Time Is Defined, Dissected, Denuded

By ED SUMMERS

"What," wonders the old riddle, "is it that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?"

The answer is made possible by the existence of Time, encompassing both animate and inanimate, in its many-folded cloak. Much lofty sentiment has been expressed regarding Time, most of it over our heads. We are better able to understand Time by studying its effects on those and that which it touches.

Beginning and End

Time Is the beginning and end of a football game. Time is an exam room filled with people pitting their wits against the unseeing plunge of a hand on a clock. Time is a young man who becomes an old man with his hairline beaten back by the batterings of the months and years. Time is a crusty bronze statue with pigeon droppings on it, a statue of a smiling man with a book in his hand, extended to a perpetually absent scholar who is also Time . . .

An Archeologist

Time is an archeologist with green skin and six legs from the planet Mars who journeys across space and goes back again to report that the dominant inhabitants of Earth are the ants and bees, . . . Time is space itself, whose only measure is Time.

One Man's Life

Time is the period of one man's life. Occasionally Time may be two or even three men's lives, if they follow each other and overlap a little. But the thread of Time is very fragile, and it tends to snap if the mind tries to make it stretch too far.

It Waits

Time is not the passage of measured minutes or hours. Time is not a healer, not an enemy, not an event or an eras, not a friend. Time waits and wants to serve; time is always there and only one somewhere else. Time is available, like a garden toor or a lawnmower.

Occasionally one thinks he can detach himself from Time and steal his world away from Time and live. The word for this is "forever."

Sometimes, Someone

And sometimes there appears one who seems to have accomplished this—one very old and important whose vitality and alertness deny the burden Time is presumed to have laid upon his shoulders. He is exalted and glorified and never is it whispered that Time must desert even him and he must stumble out of the spotlight and into the shadows.

The effects of Time's presence are the environment we are privileged to call our own. An effect of Time is an unbathed, bewhispered, boot ed, and drunk man with a revolver on a dusty street that smells of horses in a town of south Texas, standing a hundred years ago before a second party whom he has brahly promised to shoot and kill—and the same man one hundred years later standing before a movie camera in California.

Another effect of Time is a machine gun in the hand of an aborigine who yesterday had a very good bow and arrow; or a Prime Minister in a land familiar only with naked chiefs who carry the heads of their enemies in gunny sacks.

Time Remembered

Time becomes an association of events experienced, recalled, or heard of. Time is summoned by the incantation, "Why I remember back when . . . " Time for none is very far away and for others so close they reach out and wrap themselves in it until they are one with it . . . such a one is General Walter Williams, CSA, 117 years of age.

To see this man is to see Time; to remember him is to summon Time. Yet his is only one of the names to which Time may choose to answer. It is not beyond possibility that someday someone will want Time, and the name spoken to call Time will be your own.