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## The Passing Scene

## I'll Take Romance

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"So exciting! Planning your marriage with a Lane Sweetheart Chest! Suddenly you both know it's not for laughs—but for real. Could be the day he gives you your Lane Sweetheart Chest. A man's way of saying he loves you to distraction. Your cue to act downright wifely. Go ahead—air your views on garlic in the roast. Go dutch on a family-sized photo album. Find out if candlelight suppers flip him. Sound married?"

—An advertisement in *Seventeen*

WHEN I WAS growing up in Sacramento, I was, at sixteen, a more or less captive audience to a class, taught at C. K. McClatchy Senior High School during the hour allotted for Physical Education, known popularly as Sex. (Sex Education came the year after Drivers' Education; first things first in California. Sex education could be avoided, as I recall, if one's parents were willing to make a scene about it, but Drivers' Education was compulsory.) My most vivid memory of



Sex Education concerns a pretty little blonde girl, a Nice Girl, as opposed to what boys then called a Good Girl. (Good Girls preferred the third-run Starlite Drive-In Theater to the first-run downtown Senator Theater, even if it was raining.) Patti (for such was her name) was explaining to us one afternoon why it was unwise to go around kissing boys "indiscriminately." It was, she reasoned, "throwing away your capital." No good man would want you once you had been so sullied, "any more than you would want"—and there Patti paused, building momentum for what was to be her spellbinding *quod erat demonstrandum*—"somebody to bring you an exquisite white orchid in a plastic box and have that plastic box the least bit torn or dirty."

Although pacified some by the novel notion of myself as an exquisite white orchid, I had never before thought of myself as a product in need of smart merchandising, rather resented Patti's assumption that hermetic packaging was the only possible Unique Selling Proposition, and at any rate failed to see how anyone could go around kissing the boys we

knew in Sacramento "discriminately," which seemed to be all right with her ("when you know he's really your guy"); I rather thought that if you were indiscriminate enough to kiss any one of them you might as well kiss them all.

But the difference between Patti and me ran deeper than any value judgments about high school boys. Marriage seemed to me a risk venture, shadowy with shoals, uncharted sinkholes, possibilities for salvation and possibilities for insomnia, in-sickness-and-in-health-and-you-had-better-count-on-the-sickness. Marriage seemed to Patti a package deal, easily negotiated by the trained consumer; a contract not different in kind from that existing between her and the Joseph Magnin Company every time they accepted her mother's Charga-Plate and wrapped up a refill of Revlon "Paint the Town Pink" lipstick. (Patti was not, I scarcely need add, a "Fire and Ice" girl.) In the words of a china advertisement which appears in magazines directed to the very young, marriage for her was a matter of *You Get the License, I'll Get the Lenox*.

I HAVE thought about Patti a good deal lately, first when the *New York Herald Tribune* printed the results of a *Scholastic* magazine survey of 8,000 high school students, both boys and girls; again when I saw some results from a Gallup poll of unmarried girls between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. In each case, the point was more or less to determine Young America's Expectations.

Those Expectations are not, as it works out, what might be called Great. *Scholastic* asked its readers to check the qualities most wanted, on a list of twenty-five, "In a Date" and "In a Mate." What boys now prize above rubies In a Mate, it seems, is



"You can count  
the great restaurants in America  
on the fingers of one hand."



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"Pleasing Personality," followed in close order by "Attractiveness" and "Neatness." "Intelligence" and "Good Homemaker" wind up in a heat for fourth slot, and "Shares Religious Belief" slips into fifth. The *Scholastic* boys would any day take girls who were "Considerate" (sixth place), "Sincere" (seventh place), or "Polite" (eighth place) over girls possessed of a "Sense of Humor," which was rated desirable in a wife by only 22 per cent of the boys, although 38 per cent allowed as how it was A-OK in a date. "High Moral Standards" ran a poor tenth, but I decided to write that off to a possible tendency on the part of the boys to read it in its strictest, or Nothing-Below-the-Waist-Please-Stop-It, sense.

Among the qualities most desired in potential husbands, "Shares Religious Belief" received the highest number of female votes, followed by that inexorable "Pleasing Personality," then by "Considerate" and "Sincere." Thirty-two per cent of the girls marked "Ambition" and 31 per cent "Intelligence," rating those potentially anti-social tendencies respectively fifth and sixth; another—or possibly the same—31 per cent liked the idea of "High Moral Standards" in a husband.

In seventh place was "Neatness," followed by "Common Sense" (curiously enough a quality the boys would eschew altogether in a mate, but approve—or anyway 21 per cent of them would—in a date) and "Politeness." In the last money was that suspicious "Sense of Humor" (24 per cent). No lifetime interest whatsoever was exhibited in "Attractiveness" and "Interesting Talker," two items which did turn up—albeit low—on the date list.

The Gallup poll was a good deal more open-end. Rather general questions were asked and detailed answers obtained; what first reminded me of Patti (although I much prefer her simile) was this answer to a question about virginity: "Some people give the argument, *Would you buy a pair of shoes without trying them on.* My answer to this is, *Would you buy a pair of used shoes and pay full price!*"

The most unnerving responses of this poll, however, were provoked not by the Double Standard, not by Birth Control, but by an inquiry into "Your Dream House." At random: "I'd like a built-in oven and range, counters

34 inches high with Formica on them." . . . "A split-level brick with four bedrooms with French Provincial cherrywood furniture." . . . "A daylight basement to be used for both projects and parties." . . . "Would like to live in a growing suburban



community with a progressive school system and facilities for cultural growth and entertainment, adequate shopping district, tree-lined streets, and playgrounds for younger children."

*Just sweetie and me, and baby makes three*, near an adequate shopping district. It begins to look as if Patti, and not I (I think I wanted Howard Hughes at the time), had her finger on the pulse of Young America's Expectations, and if she did, all those savants—from Denis de Rougemont to Dr. Joyce Brothers—who go around deploring the effects of Romantic Love on America begin to look pretty dated, just the slightest bit Unrealistic in all their talk about Unrealistic Expectations. If an American girl can't realistically expect counters 34 inches high with Formica on them, somebody is fooling somebody in these United States.

ASKED once what character in fiction most typified American women, Mary McCarthy named Madame Bovary. Madame Bovary may typify the American women Mary McCarthy knows; she may even typify the American women you and I know. Patti, however, has the figures on her side, and "Pleasing Personality," "Daylight Basement," and "Sensible Driver" are simply not the stuff of which Emma Bovary's dreams were made. What afflicted her, of course, was the notion of Romantic Love, the logical end of which was the love-death; what afflicts us is not Romantic Love at all but Marketable Love, the logical end of which is either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product. Order white orchids and have them arrive wilted, you have a strong case against paying the florist; buy a pair of shoes and find on third wearing that a heel has broken,



you notify I. Miller and receive a refund. Find that your husband's Personality does not always Please, and you have a clear breach of contract — as unencumbered by Romantic Love as you were unhampered by any tangled emotional attachments to those particular orchids, that particular pair of shoes.

Pleasing Personality, Sincerity, Neatness: they are eminently marketable, the traits one wants to show Personnel Directors, the very qualities one can have for one's own typing pool by calling in some Kelly Girls. One begins to wish for an Emma Bovary, for an Anna Karenina, for even a poor Carol Kennicott; Patti and her friends would get to Mayerling and start polishing the flatware, hinting for a Sweetheart Chest. (Candlelight suppers, as I recall, really flipped that Rudolph.)

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

A SENSE OF REALITY, by Graham Greene (Viking, \$3.50). A collection of four new stories. Greene works diligently in each, describing the graveyards of man's compulsive affair with illusion, exposing the raw edges of reality in varieties of mental and spiritual isolation. An aging Catholic novelist accepts the fearful paradox of spent belief as the ultimate proof of faith; a young boy of the future realizes his utter divorce from civilized tradition as he views the wrecked hulk of an ocean liner, rotting remnant of a world before atomic holocaust; a doctor and his patient face the alienation that awaits the timid, the desperate, the compromising; a world traveler discovers the scenes of his youth ruined and unfamiliar, its experiences vague beyond recall. One and all, they are pilgrims to some final shrine of salvation; they are pitifully open and purposive in their search; they are close to death and anxious to shed everything except their obsessions with their wounds; they are doomed beyond reprieve. Greene has now carried his theme to a further border of despair, and he promises the defeat of his characters with an irksome assiduousness. His technique remains sure. The minor characters and backgrounds (a disinterested surgeon, a coldly domineering mother, an isolated

country house) are vivid and true; here, surpassing the logic of his vision, they are made to last.

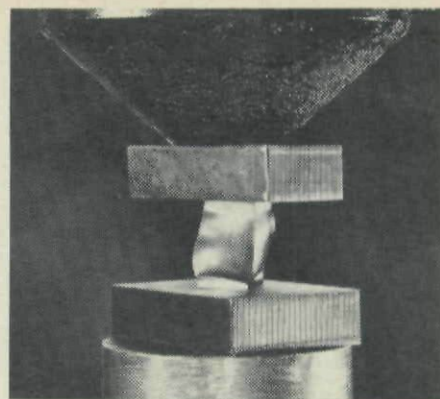
R. BEMIS

THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR A FREE SOCIETY, ed. by Felix Morley (Van Nostrand, \$5.95). From a five-day conference held at Princeton in mid-1961, these papers survive, one each from the members, as edited with an introduction by symposium Morley. Each speaking from a special acquaintance, they come at you: Karl Brandt ("Economic Conditions"), Arthur Kemp ("The Monetary Basis"), Emory Niles ("Law"), Herrell DeGraff ("The Family"), Ben Moreell ("The Assembly Line"), T. Robert Ingram ("Christianity"), Eliseo Vivas ("The Philosophical Problem"), Richard Weaver ("The Cultural Freedom"), H. W. Luhnow ("Promotion of Freedom"), Robert Cooke ("Limitations"), A. C. Wedemeyer ("The Physical Defense"), and John Davenport ("The Acceptability of Freedom")—amongst whom Weaver, Vivas, and Niles tangled with the deepest questions. Other joys: Arthur Kemp advocating return to the gold standard, and John Davenport assailing the "objectivity" of the *New York Times*. An earnest and stimulating joust with the definitional problem.

W. F. RICKENBACKER

THE HANDBOOK OF AFRICA, edited by Violaine I. Junod, assisted by Idrian N. Resnick (New York University Press, \$10). The proliferation of African "nations," with their gaudy and kaleidoscopic politics, has made life considerably more difficult for all of us who, reading the newspapers, want to keep something of a hold on what is going on in the world. Try though we may, the inner and outer politics—to say nothing of the exact location and physiognomy—of Upper Volta, Mali, or the Malagasy Republic tend to remain elusive. For pinning down these and a hundred other aspects of Africa, *The Handbook of Africa* is the answer. For every political constituent of that continent this book gives, succinctly and clearly, its geography, a sketch of its history, a discussion of its politics, population, economy, etc. A thoroughly useful reference work.

F. S. MEYER

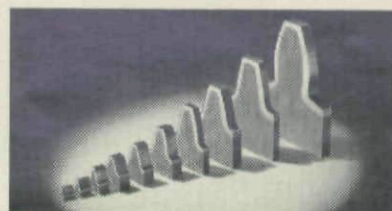


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