



The Conscienceless Hero

I AM at the disadvantage of having read several reviews of "Breathless," a French film made by one more in the burgeoning group of New Wave directors, Jean-Luc Godard, and I am close to being brainwashed by certain of our reviewers who have variously called the piece a "masterwork," "an awesome undertaking," and a "cubistic thriller . . . that subtly distorts, rearranges, and relativizes time, much as Picasso manipulated space in 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon.'" (As though every film did not, to a degree, distort, rearrange, and relativize time!) I suspect that some of those so warmly encouraged to see "Breathless" may have difficulty, however, in recognizing a cubistic thriller when they see one and may also wonder if their limited eyes, ears, and understanding are insufficient to appreciate its masterful qualities fully.

If there are any such, I offer my own membership among them. The only film masterworks I have seen in the last several months have been "Hiroshima, Mon Amour," "Wild Strawberries," and "La Dolce Vita," and I find myself unwilling to place "Breathless" on the same plane. I'll shamelessly admit, too, that I found the picture somewhat distasteful, as well as lacking in the meanings that the French critics (even more than their American brothers) attributed to this largely improvised study of a footloose French thug and one of those pathetic American girls who hawk the Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune* on the Champs-Élysées. (JFK should do something about *that*.)

This is not to deny that the movie is an occasionally interesting experiment in improvisation, that it has original touches, among them a sometimes amusing and sometimes unsettling cutting technique that jumps one sequence into the next, with a resulting jazzy pace that suggests the jerky thought sequences of a young criminal concerned with evading his police pursuers and sleeping with the newsgirl. All this is to the good. Godard obviously has ideas about cinematic movement. And he presumably espouses a modish French neo-nihilism. In a nihilistic world (if you wish to posit it as such) why not a conscienceless criminal as hero?

Godard thus whimsically dedicates his movie to Monogram Pictures, a touch that young French intellectuals found delicious. The young French

movie enthusiast tends to see something we don't in certain of our lesser pictures. You may remember that an ordinary Rita Hayworth vehicle of the Forties, "Gilda," was taken up in France and more or less enshrined. The French have their own ideas about what truly represents the American mystique. Horace McCoy, a neglected novelist here, had a cult formed around him there. There also existed a Humphrey Bogart cult, more than hinted at in "Breathless." Jean-Paul Belmondo—who plays the thug with a misplaced humor that belies the character's essential psychopathology—is seen fingering his upper lips in Bogart style, and at one point stares fascinatedly at a poster of Bogart, hoping to find a resemblance between himself and the late star. Even more symbolically, a French critic tells us, when the girl joins the criminal in his flight, they escape for a time by entering a movie house!

The way to find meanings in the film, then, is to take it at more than face value, as more than an aimless chronicle of a petty car thief who kills a pursuing policeman in cold blood, filches money from a former girlfriend, mugs a stranger in a washroom, beats up a car dealer, and then, in bed with the American girl, has some long and, I'm afraid, idiotic conversations. Jean Seberg, as the girl, has a vague, cluttered-up mind; she wants to live in France, to be a reporter, to write a novel, to rid herself of Midwestern scruples about making love, to read Dylan Thomas, to know all about abstract art. The difficulty in all this is to find Godard's intent. Is he parodying these young types? Does he see them as funny, sad, or monstrous? Or is he perhaps merely parodying other movies, with their emphasis on violence and sex?

The "idea" for the story was provided by Francois Truffaut (of "The 400 Blows") and then elaborated in day-to-day improvisation by Godard. Finally the girl (pregnant by now) gets



as tired of the moony psychopath as I did and (with relief on my part) telephones the police and tells them how to catch her boyfriend. As he expires in conventional Monogram Pictures style from police bullets in his back he affectionately calls the girl the French equivalent of a bitch. "What did he mean?" she asks bewilderedly. End of cubistic thriller. No old-fashioned moral attitudes or platitudes. All is a washed-up Humphrey Bogart world, a world, of course, that never existed in the first place.

For the knowledgeable, there is also an interview at Orly with an author called Parvulesco, who answers empty questions with empty paradoxes. Hardly hilarious, though. Acting? Pretty much thrown out the window. Miss Seberg is carefully kept a nonactress by her director, who sees to it that both her face and voice remain expressionless. Belmondo, clearly a striking new personality, has an uncommon face and what might be called a "cute" manner. The trouble is, he's all too sympathetic; and he should have been playing someone else.

But Godard, it would seem, has found critical safety in mixing up the real and the unreal, and by eliminating meaning. He has set a clever trap: if nothing is said, what is there to attack? So he has made an intriguing film, but let's face it, not really a good one.

TO return to Belmondo, he can be seen again (and all too briefly) in "Love and the Frenchwoman," an omnibus of seven stories filmed by seven directors, and purportedly illustrating the findings of the French Institute of Public Opinion about French female love life. This being a French movie, statistics are naturally subordinated to a portrayal of conventional French attitudes toward, in order: childhood, adolescence, virginity, marriage, adultery, divorce, and the lonely female.

The seven vignettes are not equally interesting, but tend to grow less so the more serious they get, and more so when the French tongue is in the French cheek. As might be expected, the subject of adultery affords the most opportunity for amusement. Jean-Paul Belmondo is a delight as a young seducer who knows exactly how to land his fish—in this case Dany Robin, a pretty, idle wife, temporarily neglected by her husband. Belmondo, with his mushy, impudent face, manages to achieve his objective on schedule, and is funny doing so; almost equally as funny is Paul Meurisse as the tolerant, betrayed husband, who has his own flings to carry on. In another mood is Louise de Vilmorin's pleasant vignette, "Adolescence," in which an adolescent girl makes her first gingerly explorations of

love, while her perplexed parents worry needlessly about her proper growth into maturity.

Rene Clair's segment, "Marriage," comes off most stylishly, so far as direction is concerned, although his account of the first married day of a young couple has its familiar side. The other directors probe their subjects with flashes of humor and perception, but the treatment in most cases is kept superficial, and one is bound to wonder why seven directors were needed, when the styles of most of them are so similar. Competent work by the Academy, and nothing here that will shatter our illusions about the *amours* of the French-woman.

One of the last roles of a great actor, Gerard Philippe, is to be found in "Modigliani of Montparnasse," a movie that shows the final years of the Italian painter in all their dreariness. The film is not a particularly enlightening view of the artist, but it does show Modigliani drifting between alcohol and women, while a truly stupefying neglect of his genius drives him to deeper and deeper despair. At the end, the painter having died an alcoholic death, an unscrupulous art dealer greedily gathers up his paintings before their value becomes known. An American millionaire collector is pillorized harshly, and it is truly pathetic to watch Gerard as the painter hawking his sketches at a few francs each in the Montparnasse cafes. Excellent portraits of the women in his life are drawn by Lili Palmer and Anouk Aimee, but the script—author unspecified—is pedestrian, and so is Jacques Becker's direction.

For lively entertainment, and nothing but that, I can recommend "European Nights," an Italian-French coproduction with the happy notion of gathering together the best of the European cafe acts and turning them into a feature-length nightclub show of dazzling variety. Alessandro Blasetti has photographed the acts—ranging from the wonderful Rastelli clowns of Milan to the striptease at the Crazy Horse Saloon in Paris—with liveliness and a knowing eye for color. To avoid the use of either subtitles or dubbing, an American version has been prepared, with Henry Morgan delivering a witty commentary—and a re-editing for what might be termed family consumption has been done with deftness and taste by Valentine Sherry. It would require a lengthy and busy Cook's tour, as well as a considerable budget, to see all the acts that Blasetti has captured on film. Those who like nightclub variety, but object to cigarette haze, crowded tables, and cover charges, will find "European Nights" one of the best and least expensive shows in town.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

Rule of Law

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management of troublesome problems in this area. The Charter of the Organization of American States, which became effective in 1951, provides that all international disputes between the American states shall be submitted to certain "peaceful procedures" before being referred to the Security Council of the United Nations. The procedures designated are "direct negotiations, good offices, mediation, investigation and conciliation, judicial settlement, arbitration, and those which the parties to the dispute may especially agree upon at any time." We promise in that Charter not to go it alone in several respects. Article 16 provides: "No state may use or encourage the use of coercive measures of an economic or political character in order to force the sovereign will of another state and obtain from it advantages of any kind." The Charter provides a broad framework for cooperative action among the American states. Article 4 not only proclaims the prevention of disputes among the American states, their peaceful settlement, and common action against "aggression"; it goes further and announces that cooperative action is desired in solving "political, juridical, and economic problems" arising among the American states and in promoting, "by cooperative action, their economic, social, and cultural development."

THE European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms creates a more selective administrative and juridical system. It came into force in 1953; fourteen out of fifteen countries that are members of the Council of Europe have ratified it. The Convention includes a bill of rights for nationals of the member nations, under which a wide range of human rights is protected.

This organization's Commission of Human Rights may receive complaints from individuals or groups or from member nations. It deals with complaints only "after all domestic remedies have been exhausted." It makes an investigation and seeks to secure "a friendly settlement" on the basis of the rights defined in the Convention. If it is unable to effect a settlement, it reports the matter to the Committee of Ministers.

In that event the matter can be submitted to the European Court of Human Rights created by the Convention. The Commission can submit it, or the member state whose national is alleged to be the victim, or the member state that referred the case to the Commission, or the member state against which

the complaint is lodged. The court is empowered to decide its jurisdiction should that be challenged. Its judgments are final.

The European Court of Human Rights has had few cases to date. The Commission, however, has been extremely busy. Some complaints are from individuals who protest an action that their own government has taken against them; others are by aliens against another government. The most publicized have been those by the German Communist Party and by German Communists detained by West Germany or convicted by its courts. And perhaps the most common ground for rejection of the complaints is a failure to exhaust "domestic remedies" that were available.

The International Court of Justice, created by the United Nations, also has a permanent status; but it has a different kind of jurisdiction from that of the European Court of Human Rights. It decides actual controversies; and, unlike the United States Supreme Court, it has the authority to render advisory opinions. Yet only states (not individuals) may be parties before the International Court of Justice. This includes the United Nations itself, which was permitted to bring an action before the court in 1949. The disputes with which the court deals concern the interpretation of treaties, any question of international law, and the breach of an international obligation, together with the nature and extent of the reparation to be made for such a breach. The aim is to have such a court "that in the body as a whole the representation of the main forms of civilization and of the principal legal systems of the world should be assured." Enforcement of the decrees of the court is entrusted to the Security Council.

THE tools with which we can evolve a "rule of law" into a more mature system are at hand. Why do nations hold back? Why are we not willing to take the lead in inaugurating a truly golden age for international law? We could, I think, do it, if we asserted the moral leadership of which we so often boast. We need more commitment and less lip service. World opinion is ready to be marshaled. Small nations quiver on the sidelines as they watch giant rivals spar, threaten, and shake their nuclear fists. The world is filled with such a sense of insecurity that for the first time in history solid foundations for a "rule of law" can be laid.

Khrushchev employs the classical techniques which Communists have been taught to use when participating in parliamentary proceedings. On August 2, 1920, the Second Comintern Congress sent instructions to Commu-

nist Party members on how to destroy parliamentary democracy by using as an "auxiliary center" of the "mass struggle" the "rostrum of the bourgeois parliament." This directive of August 2, 1920, also stated: "Demonstrative legislative proposals should be regularly submitted on the instructions of the party and its central committee, not with the idea that they will be accepted by the bourgeois majority, but for purposes of propaganda, agitation, and organization." The activity recommended was "chiefly in revolutionary agitation from the parliamentary tribune, in exposing enemies, in the ideological mobilization of the masses." Pounding a lectern with one's shoe at the United Nations is in the same category as maintaining a chant in the manner of Communists in the French Assembly.

WHETHER Khrushchev was doing more than making a play to the Communist galleries in the world, we do not know. Some think he wants to destroy the United Nations. Yet a nuclear holocaust would be destructive of all peoples, Communists included. Even for Communists the cult of force is fast becoming obsolete, Khrushchev knows it, as evident from his Bucharest speech in June, 1960, in which he concluded that war with non-Communist nations was not "inevitable." Moreover, world opinion on the side of a "rule of law" is powerful. Those who were forced to vote against it would lose in prestige and influence. This force of world opinion must be mobilized.

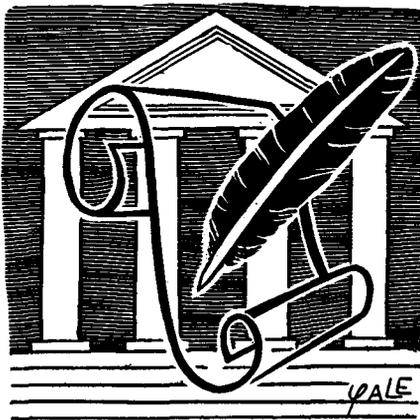
There are of course great gulfs between the law, customs, and mores which we of the West accept as normal and which other parts of the world practise.

One of our major errors, as we emerged from a century and a half of isolationism, was to think of the world as if it were made in our image; at times we even thought that the non-conformists should be remade in our image. The advanced form of democracy which we enjoy, which Europe for the most part represents, which flourishes in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and which is taking sturdy hold in India and Israel, is largely unknown in the world. Many societies developed along family lines, not community lines. Familial, not democratic, regimes have shaped the affairs of many Asian countries for centuries. It is a familial, not a democratic, type of regime that governs Formosa today. Pakistan is making modest advances toward a democratic society. Turkey has great promise. Indonesia is holding most political experiments in abeyance. Tribal government controls the lives of men and

women in some African nations. In at least one African nation which is a member of the United Nations, trial by fire—which India practised long centuries ago and which was practised in England until 1262 A.D.—is still practised among the tribes.

African tribes hold much of the land in trust for people. Yet tribal life is breaking up; about 40,000,000 have left their tribes and sought new lives in villages and cities. These transitions promise turmoil and unrest. Chaos may indeed mount in the Congo.

The vast gulfs that exist between various world cultures mean that the common ground for world law will be narrow and selective. It starts, of course, with the rule against aggressive war; and it proceeds from there to all the stuff which treaties, contracts, commercial engagements, investments, travel, communication, and the like shape up into controversies. There are only limited areas where today we can rightfully say common ground can be found. Yet they are important, indeed critical, ones; and they will expand as the



peoples of the world work with their newly emerging institutions of law and gain confidence in them.

Some have the lingering notion that wars without nuclear weapons can be fought—if only nuclear weapons are abolished. That is dangerous thinking. Now that the art of making them is known, they could be quickly manufactured even though all were destroyed. They are so strategically important that they would tempt any participant. Once war broke out, a frantic race would be on to manufacture again the outlawed nuclear weapons. The side that won that race would have the opponent at its mercy. We know now that nuclear war risks all life on each continent that is involved, and perhaps all other life as well. That means that the central problem of this day is the *prevention* of war.

The Charter of the United Nations

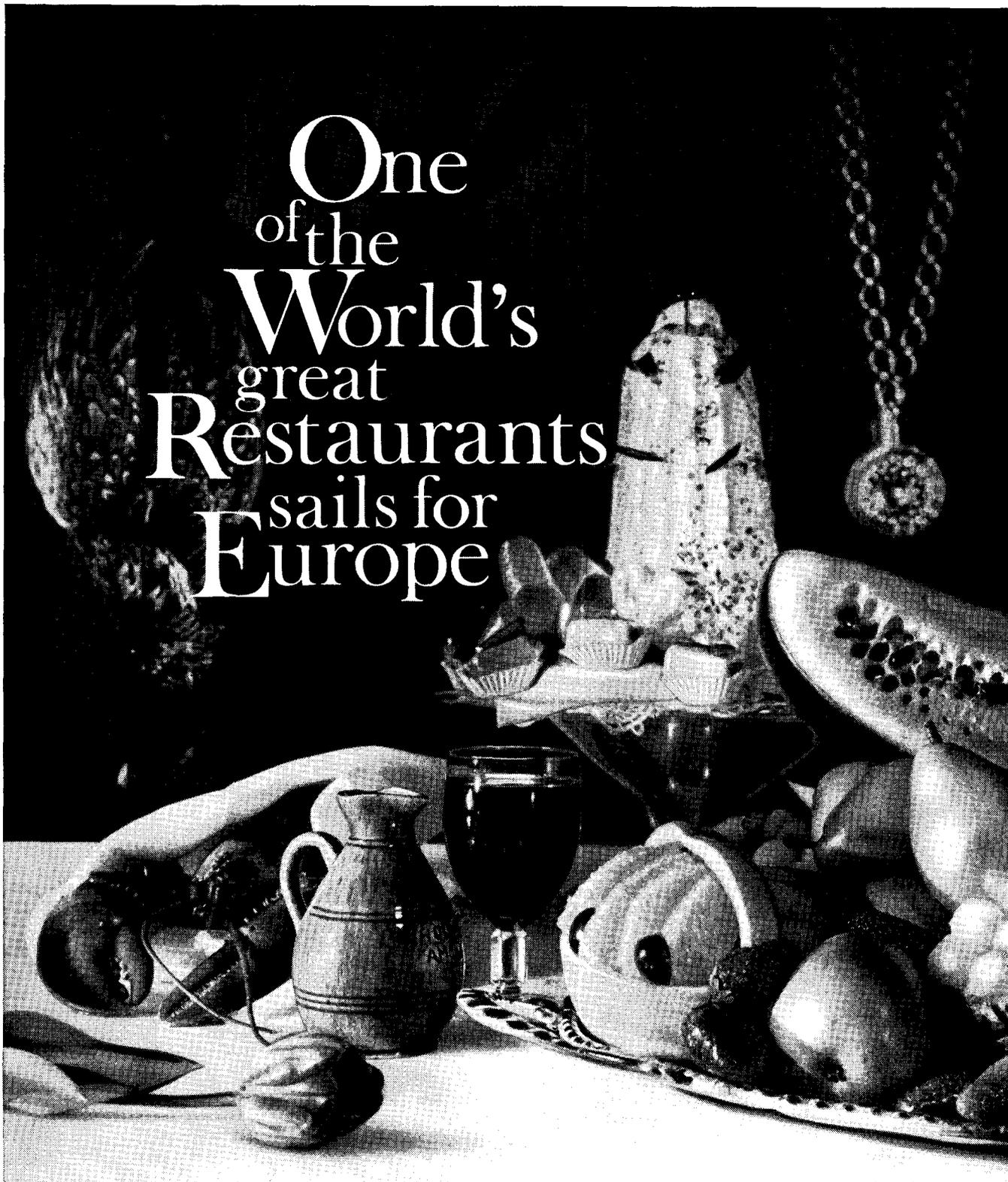
contains a resolve on the part of the people "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind." Effective prevention of war means disarmament. Partial disarmament is a sham except insofar as it leads to the establishment of procedures which can be extended to full disarmament. The danger of partial disarmament is that each side aims to keep the weapon—or weapons—that best suits its strategic position. Russia, for example, would gladly trade atomic bombs for tanks, since with tanks she could still dominate the land mass of which she is the center. Pursuit of peace at this stage means making the search for foolproof disarmament the first item on the international agenda. Walter Millis in his challenging work, "A World Without Wars," shows that a viable world could easily exist if war were actually abolished and never again became an instrument of national power.

We need to return to the philosophy of our Declaration of Independence, which was summed up by Carl Becker as follows: "At its best it preached toleration in place of persecution, goodwill in place of hate, peace in place of war. It taught that beneath all local and temporary diversity, beneath the superficial traits and talents that distinguish men and nations, all men are equal in the possession of a common humanity; and to the end that concord might prevail on the earth instead of strife, it invited men to promote in themselves the humanity which bound them to their fellows, and to shape their conduct and their institutions in harmony with it."

If we ourselves and other members of the democratic world community once more embrace that view of world affairs, we will be on a high road to a rule of law in international matters. Those Communist groups that want "coexistence" may in time fall into line. There does not, indeed, seem anywhere else to go—whatever the people are and whatever the political creed they adhere to.

THERE is no reason for us to get tangled up in legalisms that inexorably to the conclusion that total and complete sovereignty must be retained. For we now know that when that claim is pressed by all nations, everyone faces extinction in a nuclear holocaust. We believe as a people that we have an "unalienable" right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"; and it is increasingly apparent that our governing agencies must have sufficient freedom in policy-making and in action to assure us that right.

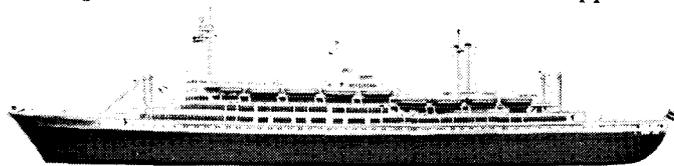
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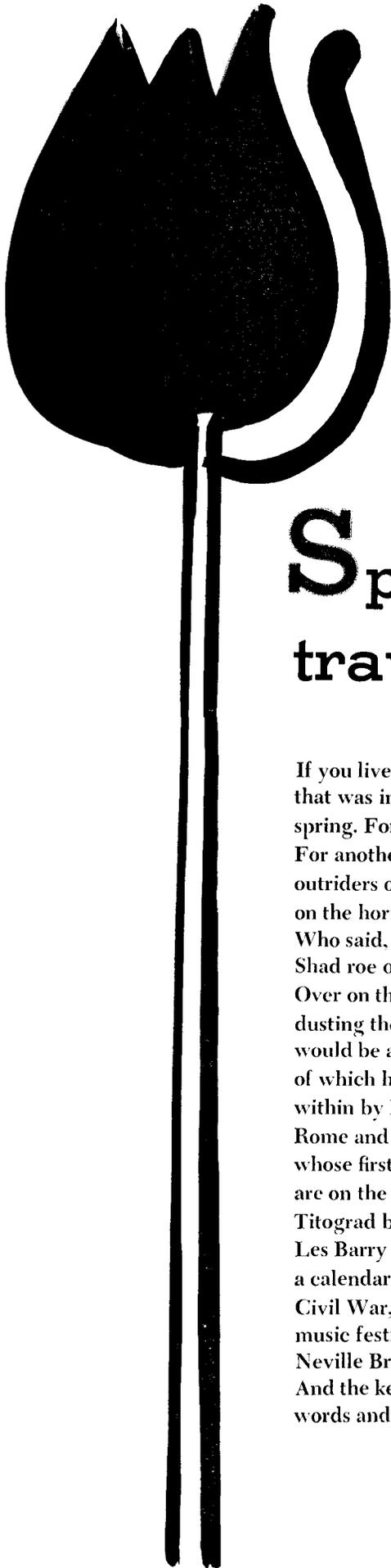
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Spring and the traveler

If you lived in Manhattan and you had a periscope and a psyche that was intrinsically hopeful, you could see the signs of spring. For one thing there were days when it didn't snow. For another there were events almost in sight, like the outriders of a familiar column, still tiny silhouettes on the horizon, but approaching with each warming day. Who said, "Flower Show"? Rolling eggs on the White House lawn? Shad roe on the menus, already?

Over on the far side they would be tulip-watching in Holland, dusting the sidewalk tables in Paris. And Seville would be a frenzy for its Fair, some attitudes of which have been painted on our cover and described within by Barnaby Conrad. Marc Connelly's memories of cats in Rome and some advice on how to travel heavy by playwright William Marchant, whose first novel, "Gondolier," is to be published with the spring, are on the pages that follow. So is the recollection of a breakfast in Titograd by Anita Leslie, author of "Mrs. Fitzherbert." Editor-photographer Les Barry tells of art in an abandoned Arab village in Israel, there is a calendar of events commemorating the centennial of the Civil War, along with a poem by John Ciardi. (A calendar of European music festivals appears in the music section on pages 94 and 95.) Neville Braybrooke writes from London about a memorial to W. H. Hudson. And the keeper of the local flame, who has been to Brasilia, is back with words and pictures. Please turn.

—H. S.