

publisher of the present book.)

It was not just British dissidents who read the *Review*. Arguably, its greatest impact was in Eastern Europe, in the days before the Iron Curtain finally rusted away. For years, Scruton and a small band of collaborators visited isolated intellectuals in Prague and elsewhere and smuggled forbidden publications and classic texts to dissident circles, at considerable risk to themselves. Scruton has mixed feelings about the results of the opening up of Eastern Europe: He looks back longingly at the heady days of dangerous dissent among the musty remains of the old Europe, which, in some ways, paradoxically survived longer in the isolated East than in the free West. "That world has vanished. Communism preserved it as a dream; capitalism processed and packaged its remaining fragments." That balanced pronouncement encapsulates Scruton's intellectual and emotional distance from the economic reductionists of left and right who have now captured (temporarily, one hopes) the major political parties in all Western countries.

Much of *Gentle Regrets* is taken up with its author's gradually growing religiosity. Like many thoughtful people, Scruton spent years "roaming in search of beauty," which led him ineluctably into churches. Driven by his compulsion to find meaning in everything and the knowledge that societies (especially those, such as England, which have a "national church") simply cannot function without an irrational spiritual foundation, his aesthetic tourism morphed into an ever-closer engagement with Christianity. He is now a regular attendee (and keyboardist) at High Anglican services. But there is something essentially paradoxical about this newfound (or rediscovered) allegiance. Scruton's awareness of the intellectual challenges of science condemns him to view religion mostly from outside, as if he were an anthropologist looking down from an empyrean height on some quaint cultish practice, or an entomologist admiring a beetle pinned to a board. Like Eliot, he is "a believer in belief" rather than a true believer. Like other clever conservatives, Scruton has arrived at his religious views progressively and rationally rather than emotionally, as a combined recognition of religion's social utility and a weakness for resonant prose and music. His view is diametrically opposed to that of Sir Thomas Browne's famous "Methinks there be not enough mysteries in religion

for an active faith."

There is one area of politics that the author has always somewhat overlooked, much to our detriment. Despite the accusations of "racism" instanced above, it is often said that Scruton has never ascribed sufficient importance to race as a factor in human affairs, and certainly, for many years, such concerns went almost unaddressed in the *Salisbury Review* (although that is no longer the case). Nor has he ever treated this subject at book-length. Yet his delicate antennae are always twitching, sniffing the winds, acknowledging a changing world: He devoted a whole book, *The West and the Rest* (2002), to the challenge of Islamic terrorism. In *Gentle Regrets*, he looks directly, if glancingly, into the hate-flecked brown eyes of the Muslims, in the chapter on "Regaining My Religion":

The Muslims come to us from the demographic infernos of North Africa and Pakistan, like Aeneas from the burning ruins of Troy, each with an old man on his shoulders, a child at his feet and his hands full of strange gods . . . They show us what we *really* stand to lose, if we hold nothing sacred.

In the September 2006 issue of the *New Criterion*, in an article on Enoch Powell, he returned to the theme:

The fact is that the people of Europe are losing their homelands, and therefore losing their place in the world. I don't envisage the Tiber one day foaming with much blood, nor do I see it blushing as the voice of the muezzin sounds from the former cathedral of St. Peter. But the city through which the Tiber flows will one day cease to be Italian, and all the expectations of its former residents, whether political, social, cultural, or personal, will suffer a violent upheaval, with results every bit as interesting as those that Powell prophesied.

In *Four Quartets*, Eliot reflected ruefully that "human kind cannot bear very much reality." Scruton is one of the exceptions to this rule; he is a one-man intellectual army, an antidote to (almost all of) our present discontents.

Derek Turner is the editor of the Quarterly Review, published in London.

"Nothin' Could Be Finah Than to Be in Carolina"

by Clyde Wilson

Memory's Keep

by James Everett Kibler

Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co.;
221 pp., \$22.00



A first-rate scholar is as rare as, or rarer than, a first-rate creative writer. Believe me, having hung out with professors for 45 years, I know whereof I speak. When a first-rate scholar is also a creative artist of merit, you have a national treasure, a real live example of what has become scarcer and scarcer—a man of letters.

James Kibler long ago showed his mettle as a literary scholar. With his novel *Memory's Keep*, he has five creative works to his credit: two novels, a book of stories, a book of poetry—*Poems From Scorched Earth*—and a beautiful historical memoir, *Our Fathers' Fields*. In choosing his literary territory, Kibler has followed Sherwood Anderson's providential advice to Faulkner: Concentrate on your own little postage stamp of land. Kibler's is in Upcountry South Carolina (*Upcountry* being a tradition-laden three-centuries-old term which now, unfortunately, our foreign-owned local media have replaced with *the Upstate*.)

Daringly, in *Memory's Keep*, the author has taken up the human dimension of a major but little-known demographic fact of our time—the return of numerous black Americans, including many educated and prosperous folks, from the alien North to their Southern roots. *Memory's Keep* begins with the friendship of the young white farmer Trig Tinsley and the elderly black farmer Mister Pink. But the story is primarily about Mister Pink's children and grandchildren in their Northern diaspora and how, with the aid of memory and of Trig Tinsley, they begin to discover their healthy roots in the land.

Kibler has drawn a moving and a true portrait of people who once were lost but now are found. This signifies one group's return to its native place as well as the universal need to return to what is natural and close to the earth. Kibler is consciously in the Southern Agrarian tradi-

tion and knows his patch and its people not only as they appear today but in historical, cultural, and ecological depth. If his muse does not desert him, his Clay Bank County, South Carolina, promises to become richly peopled and meaningful in the way of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha and Wendell Berry's Port William.

Clyde Wilson is Distinguished Professor of History Emeritus of the University of South Carolina.

Founders, Keepers

by James O. Tate

Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different

by Gordon S. Wood
New York: The Penguin Press;
321 pp., \$25.95



Professor of history at Brown University, author of *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, *The American Revolution: A History*, and *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, Gordon S. Wood is in a unique position to undertake an account of those Founding Fathers from whom we must feel increasingly estranged. Intellectual, or perhaps we should say ideological, revolutions stand between us and them. Wood points to the muckraking efforts by John Back McMaster in 1898, by Sydney George Fisher in 1897 and 1912, and, above all, by Charles A. Beard, whose *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, published in 1913, Wood calls "the most influential history book ever written in America." Since then, of course, there have been further revolutions in the writing of history and in the making of it, as the lives of the Founding Fathers recede in time and their images occult themselves, and as the meaning of the Constitution has been distorted again and again.

There can be no question but that we need to recover a vital connection to the spirit of the Founding Fathers: By identifying that spirit, Wood has made an imposing contribution not only to American history but to the regeneration of the national mythology. But Wood gives us no easy answers: He does not indicate that ev-

ery little neocon can channel Alexander Hamilton. Much that we have heard lately about Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, and Hamilton has been too tilted toward our contemporary values and to obvious political logrolling to be of much use or credibility. Rarely does Wood nod in the direction of political correctness, for his point about the difference of the Founding Fathers is their difference from us. In this sense, the "vital connection" is a dead end. When they went, they slammed the door behind them, for never again could such men rise to the challenges they surmounted. They knew that their time had passed and that a republic of classical virtue was already slipping away in the decade after the Revolution.

There is a Plutarchian aspect to Wood's book, as there is to the word *character*; perhaps the best thing about the work is its intensification and clarification of our sense of the characters of the Founding Fathers, in respect both of their individual natures and the assumptions and principles they shared. George Washington emerges as something more or less than marmoreal, or perhaps I should say that his teeth are the only thing wooden about him. Our lack of a sense of Washington's distinctive personality is just that—our lack, not Washington's. We can hardly imagine today, without the insight of Wood, just how "public" a man Washington was. He suppressed his individuality in order to play his public role, and this so completely that he disappeared into that role. At the end of his life, he knew that the country had changed, that character now counted less than party affiliation, and that his historical moment was gone. "He was an extraordinary man who made it possible for ordinary men to rule. There has been no president quite like him, and we can be sure that we shall not see his like again." Exactly right; and there is more than the ratchet of history involved here, for Washington had indeed been outmoded in his own lifetime.

Wood clarifies for us the enigma of Thomas Jefferson, who did not believe in government or the state, but rather the virtue of the people. His position on slavery was optimistic, from his expectation that natural sociability would lead to the end of the peculiar institution. His historical error does not discredit his refusal to idolize the power of the state. His failure to anticipate the corruption of the people by the state is not his fault but that of the people. The aged Jefferson knew that the

country had changed: "All, all dead! And ourselves left alone midst a new generation whom we know not, and who know not us," he wrote in 1825. Wood's Jefferson is an understandable man, and one who still has something to tell us.

Thomas Jefferson had declared in 1806 that "our constitution is a peace establishment—it is not calculated for war"—a truth that speaks to our time and helps explain why we have lived on a war footing for generations. James Madison was so determined to avoid the centralization of power that, as President, he was undoing the war-making powers of the government even as the War of 1812 approached. John Adams wrote Jefferson that Madison's administration was glorious—which is why Wood insists that "[Madison's] conception of war and government, whether we agree with it or not, might help us understand better the world we have lost."

Wood also provides us with a revealing negative example in his account of Aaron Burr. Hamilton, Jefferson's opposite politically, went out of his way to throw the election of 1801 to that same Jefferson, and he had a reason for doing it: "The public good must be paramount to every consideration." It was a matter of character, not politics. Burr had many qualifications for presidential leadership, but he lacked the greatest requirement of all: disinterestedness. He was not a man of neoclassical virtue, but he was the man of the future, for our political leaders today have much more in common with Burr than they do with the most admirable of the Founding Fathers.

Professor Wood's book is not a lament for a lost moment but an introduction to a world of nuances and ideas and ideals that are now so distant that the need for his analysis is manifest. As his chapters are elegantly written as well as insightful throughout, *Revolutionary Characters* both delights and instructs. The question that remains is what, if anything, we are going to do about the gap between the nobility of the Founding Era and contemporary chaos and corruption. Wood seems to me to imply that there is little or nothing we can do, except to enhance our awareness of it. *Founders, keepers; losers, weepers.*

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