elected to the American presidency for two terms by an overwhelming majority against the bitter opposition of a substantial part of those who control mass communications would seem to show that we were on the right track. At the same time, the fact that so many of those highly influential in communications, those whom Hayek called intellectuals, "second-hand dealers in ideas," as he further defined them, are still wedded to the outmoded ideas of liberalism, is proof enough that the battle is far from won.

Most revealing of the nature of the opposing forces in our society is the recent battle over the confirmation of Judge Robert Bork. Clearly those who opposed his confirmation did not seek to conduct the battle against him on the higher intellectual level of ideas, where they knew they had no chance, but on the shallower level of public relations, where, with the money and skills of Hollywood, the left reigns supreme. However much comfort we can take that the battle against Judge Bork was not and could not have been won on the basis of reason, it was nevertheless won. That victory is indicative of one of the hard facts of contemporary life that we must decidedly face.

The Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt spoke with deep foreboding of the coming age of the "great simplifiers," of those representative figures who would take advantage of the institutions of democracy to control not only government but also education, religion, and other manifestations of cultural life. We have had experience in our own century with such "simplifiers" and of their appeal, which, however, to be successful requires and has regularly received the support of intellectuals. It seems doubtful that *Modern Age* and what it represents will ever win over such intellectuals, but it is our aim to raise the moral level of public discussion to the point where the influence of "second-hand dealers in ideas" will not be conclusive. Overcoming their influence will not be easy, for the very reason that their appeal is to the people who accept easy solutions. They are also the people, to quote Burckhardt again, who "no longer believe in principles, but will, periodically, probably believe in saviours."

—Henry Regnery