

## THE CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION: POLITICAL OR NONPARTISAN?

the regime's policy in locking up so many men and women without a trial or hearing, most of them innocent of any real offense.

The reader will not be surprised to learn that Mr. Varney's quotation from Mr. Baldwin that "communism is the goal" has been torn from its context. The statement was made in partial answer to a questionnaire sent out by Mr. Baldwin's class at Harvard, in which the recipient was asked to set forth his personal social philosophy. Mr. Baldwin used the term *communism* not, as the casual reader would infer from Mr. Varney's quotation, in a political or party sense but simply in its generic meaning of a "classless society."

The position of the A.C.L.U. and its officers has been from the beginning perfectly clear and consistent. The A.C.L.U. is unalterably opposed to any system of government which

would suppress civil rights in America, whether that system be called communistic, fascistic, or any other name. At the same time, the A.C.L.U. (in common with the United States Supreme Court) holds that the civil right of free speech includes the right to advocate any system of government whatsoever, the worst as well as the best. We cannot defend free speech by suppressing the kind of free speech we do not like. When it comes to action, that is quite another matter; a democratic government will of course defend itself against any attempt to overthrow it by force and violence. But, as long as it is a real democracy, it must permit free discussion. That is the traditional American position. It has always been the position of the A.C.L.U. and it will remain its position in spite of misconceptions and deliberate misinterpretations.

### III—Rebuttal by Mr. Varney

**I**T IS SUPERFICIAL to pretend that we can simplify the question of the Civil Liberties Union by describing it as a disinterested defender of our first ten constitutional amendments. For the whole controversy between the Union and its opponents hinges on not acceptance but interpretation of the bill of rights. The lawyers of the American Liberty League, whom I mentioned, based their defense of an entirely different social philosophy from that of Mr. Baldwin and Dr. Ward on the safeguards of this same bill of rights.

It is inaccurate to say that the A.C.L.U. position is the "traditional American position." The only official body which has the right to define a traditional American position is our Supreme Court, and practically all the work of the A.C.L.U. in the higher courts has been directed toward the scrapping of the "traditional" decisions of the Court in civil-liberties cases and their replacement by new "liberal" reinterpretations which will widen the permitted activities of radical propagandists. In their zeal to hasten such reinterpretations of the bill of rights many of the A.C.L.U. leaders even supported the Supreme Court packing plan of unholy memory.

My opponent has devoted some space to a

discussion of my own "complex attitude." I am a believer in the American free-enterprise system and in its preservability in this country. I have never advocated fascism for America. At the same time, I am realistic enough to believe that western Europe, faced by the overhanging glacier of Russian communism and the terrific Russian birth rate, has unique problems which must be worked out in other ways than ours. To the extent to which muddled "liberals" play Moscow's game by supporting a "united front" with the communists, I shall condemn them as I did in the quoted *Awakener* article. I reject the idea that there is any one universal pattern of government.

The Italian Historical Society was not "engaged in fascist propaganda." Its interests were primarily cultural and social. The Italian decoration was given me not by Mussolini but by the King of Italy and was conferred for intellectual and not political work.

All of which is beside the point that the Civil Liberties Union, by coddling the growth of subversive propaganda movements, is hastening the day when people — not Varney — may turn to desperate countermovements which will confront us with the same tragic dilemma which now darkens Europe.

# Life and Literature

## *The Individual vs. Society\**

by MARY M. COLUM



**I**F, AS HAS been said, the essential element in tragedy is waste, the waste of human intelligence and human emotion, then *The Caissons Roll*, by Hanson W. Baldwin, is an exposition of tremendous tragedy — an exposition, one says, because the tragedy has not yet been enacted and there is hope that it may yet be averted. Some time in the 1940's, the expert who is the author of this book concludes, Europe is likely to find herself at war, and what this means to civilization is something one can hardly bear to think about. The bulk of us in this Western Hemisphere belong to that European stock and to that European civilization, and everything on earth will be done to make us take part in that disaster.

What European civilization has meant to the world need not be enlarged on. I am among those who have never believed very heartily in Oriental civilization and Oriental wisdom, sometimes lauded as superior to the Western. A great deal of it is too remote from life, is but a contempt for life, whereas European civilization, European art and literature, when the worst against them has been said, have always stood for praise of life, for the profound living of life, and for human dignity.

\* EDITOR'S NOTE: — *The recent books discussed by Mrs. Colum in this article are: The Caissons Roll, by Hanson W. Baldwin (Knopf, \$2.50); A Vision, by William Butler Yeats (Macmillan, \$3.50); Starting Point, by Cecil Day Lewis (Harper, \$2.50); The Pasquier Chronicles, by Georges Dubamel, translated by Béatrice de Holtoir (Holt, \$3.50); Harvest Comedy, by Frank Swinnerton (Doubleday, Doran, \$2.50); I Live Under a Black Sun, by Edith Sitwell (Doubleday, Doran, \$2.50).*

This Western Hemisphere has inherited that European tradition, and some of the inheritors have always believed it their business to help to defend, in Europe, European civilization. But how, one asks, can it be defended when it is Europe herself that is bent on its destruction?

*The Caissons Roll* is a report by an expert on the military situation in present-day Europe, a report all the more frightening because it is so little emotionalized. Hanson W. Baldwin tells us of the preparations that are being made in practically every country in Europe for an offensive or a defensive war. What emphasizes the tragedy, what gives the sense of waste, is the magnificence of that effort — courage, imagination, invention, self-sacrifice, intellect, all the great human attributes, go into this vast effort that is being made in the name of patriotism or racial destiny. Contemplating that effort, not only nations but individuals are exalted: what they are contemplating is, to a great extent, the triumph of human heroism but a human heroism that is turned toward the destruction of men and their possessions, because war seems to be the inescapable end of it all.

When Hanson W. Baldwin describes some of the visible and tangible effects of this tremendous effort his readers cannot help being impressed as by a work of Titans — the fleets of airplanes; the battleships; the submarines; the fearsome engines of destruction, gases and cannons and projectiles; the Maginot line, with