

The Importance of Putting Deeds into Words

By CALVIN KYTLE



LET ME SAY FIRST how nice it is to be briefly out of the insurance world of loss ratio, claims history, and premium volume and to be instead among you people who, I take it, are more concerned with lost antecedents, history unmodified, and just plain volumes.

I'm with you this afternoon to praise you, and to praise you sincerely. I'm not quite sure, really, why Dr. Marvin asked me in particular to do this, although I am glad that he did, and honored, too. An organization like yours deserves to be told from time to time that its work is appreciated by the vulgar world of commerce. And certainly it is good for someone of that world, like me, to have the chance to meet with an organization like yours to be reminded of what, in the last analysis, we're all in business for.

The Vice-President—Public Relations of Nationwide Insurance, who lives in Columbus, spoke most eloquently at the Workshop and Tea for the County Chairmen of the Ohioana Library, held at the Governor's Mansion. His remarks follow, in abbreviated form. Mrs. Kytle (Elizabeth Kytle) is the author of Willie Mae, reviewed in the first issue of this magazine.

I have read some of the leaflets published by your Association and I gather that this is your thirtieth anniversary year. Congratulations. I also have been impressed by your statement of purpose: "To honor Ohio writers and composers, and to acquaint the public with their attainments." I am all the more impressed by the fact that so much of your work is directed toward honoring *living* Ohio authors and composers, and publicizing their good works while they can enjoy the royalties.

State Pride

It's not rare for people to have pride in their state, in its history, its politicians, its scenery, its movie and sport stars. But to have pride in the authors and artists and composers, and to organize that pride into a sort of adult fan club is something special indeed. I think the existence of the Ohioana Library Association speaks very well for the people of Ohio. I think it has something quite important to say about their sense of values.

In fact, I feel most personally that your activities, and those of others like you, are one of the few comforting signs in a world that often seems indifferent and abusive to works of the mind and spirit. To honor our intellectuals in a time of

anti-intellectualism, as you're doing—this is no little accomplishment. And to encourage authors to keep on writing and people to keep on reading when there seems to be a natural conspiracy to have them do anything else but—this is, it seems to me, a really noble purpose. I'm convinced that the best hope we have for hanging onto our senses in times like today is in cultural efforts like yours—and I could be easily persuaded that dependent on the direction and success of such efforts is the survival of anything in our civilization worth saving.

Why do I say this? Because only through books—good books—and through its art does a society come to understand itself; not merely express itself but understand itself. Only in books can the meaning of our lives and times be fully articulated and preserved. In drama, music, paintings, great sermons, sure. But these are the fleeting media, limited in their impact to the span of emotion and by the retentiveness of the eye-mind. And for understanding, for that kind of understanding which conditions the functioning healthy society, we need something to have with us, to hold, something permanent to refer to. Here in a book can be the orderly analysis of events that are otherwise too complicated, too fast-occurring, too diverse in both cause and effect, for us to interpret. Here in books are the facts of our environment, the realities we live with; here are the ideas that provoke us to action; here in books are the clues that will lead us to our own private answers to history's most private questions: "What is it all about?" "What am I here for?"

We Act Before We Think

There has never been a time in history

when our need was greater for what good books can give us. For unless we can keep perspective, unless somehow we can find a governing principle in the seeming chaos of contemporary events, we will lose our direction and our lives will have no purpose. This is our peril. And the peril is compounded by the fact that the momentum of what we have come to call the Technological Revolution is causing us to act before we think. Perhaps more accurately, it is causing something to happen today before we have come to understand what happened yesterday. It is not merely that we are living in fast-changing times; what is not so popularly understood and yet is already one of the facts of life is that the *rate* of change is accelerating.

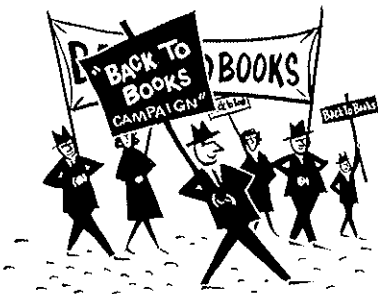
To appreciate this, you need only consider that it took man 10,000 years to move from the Agricultural Revolution to the Industrial Revolution; it took him only 150 years to move from the Industrial Revolution to the Technological Revolution. It is estimated that mankind has been affected more by the revolution that dates from 1945 than it was by either of the two revolutions preceding. Fundamentally affected. The result, moreover, has been to push us into an era of continuing revolution, in which every new day requires us to take another notch in our psyches, to shake our values before using. In a time of such furious change, of push-pull pressures, of yes-but decisions, of problems that seem too big to comprehend, much less resolve, no wonder most of us are nervous or numb.

And yet it is precisely because things are the way they are today that I say the time has come for a Back to Books Movement. Truly, never before have we need-

ed more urgently to have our own experience interpreted for us. It is one thing to act—to shoot a rocket to the moon, to send a ship under the polar ice, to introduce a machine that can reproduce its own kind, to put into a single capsule enough explosive to blow up the earth. It is quite another thing to explain why we're doing such things, and still a different thing to show the relationship of one to another so that, together, they make for a kind of cosmic sense. Yet this is what books and great writers can, and must, do for us—to stabilize a frame of reference on which our statesmen can build platforms and the rest of us can build hopes.

It's So Important

This is why I say that in times like these it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of putting deeds into words. This is why I think it's so important



that authors be encouraged to write and be told they're appreciated, and why it's important that book-reading among Americans be made as routine as breakfast.

And yet, sadly, the facts are hardly encouraging.

During the last year and a half I have come to know a fine American writer named David Karp. My company, Nation-

wide Insurance, has hired Dave to work with our president, Murray D. Lincoln, on an "as-told-to" biography. We expect to have the book out either late this fall or early next year. I promise you, this is the only commercial you'll find in these comments, but I do hope that, once the book is published, the Ohioana Library will see fit to give it its blessing. But about Dave Karp—Dave is an especially gifted young man and, what is just as important, also a very energetic one. He is able to turn out quite successful television shows (he's probably best known as the author of a widely publicized Playhouse 90 script, "The Plot to Kill Stalin") and still find time to do serious fiction at no sacrifice of art or integrity.

Author of Four Novels

What is important to remember about Dave Karp is this: Within five years he has written four novels, each dealing provocatively and perceptively with a major theme: "One", on the welfare state; "The Day of the Monkey", on colonialism; "All Honorable Men", on intellectual freedom; and "Leave Me Alone", on social conformity. The sad fact is that none of these books has sold more than 3,500 copies in its original trade edition. In America, that is. In England, they've all been best-sellers. "Leave Me Alone", interestingly enough, sold more copies in Johannesburg, South Africa, than it did in all America. When he visited England for the first time last year, he was met at the pier by reporters from the *London Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*.

Now why does what Dave Karp has to say have meaning to thousands of Englishmen but to only a handful of Americans? Why should he have a popular audience in London but, as the press-

agents would call it, only a small devoted following in the United States? Part of the answer, I think, can be found in an article on America's book-reading habits published in *The Saturday Review*. Here are some facts pulled from that article:

Among college-educated Americans, one-fourth has not read a single book in the last year. Among those whose formal training ended with high school, almost three-fifths have not cracked a book in the last year.

Today, at any time, only 17 percent of the adults in the United States may be found reading a book. In England, 55 percent of the population at any given time may be found reading a book.

Twenty years ago 15 percent of our houses had built-in bookshelves. A fairly recent survey indicates only 12 percent of the houses erected in the past ten years have them. Forty-two percent of the houses in America are without bookcases or bookshelves of any kind. Of course, it doesn't follow that books in book-

shelves are read. A survey by one of America's leading publishers revealed that 84 percent of the families purchasing their encyclopedias had not opened so much as a single volume within one year after they'd bought it.

Only 13 out of every 100 citizens borrow books from the public library. In the judgment of the director of one of the largest circulating libraries in the world, only 5 percent of the books borrowed by this 13 percent of the populace are good reading. Eighty-eight percent are low-level material, and seven percent intermediate. If the United States had the same proportion of libraries per capita as Sweden there would be in this country not 7,500 public libraries but 77,000.

It is when I contemplate these statistics and when I think of the vastly talented but deplorably unappreciated David Karpis in America that I say Thank God for organizations like Ohioana. At least, here in Ohio, our David Karpis, whatever their names, are not going unrecognized or their books unread. Thanks to *you*.