

# Acheson Says Ego Is Great Corrupter

By Leroy F. <sup>4/11/44</sup>Aarons  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Public figures who are concerned with their own image are playing a dangerous game, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson warned last night.

Addressing the annual dinner of the Society of American Historians, Acheson said, "The great corrupter of public men is the ego . . . Wealth, sensuality, power cannot hold a candle to it. Looking in the mirror distracts one's attention from the problem."

Acheson mentioned no names but said that public men would do well to forget the historians "while they get on with their job."

"The solution of every problem, every achievement is, as Justice Holmes said, a bird on the wing; and he added, one must have one's whole will focused and one's eye on that bird. One cannot be thinking of one's self, of one's image, or one's place in history—only of that bird," Acheson said.

Acheson addressed a distinguished gathering of 250 that included 16 Pulitzer Prize winners, Nobel laureates, recipients of National Book Awards and leading public of-

ficials. He spoke on the society's traditional topic, "History as Literature."

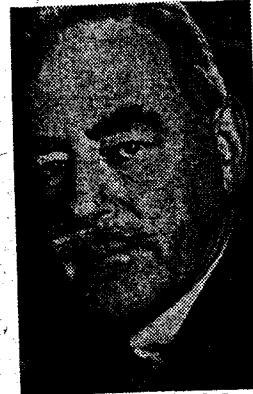
The Society gave an unprecedented Special Award to Historian Allan Nevins for his lifetime contribution to history education and writing. The Nevins Prize for a doctoral dissertation went to Robert L. Beisner, an assistant professor at American University, for his paper, "The Anti-Imperialist Impulse."

Daniel J. Boorstin, a professor at the University of Chicago, received the Society's Parkman Prize for his book, "The Americans: The National Experience."

Acheson cautioned that books written to support a preconceived idea or to glorify an individual are "dangerous history." He added that "Some recent writers might have done well to recall a wise observation: 'Praise is the shipwreck of historians; his preferences betray him more than his aversions.'"

History is the product of historians, he said, and "the product of historians is writing and writing is the beginning of literature."

To be literature, history



DEAN ACHESON

... defines "great corrupter"

must be more than a compilation of research. It must be sternly disciplined and controlled by fact, yet garnished with a little imagination. The writer "must carry the conviction that he has a tale to tell, that he believes it, is full of it, and wants to get on with it."

He cited Barbara Tuchman's "The Proud Tower" as a work that employs imagination and style with telling effect. Noting that critics have been hard put to discern a theme to the book, he said it nevertheless "conveys to me a period through which I lived. Reading the book I apprehend a people of the time and place as people possessed . . . by impulses which drive them to destruction."