

Photography

Photography on The Social Scene

By JACOB DESCHIN

SEVERAL picture books recently published illustrate various aspects of the social scene in the United States and abroad.

"American Album" (New York: American Heritage, 352 pp. \$17.50) is at the same time a history of photographic activity in the United States during the medium's first 75 years up to World War I, and an illustrated social history of this country during this period. It is also often a relatively lighthearted romp through these decades, thanks to Oliver Jensen's captions, Joan Paterson Kerr's industry in tracking down the more than 300 photographs reproduced in this 10½x14-inch volume, and Murray Bel-sky's generously large reproductions, many of them full-page. Mr. Jensen also did the informative introductions to the various sections.

"How We Looked and How We Lived in a Vanished U.S.A.," the book's subtitle, was covered by often ingenious photographers, many of them anonymous, on an increasingly broader scale as the medium advanced technologically, from the daguerreotype that ushered in the photographic era, to the wet plate that witnessed the Civil War and the opening up of the West, and so on eventually to the more convenient film that chronicled the crowding of the cities and celebrated "the pursuit of happiness." The pictures are arranged in orderly fashion and in meaningful groups.

"Magical" Images

For the reader still not so numbed by the speed and overwhelming volume of technological progress that he can no longer feel the sense of wonder, these old images of America's yesterdays "done to the life" certainly must appear, as they do to Mr. Jensen in his introduction, as little less than "magical."

In 1946, Wright Morris, novelist and photographer, introduced a new way of handling words with pictures in a book called "The Inhabitants" (Scribner's). In "God's Country and My People" (New York: Harper & Row, \$10), just published, he returns to the method with a bigger volume, nearly twice the earlier one and with memories sorted out in more detail and a deeper awareness of experience.

The pictures are little more than symbols — a rocking chair, barber shop pole, fire hydrant, kitchen stove, wooden church, back stoop, water tower — things and places, but without people.

Each is a hint leading back to the past, and to recollections, surmises and ruminations, to which the text opposite is devoted. Simple as the pictures are in context, they have a provocative quality and, prodded by the author's musings, provide stimulus for the reader to invoke personal memories of his own.

Benedict J. Fernandez's "In Opposition: Images of American Dissent in the Sixties" (New York: Da Capo Press, \$15) is a kind of pictorial primer of protest, both for and against whatever the cause — Vietnam, fair housing, white or black power, student sit-ins.

Convinced that people who feel strongly about anything should make their voices heard in "the marketplace of ideas" — the variety of demonstration techniques, indoors and out, this restless decade has produced — Mr. Fernandez has made a specialty of being around when they do and taking pictures to spread the word and the sense of indignation further through exhibitions and publications.

In a preface, Aryeh Neier, director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, sees the pictures as reflecting the updated character of dissent in America, one not foreseen by the framers of the Constitution in guaranteeing the right of free speech. The new way is described by Mr. Fernandez in his introduction: "Dissent is realized where a guy will get out of his pad and out of his rut and get on a soapbox . . ."

An art exhibit based on photographs of Mr. Fernandez, entitled "Conscience: the Ultimate Weapon," is currently being shown in the lobby of the An-pacher Theater, 425 Lafayette Street. Admission is free, and the exhibit is open during the hours of performances: Tuesdays through Thursday, 5-11 P.M.; Saturdays, 4:30-7:30 P.M.; and 8:30-10:30 P.M.; Sundays, 2-30

5:30 P.M. and 7-10 P.M. The show will be open through Dec. 29.

Josef Breitenbach, who frequently journeys to Asia on photographic assignments for American industry and magazines, occasionally takes time out to photograph native women, children and the local environment for his own pleasure. A representative selection of these is assembled in a large new volume, "Women in Asia" (New York: John Day, \$15), which has an introduction by Spurgeon M. Keeny that provides some essential background for the general reader. Mr. Keeny was UNICEF'S Director for Asia in 1950-1963.

Covering nearly 20 countries from Iran to India, Ceylon, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, to Bali, the Philippines, Taiwan, Korea and Japan, the pictures constitute a kind of travelogue dominated by pretty girls, delightful children, old women, and something of the world in which they move about. As such, a number of the photographs are quite appealing.

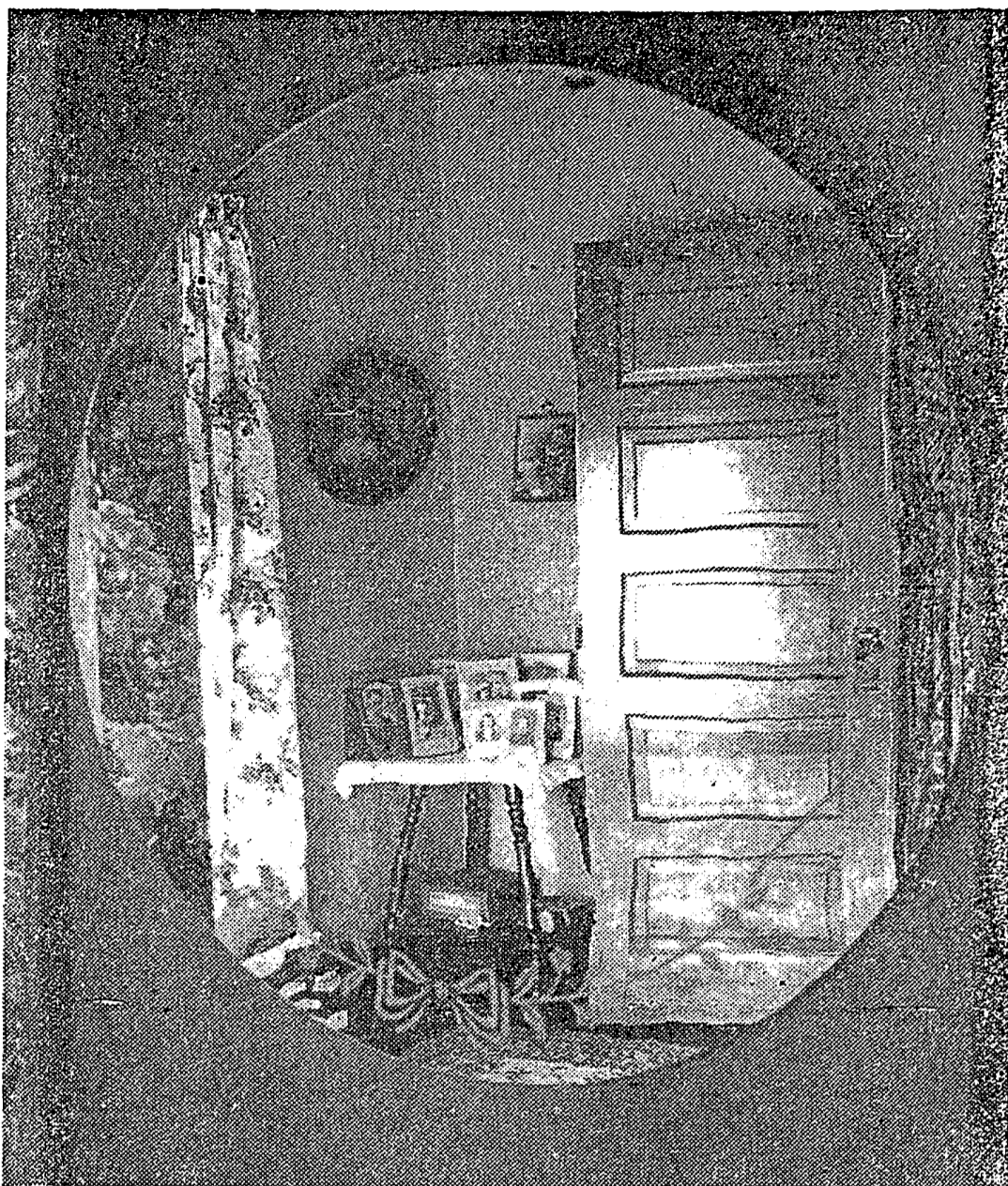
But a travelogue is not a documentary penetration of a society, yet this is what this reader, at least, looked for in vain in this attractive volume.

Ken Heyman, who illustrated Margaret Mead's "Family," a picture book for which he photographed in many parts of the world, again draws on this extensive file, this time for Robert Cohen's "The Color of Man" (New York: Random House, \$3.95).

Apparently intended for young people, Mr. Cohen's very readable study of the social and scientific aspects of color differences and the illogicalness of prejudice, is well suited for adults as well. The many photographs by Mr. Heyman, whose anthropological training at Columbia under Dr. Mead has made him a specialist in this field, richly illustrate this very illuminating book.

GRASS IN COLOR

"Grass Land" (Polk, Neb. Wide Skies Press, \$4.95) is a beautiful book of photograph-



FROM "GOD'S COUNTRY AND MY PEOPLE"—Mementos of the past are reflected in an old-fashioned mirror in the new text-and-picture book by Wright Morris.

ic color reproductions with verse and text which is, in effect, an appeal for preservation of grass land and the natural environment. The book is a family affair, with photographs by Steven Wilson and text by his parents, Jim and Alice Wilson.

If this be promotion, which in the best sense it is, make the most of it. Rarely has a cause been so appealingly defended.

F.S.A. RECALLED

"Just Before the War," the illustrated catalogue of an exhibition on the work of the Farm Security Administration photographers from 1935 to 1941 under Roy E. Stryker, has been published by the Newport Harbor Art Museum, 400 Main Street, Balboa, Calif. 92661. The show hung there from Sept.

30 through Nov. 10.

Primarily, the publication is a cross section of photographs by the 15-member group, among them Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, John Vachon and John Collier. In addition, the publication includes samples of shooting scripts, story outlines and memorandums Mr. Stryker prepared for his staff's guidance. The show will be seen again from Feb. 14 through March 30, 1969, at the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C.

ON SHEELER

A biographical study and critical evaluation of Charles Sheeler's work by Charles Millard inaugurates a newly enlarged format for Contemporary Photographer, a quarterly published in Lexington,

Mass. Its editor is Carl Chiarenza.

An original contribution to the literature, which took over a year of research, the study, with a large collection representative of Sheeler's work, fills the entire issue of the quarterly. Thus, the issue is in effect a monograph.

With the new issue, Mr. Chiarenza hopes to bring the quarterly back on a regular basis. The next two numbers are already in work, one devoted to "The Concerned Photographer," the other to portfolios by Marie Cosindas (black - and - white photographs) and Warren Hill.

The new rate for the quarterly is \$10 a year. The editorial offices of Contemporary Photographer are at 258, Lowell Street, Lexington, Mass.