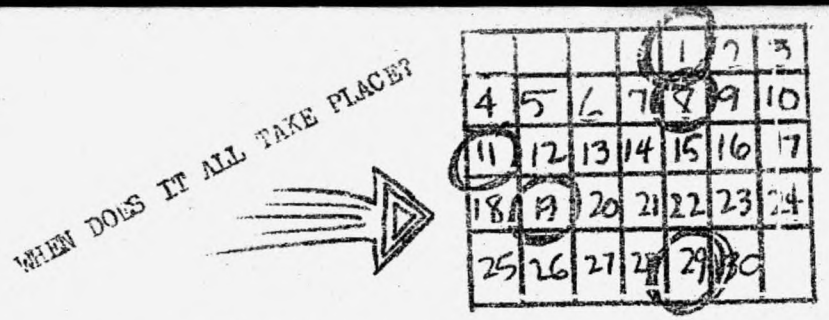
NOVEMBER 1956

42th Issue

SAN FRANCISCO AREA COUNCIL

mattachine newsletter



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER

1 - Public Discussion Meeting, Friend's Center, 1830 Sutter Street, 8 P.M.
Speaker: Ken Zwerin
Subject: Recent Tour of Europe

8 - KOFFEE KLATCH - moderated discussion group - 1560A Haight St., 7:30 P.M.

11 - Mattachine Brunch - 1560A Haight St. 11 until 2

19 - Fellowship Dinner - Mexican Dinner 2454 Geary, Apt. 4 - 7:30 P.M.

29 - Monthly Business Meeting - Members 693 Mission Street, Room 307, 8 P.M.

DECEMBER

6 - Public Discussion Meeting, Friend's Center, 1830 Sutter Street, 8 P.M.
Speaker: Miss Alice LaVere, Psychologist

15 - Annual Mattachine Christmas Dinner

27 - Monthly Business meeting - Members 693 Mission Street, Room 307, 8 P.M.

KOFFEE KLATCH

November 8 will mark the debut of a new series of informal, moderated discussion groups. Ray Frisby will act as moderator of the group and any topic will be considered for discussion. The program is aimed toward a type of neutral atmosphere which will be conducive to each person airing his thoughts along a particular line. Location will be 1560A Haight St., and the time will be 7:30 p.m.

DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS

One of the most interesting news items in this area is the publication "The Ladder" which has made its second appearance. It is the official publication of the Daughters of Bilitis, an organization designed for educational projects on the subject of sexual variancy, especially the female homophile. "The Ladder" is published monthly, and for those of you interested in this organization or its publication, write to the Daughters of Bilitis, P.O. Box 2183, San Francisco. To receive the "Ladder" for a year, enclose one dollar donation.

Book Section, REVIEWS AND COMMENTS

"Cards of Identity" by Nigel Dennis

Here, in only 370 pages, Mr. Dennis has created one of the most dashing novels read in recent years by this reviewer. It has the incisive wit of Aldous Huxley and the ingenuity of George Orwell.

To say that "Cards of Identity" is extremely worthwhile reading is doing it a great injustice, for its penetrating insights into the foibles and follies of contemporaneous attitudes towards the question "Who am I?" are not only outrageously amusing but bitterly sardonic, in a richly sophisticated manner.

Mr. Dennis has chosen man's attitude toward who he is as his theme and embroiders with deft strokes to paint a broad canvas de icting many of the arbitrary qualities that go into the making of man. He goes to the very core of his characters with casual ease, and points to the nonsensical centre of his creations.

The scenes in this story revolve about the Identity Club, a group of people devoted (sometimes) to re-creating identities. The members gather for their Annual Convention in a country house 'taken over' for the occasion and staffed with re-identified townspeople. Part of the program is utilized with readings of 'case histories' of recreated identities by the various members. One such 'case history' will be of particular interest to the homophile--for it concerns the indecisiveness of a young 'man' towards sexual expression, and to sexual identification. The hero of the story moves through homophile circles always with hilarious results.

The amazing thing about "Cards of Identity" is the author's ability to poke the most delightful fun at most of the contemporary institutions; psychology, Communism, homosexuality, but most of all, at the nonsense and vacuum existing in modern man.

LIBRARY NOTES

Recent con tibutions include an extremely important bulletin of 156 pages, "Obscenity and the Fine Arts," in a special issue of Law and Contemporary Problems issued by Duke University. In it important figures in the field of anthropology, theology, psychology, law and philosophy, attempt to present the reactions of their different areas to the subject.

One of the most striking facts about the contributions is that nearly every writer finds it necessary to redefine the meaning of the word "obscenity." Time and time again the comment is made that the dictionary's supposed definition in reality only consists of a series of adjectives - "libidinous, lasciviousness, indecency," etc., rather than being a definition of the thing in itself.

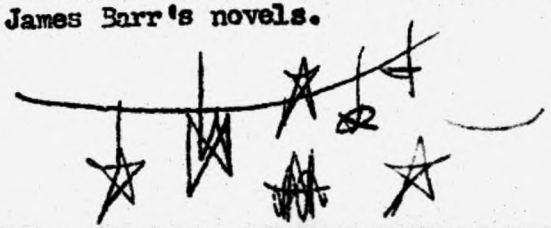
Though opinions and attitudes sometimes vary considerably among the writers, the ultimate conclusion arising from their data and views is that obscenity is a relative rather than an absolute thing. Each society, and economic and religious group within a society has its own special concept of it. Upon occasion the concepts of different groups within the same society differ almost completely as with, for example, the various Fundamentalist sects, the Unitarians, the various nudist organizations.

Each one of the writers, in nearly all cases without any conscious awareness of the fact, defined obscenity solely in terms of sexual taboos, and taboos having sexual connotations, as with adultery and defecation, which, obviously explains why homosexuality is practically never discussed or even mentioned in most of the major art forms of today, with the exception of literature.

The usual belief of the censors of obscenity is that it corrupts the morals of the group, particularly those of the young. Whether or not this is actually so has never been definitely ascertained. So far only pro and con opinions have been stated, upon occasion with a great deal of heat, by parties against or in favor of it. There has not hitherto been any sort of serious statistical scientific study or series of tests made to determine what the exact truth of the matter it. Until the date that this is done it would seem that no valid judgement can be passed as to whether or not censorship is a necessity as a means of preserving the social structure.

Actually, it appears that what the censors are essentially interested in maintaining is the surface appearance of morality rather than attempting to incite persons to live rightly, and letting them decide the exact nature of immorality and whether or not to perform it, for themselves. During the Victorian period it was notorious, as Burton pointed out, that there were certain areas of London and Paris where male prostitutes and houses of male prostitution were to be found. It was also well-known that there were certain types of attire and flowers that were commonly worn by well-to-do homophiles. However, it was practically never discussed in print, and never on the stage, etc., so that it was conveniently easy to subscribe to the belief that there were few, if any, socially disturbing elements existent in the social structure. This in turn produced the necessary feeling of internal security which for censors is only to be obtained by being sure that the world continues on as it has always been.

Naturally, therefore, the formal changing of present legal and social attitudes towards homophilia would seem a highly revolutionary and shockingly disrupting change to such persons. Ironically enough, the present legal code concerning heterosexual and homosexual behavior is scarcely ever strictly enforced, owing to the change in cultural attitudes and mores since the laws were drawn up. However, as long as they are not formally changed censors can sleep in peace, the surface appearance of morality is maintained, and the only branch of the fine arts that makes a serious attempt to deal with the homophile is fictional and non-fictional literature.
Even there, there are no limitations, as witness the banning of James Barr's novels.



SEPTEMBER PUBLIC
DISCUSSION MEETING

This meeting, Thursday September 6, was unfortunately marked by the absence of the speaker who was expected back from Europe in time for the event, but who was unable to make it. However, Sam Morford, Chairman of the Mattachine Society in New York, who had flown out for this meeting, introduced with his comments, a taped recording of a television program which was presented a few weeks ago in New York. The program is "The Open Mind" and deals with such areas of interest as alcoholism, juvenile delinquency homosexuality, and other particularly broad fields of social problems. The recording which Mr. Morford brought with him was the first on the subject of homosexuality. He stated that this was a purely experimental project; that the earlier programs on different topics weren't too well received because they were broadcast at an inconvenient time for TV-watchers. However, the response to this one program on homosexuality brought such an enthusiastic notice that two more are scheduled for this series on the same subject. The program follows the usual line of a panel of three professional people and a moderator, who in this case is also the producer, Richard Hefner. The panel members were Dr. Robert W. Laidlaw, Chief Psychiatrist at Roosevelt Hospital, Miss Florence Kelly, Attorney with the Legal Aid Society and Dr. Arther Swift, Dean of the School of Politics at the New School of Social Research. One of the most interesting things about the content of this discussion was the remarkable similarity to previous discussions held here in San Francisco from time to time. Many of the same questions, many of the same solutions

were asked and talked about. It would appear as though a form of universality is being approached in current thought and feeling about homosexuality in these areas. And it presents the difficult problem of evaluating how much of this thought is drifting over into and across the country; the question of whether the country as a whole is really changing its attitude and becoming interested in looking at the situation. Undoubtedly, there remain those persons who still are uncertain how to react to homosexuality, and in their uncertainty become resentful and angry. And with this type little can be done except to hope that they will slowly rethink their way to a more honest appraisal of the subject.

"The Open Mind" television program was without doubt one of the most heartening examples of current action on general discussion of the homophile. It was excellently prepared and presented. About all that can be added is a wish that all peoples could approach the subject of homosexuality with the same neutrality and desire to seek out the areas of agreement as to what is true and what is false about it.

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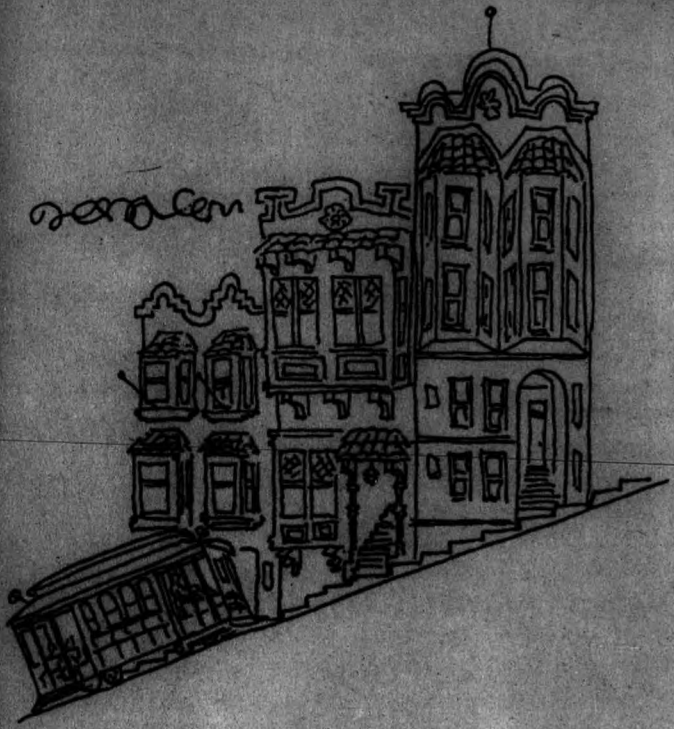
CHRISTMAS PLANS

Plans are now underway for the annual Mattachine Christmas Dinner Party. This year's event will be held on December 15 and the location will be announced later by special letter. As is the custom, the evening consists of an interchange of gag-type gifts (inexpensive - usually about one dollar), dinner, wassail, and other surprises, and of course, the Christmas tree.