

"The Freedom to be Free," by James Marshall. The John Day Co., New York, 1943. 277 pp. \$2.50

If that earnest apostle of verbal obfuscation, Gertrude Stein, had written this book, she would probably have called it, "The Freedom to be Free, to be Free, to be Free, to be Free," and so on until she ran out of breath or out of ink. The author is less prolix; he is content with "The Freedom to be Free," and even that he claims as not his own but Gandhi's. He tells us that Louis Fischer quotes Gandhi as inquiring whether President Roosevelt's four freedoms include "the freedom to be free."

Now the mahatma is generally considered by the critics to belong in the first ten if not to deserve top ranking when it comes to knowing what freedom means, even though he has spent a lot of time in jail, and certainly the author himself, former president and present member of the New York City Board of Education, is no slouch on the subject, as the present volume abundantly proves. None the less, and these weighty authorities to the contrary notwithstanding, this humble reviewer ventures to opine that freedom means freedom—just that and nothing more—and that if it doesn't include the freedom to be free and all other freedoms, then it isn't freedom. It means the right to do as you please. Obviously in a civilized society that right must be conditioned upon the equal rights of others, but that is the only limitation.

Thomas Jefferson did a pretty good job when he wrote that all men have equal rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and his present day emulators, when specifying the *particular* freedoms which must be preserved—such, for instance, as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly—are by that very token eliminating a lot of others. Moreover it seems passing strange that the more we *hear* of those four freedoms, the less we *have* of them.

The foregoing observations are offered not in a spirit of carping cantankerousness or even good mean fun, but only because the slight irk occasioned by the title of the book is but one of several that the reader will experience before he reaches the end of the excellent final chapter, "Men Cannot Live By Words Alone." It is a little to be regretted that the author, who scores repeatedly with telling effect, is occasionally guilty of the most egregious misses without, apparently, realizing in the slightest that he *has* missed.

The bullseyes begin even in the warming-up shots. On the very first page of the foreword we read: "It is easier for the mathematician to abandon the Euclidean

hypothesis that two parallel lines will remain parallel into infinite space than it is for men in power to concede that power which is concentrated becomes corrupt."

That's swell, but when a little later we are told that "State planning is here to be with us for a long time because unplanned private finance milked new capital investment, and because industry could not plan either for world markets or internally," we begin to wonder a little.

It would be interesting to know who the culprit, "unplanned private finance," is, and who, the victim, "new capital investment." Who, too, is the industry that "could not plan?" These terms, of course, stand for human beings, business men with thousands of diversities of character and temperament, each trying his best to get along, to gratify his desires with the least effort, as every man has done since time began. The groups are largely interchangeable and overlapping. To imagine that one group ganged up on another and that a third

fell down on a mission which was peculiarly its own, is to indulge in fanciful thinking.

Though capitalism has developed more productive power than any other system, we are told, "for years before this present war the competitive system had to be insulated against international competition through tariffs . . . and capital invested at home had to be supported by grants in aid to build railroads and ships, to open up new resources and to establish banking and credit facilities."

It is not correct to say that the competitive system *had to be* insulated by tariffs, or that capital *had to be* aided by grants. It could be said in truth that they were "insulated" and "aided," and this at the behest of individuals and groups seeking to further their own interests at the expense of the public at large.

The author says with apparent approval: "Even before the war program necessitated priorities and price regulation, we were moving toward a planned economy; we were acknowledging that free competition was meaningless in situations involving monopoly and was a free pass to suicide to agricultural and other small producers."

Free competition, instead of being meaningless in the case of monopoly, is the one cure for monopoly, while a planned economy is by its very nature the greatest monopoly of all, the monopoly of power and authority in the hands of the State. Instead of free competition leading to the suicide of the small producer, that is the only condition under which he can survive. Without arguing the exigencies of the present situation it is evident that trade and production are more circumscribed, more hedged about by laws and restrictions than ever before in the history of our country. Never has free competition been so curtailed. And what is the effect on small business? You have only to pick up your daily paper to read that the little fellows are going out of business by the hundreds of thousands.

We like the author when he says in his interesting chapter on cooperatives that "running to the government is not the way to develop a self-reliant democracy." In another place he assures us that "The institutions

of men can be developed with an eye to encouraging rather than discouraging independence, cooperation and creativity." That, he holds, is what we mean when we say "that we want to develop a democratic world; we want to develop institutions founded on attitudes congenial to the survival and enrichment of human integrity."

He is everlastingly right, too, when he warns us that "the British Tories and most of the southern democrats represent an anachronism in democratic society, a vermiform appendix, inflamed with a chronic irritation at the thought of equality between peoples of different color." He says that "those bigotry-infected

members threaten to impede the effectiveness and welfare of democratic society." And he adds, truly: "For the failure to take an equalitarian attitude toward those races which are not white, and which have been subject races, will be the measure of the failure to appraise the current world-wide revolution and to recognize that the colored peoples are struggling to attain their maturity by freeing themselves of the paternalism of the white peoples."

All in all, this is a distinctly worthwhile book, even though I wish the author had shown a keener perception of the part land plays in the economic structure.

—C. O. STEELE