

# The New York Times Book Review

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## The Witness And I

By O. Edmund Clubb.  
Illustrated. 314 pp. New York:  
Columbia University Press.  
\$9.95.

By JAMES THOMSON

In July, 1932, a young Foreign Service officer, on home leave from China, stopped by the New York office of a small left-wing journal to present a letter of introduction to the editor. The editor had been replaced, but his successor detained the visitor for some minutes to grill him about the Communist movement in China.

It was thus that Oliver Edmund Clubb fleetingly crossed paths with Whittaker Chambers, an encounter that was to lead 20 years later to the ruin of Clubb's distinguished diplomatic career.

How the one thing led to the other is not at all simple, but the story is chillingly important.

Edmund Clubb was a Minnesota boy who joined the Foreign Service in 1928, was sent to China for language training, and during the thirties reported extensively from Hankow and Peking, also briefly from Nanking and Shanghai. Pearl Harbor caught him on temporary duty in Hanoi and brought him eight months of very rough treatment by his Japanese captors.

Repatriated in 1942 as far as Portuguese Africa, he volunteered to return at once to unoccupied China and a mix of sensitive assignments: from Chungking to Lanchow and remote Sinkiang, where he opened up a new consulate at Tihwa; then Vladivostok (he spoke Russian too); then Mukden and Changchun in Manchuria; and finally postwar Peking as Consul General.

James Thomson, an East Asia specialist who served in the State Department and White House from 1961-66, curator of the Nieman Foundation or Journalism at Harvard.



O. Edmund Clubb, U.S. Consul General in Manchuria; testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee; and at home.

al during the collapse of the Nationalists.

In April, 1950, after months of mounting tension with the new Communist regime, Clubb closed down the Peking office, the last United States diplomatic post on the China mainland. He had remained absolutely firm—some even thought too rigid—in the face of arbitrary Communist demands. Back in Washington he was rewarded with the directorship of State's Office of Chinese Affairs.

By late 1950, then, Edmund Clubb had emerged at the top of the Department's prestigious China service. His voluminous, scholarly and prescient reporting over two decades of war and revolution had won him highest es-

teem; he was without doubt the State Department's leading expert on Chinese communism, a specialty of his since 1932 when no one else was interested. A Sino-Soviet expert as well, he had deftly handled difficult posts along that frontier. He had suffered stoically at the hands of both Japanese militarists and Chinese Communists, defending his nation's interests with dignity throughout.

But within a year Clubb was decreed "a security risk" by the State Department's Loyalty-Security Board. He was not actually fired, for the Board's action was reversed on appeal to Secretary Acheson. But by then, after months of humiliating and widely publicized interrogation, Clubb knew his

## Kafka in the State Department

career was finished. Reassigned to State's Historical Office—"put on the shelf, damaged goods"—he chose to resign on Lincoln's Birthday, 1952, to become instead a respected China historian.

Clubb's undoing began in January, 1951. Out of the blue came an "interrogatory" from the Loyalty-Security Board containing 20 items in the form of questions, allegations by anonymous informants and demands for extensive commentary. They ranged in specificity from "Are you, or have you ever been, a member of . . . the Communist Party?" to allegations that he had "viewed some aspects of Communism favorably, 1932-34" and had "distinct 'pink' tendencies at Peking, China, 1934-35," and queries about his associations with five suspect individuals. The Board also asked him to set forth "in detail an explanation of your political philosophy and orientation from 1928 to date. . . ."

At the end of the list came one very specific charge: "that in 1932 you delivered a sealed envelope to the office of the editor of the 'New Masses' magazine in New York City for transmittal to one Grace Hutchins, a reported Communist. . . ."

Clubb's reaction was total incredulity but also total confidence in the outcome. The charges were absurd, a sign of the times, he thought, yet entirely answerable. But there remained that mysterious 1932 visit, obliterated from his memory. And its importance soon loomed larger when he was subpoenaed to discuss it before the House Un-American Activities Committee; someone had leaked the Board's confidential proceedings to the Hill.

The rest of the story resonates with Kafka. And it has to be read to be comprehended. All charges, however vague, were duly answered with Clubb's customary precision, care and exhaustiveness. And the 1932 mystery was also finally resolved with the arrival from Peking of his diary for that year, left with his other files in the custody of the British chargé when the Chinese threw him out. The diary extract showed that he had indeed stopped by New Masses ("a horrible rag") in the course of New York calls, with a note of introduction to its edi-

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tor (not, incidentally, Grace Hutchins) from the noted leftist China journalist Agnes Smedley and had encountered instead "one Whittaker-Chambers (sic), a shifty-eyed unkept creature who nevertheless showed considerable force and direction in asking me about the Red movement in China."

But Clubb's responses were not enough for his inquisitors, now heavily pressured from Capitol Hill. In June the three-man Board (two ex-Army officers and one ambassador) formally charged him with being both disloyal and a security risk; the particulars were those of the earlier interrogatory, virtually unchanged. Clubb was summarily suspended by the State Department with that "confidential" suspension of course reported to the press. His name thus became notorious on the Hill. There followed endless hearings, with the Board sitting as accuser, prosecutor, judge and jury. Its informants remained anonymous, inaccessible for cross-examination; and the accused was persuaded, naively, not to engage legal counsel.

The inquisitors raced off, no longer interested in that New Masses incident (the diary extract had helped, and Chambers himself had badly blurred his original charge in new Congressional testimony), but intrigued instead by the diary itself; they now wanted full access not only to all the 1932 entries, but also to the wartime and postwar volumes in Clubb's possession. Never, incidentally, did they show the slightest interest in his 20 years of actual reports from China, all of them made available to the Board.

Clubb finally said no about the diaries, standing firm on principle, relevance, privacy and his Fourth Amendment rights. But the Board got them anyway (thanks to the collusion of a small-bore ex-colonel who was Deputy Under Secretary of State—the military were now everywhere in the making of foreign policy), and then searched them in vain for incriminating or dangerous thoughts. It was now discovered that two pages in the 1932 entries were misdated! Perhaps the diary had been altered prior to its unintended submission? Perhaps the whole thing had been cleverly sanitized by the accused?

The dreary upshot was the Board's solemn judgment, excruciating months later, that Clubb was not disloyal but was a security risk and should therefore be fired. But now, at the eleventh hour, Clubb finally hired a first-rate lawyer, Paul Porter; Secretary Acheson named a courageous and seasoned diplomat, Nathaniel P. Davis, to hear the appeal; and in January, 1952, Davis exonerated Clubb, with Acheson concurring. Nonetheless, the career was clearly finished, the man badly wounded—and out he chose to go.

Now two decades later, we have Edmund Clubb's agonizing story, prompt-

ed no doubt by saner times, set out in meticulous, painful detail, in a flat, dry prose style that is curiously compelling.

What can one learn from all this, except that we did such things to our most gifted public servants in a dark time of our national life, and will surely do so again?

Well, first, not to trust too much our own institutions. Clubb believed in his own rectitude, but even more in the fairness of the Board and the decency of his employers. (He wasn't alone on the first count; as one United States Army colonel in China wrote him, when asked to comment on the charges, "I always thought you were secure to the point of being boring.") What broke his heart in the end was his own Government's disloyalty to him.

Beyond this there was a serene obstinacy to Clubb, a quality that had infuriated the Japanese in Hanoi, the Chinese in Peking and did not sit well with the Washington inquisitors. He kept standing on principle, quoting Jefferson and the like, while his career was at stake.

Anyone intending to enter Government service in foreign affairs should first read this book. It has two alternative lessons. One—play it safe. Choose a non-controversial, non-turbulent specialty (certainly not China). Keep associations at home and abroad clean and conventional (mainly your fellow bureaucrats, plus friendly allied types on the cocktail and golf circuit). Never state or imply views that are, or may become, controversial.

Or, do it the way Edmund Clubb did, but with a difference. Seek out the important and therefore the controversial, in places, subjects, and people. Report freely and accurately what you see, and consort very widely in order to see it. You should form your own views and frankly state them. But for this route there are three caveats. First, begin with a substantial private income, or an alternative profession, or both. Second, when the inquisitors come around, hire a good lawyer at once. And third, keep not one but two diaries (or perhaps none)—one nicely cleansed for future sleuths, and another sealed away in some code known only to you.

Clubb's is not the first nor, one hopes, the last account of that shameful era when we blithely banished a generation of our wisest Asian experts. But while we learn from such men in this interval of relative openness, we should keep in mind the words of another of McCarthyism's targets, John K. Fairbank, who warned young Foreign Service trainees of the post-Ping-Pong era, "Remember, the pendulum could swing the other way. It always does."

So. Whose path did you cross for a few minutes last week—or 19 years ago? And did you keep a record? ■

By a sympathizer, not a sycophant

## Before The Fall

An Inside View of the  
Pre-Watergate White House.

By William Safire.

Illustrated. 704 pp. New York:  
Doubleday & Co. \$12.50.

By DANIEL SCHORR

"I'm writing this book sympathetic, but not sycophantic," said William Safire early in 1973. "No sweat, adds credibility," replied H. R. Haldeman, granting permission for the use of President Nixon's personal notes. "The Boss says to cooperate, and he doesn't expect a puff piece."

One senses in that exchange the easy rapport of men who had worked together at opinion molding since 1959, when Vice President Nixon found himself debating Khrushchev in a Safire-promoted model kitchen in Moscow, to the mutual satisfaction of the two Americans.

In the ensuing 13 years Safire served as Nixon's speech writer—the middle one, between Patrick Buchanan on the right and Ray Price on the left—and was also encouraged to chronicle selected internal discussions bearing on great decisions.

So, leaving the White House, with exquisite, if accidental timing on March 21, 1973, while John Dean was warning Nixon of "a cancer on the Presidency," Safire was in a position to produce an important book that could display the finest art of the apologist, which is creating a context. Watergate would be reduced to a blotch on a larger canvas featuring Nixon as world peace-maker and domestic reformer, and more human than people knew.

Unfortunately, as the wordsmith worked, the ground started shaking under him. The writer discovered that his telephone had been tapped. He learned that he had been manipulated into helping construct a lie about the F.B.I. investigation of a newsmen. The dark side of his subject began to appear much darker than Safire had imagined. And, most devastatingly, the White House tapes exposed a Lower Nixon difficult to reconcile with the Upper Nixon that Safire was portraying. Before the manuscript was completed, the President who had scrawled about Senator Kennedy after Chappaquiddick, "Defeat doesn't finish

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a man—quit does," had quit himself rather than face defeat.

So, the book, still subtitled "An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House," began to incorporate a second book seeking to explain the Watergate White House and the roots of disaster. Inevitably, dealing with later events without the benefit of full documentation, this portion became less coherent, less confident and, to some extent, in conflict with the original conception.

In Safire's pre-Watergate White House you will find an executive of scope and vision, supremely on top of his policies, from Cambodia to school busing. You will see the speech drafts, with the President's perceptive comments, and the notes he wrote before his news conference—invaluable source material. You will also receive some new perceptions of Nixon as a human being, coming better to understand the loner whose "most revealing night" may have been May 9, 1970, when he "broke out of the cocoon," groping for contact with antiwar demonstrators at the Lincoln Memorial.

You will find the subalterns cut down in size—Haldeman manning the "Berlin Wall" around the President only because Nixon, wanting privacy and fearful of his own impulses, wanted it that way. You will see Haldeman constantly in fear of "end runs" by other intimates, like that zealot, Charles Colson. You will trace the shifting fortunes of those with whom, in Safire's metaphor, Nixon successively fell "in love"—John Mitchell, Daniel Moynihan and John Connally.

"Only three men in America understand the use of power," Nixon is quoted as saying. "I do. John Connally does. And, I guess, Nelson [Rockefeller] does."

No one is more savagely cut down than Henry Kissinger, presented by Safire as an intriguer for power, but ultimately "a marionette" in Nixon's hands, used to display rigidity until the moment the President himself is ready for an imaginative new stroke.

But Safire concedes that his revised view of Kissinger may be influenced by his resentment of a onetime friend whom he blames for sponsoring the tap on his telephone. Inevitably, recent revelations intrude on the contemplation of halcyon times. And Safire's smooth mastery of words undergoes an awful test as he seeks to maintain the delicate balance of a Nixon "great and mean, bold and vacillating," groping to understand the Nixon he had never known.

In one section, Nixon's greatest weakness and "the cause of his downfall" is presented as his hatred of the press, a "close to irrational animus" that led to an obsession with leaf plugging, which led to wiretapping, which led to Watergate.