

Strictly Personal

by RUTH MCKENNEY

WHITHER?

COSMIC questions can shatter the nerves of the earnest parent, especially if the domestic situation gets cluttered up with a slight touch of mythology. In our household, for example, Santa Claus is even now, on this bright May morning, working his kindly old whiskers off, painting the stripes on candy canes, while Donner and Blitzen, clocked by an elf, take their morning speed tests on the North Pole race track.

The moon, on the other hand, is definitely not made of green cheese. The moon is a dead stone world. Once it was part of the earth, for in those days, my darling, the earth was a flaming ball of—guess what?—FIRE! And the earth whirled around SO fast that a hunk of it whizzed off into space, and that was the moon. Well, pretty soon. . . .

From Patrick, brutally well informed for his five years: "Daddy says the moon is made of green cheese, absolutely."

From me: "Well!" Pause, while Patrick waits, a gleam in both blue eyes. "Well! Daddy was only joking. So PRETTY soon, the moon got cold and frozen, and the moon is so small, gravity doesn't work up there, not very much anyway, and . . . Paddy, you remember gravity from yesterday?"

"No. Daddy says Jiminy Cricket lives on the moon and the evening star comes down every night and kisses him when he goes to bed."

From me (touched): "Well, but darling, you know that's pretend, and Daddy only meant. . . ."

Patrick: "Yeah. I told him the evening star couldn't kiss Jiminy Cricket good night because the evening star was six times as big as the sun and made out of burning gasoline."

Me: "Well not exactly gasoline, darling."

Patrick, stubbornly: "You said, burning gas. That's what you said, Mommy!"

Me: "Well. Anyway, what with no gravity up there on the moon to amount to a row of beans, first thing you knew, there wasn't any air because the air just floated away. Just think, aren't you glad we have gravity on earth so we can have air to breathe?"

Patrick: "Uh-huh. We could all be fishes."

Me, crossly: "Not on your life. Fishes have fins and what do we have?"

Patrick (bored): "Lungs. But you said we used to have fins before we got lungs, you said so."

Me: "Paddy, you have it all mixed up. We can't have fins all over again."

Patrick: "Look, I'm a fish!" (Energetic

motions with legs and arms and head.)

On the other hand, the leprechaun situation is extremely obscure. Leprechauns are in bad odor with both Patrick and his father. In vain, I have argued that the whole world knows of the little people who go around turning milk sour and making bread stale. Paddy and his Daddy maintain that leprechauns are merely Irish superstition.

From Patrick, in a patronizing manner: "Mommy, don't you *know* about the little microbes that grow and grow in the milk and get it all nasty and sour and then they get in our noses and make ear aches and sometimes they give us chicken pox too!"

Me: "Superstition, eh? I suppose that's accurate? It says in the book, always be accurate. Microbes make chicken pox! Ha! I stick to leprechauns!"

Sour milk is a cinch, though, compared to electricity. For some months Paddy seemed both pleased and satisfied with my energetic explanation of a dynamo. Day after day I whirled one arm in one direction, the other arm in the opposite direction, while I shouted: "Magnetic, like your little magnet that picks up nails!"

From Patrick: "Now do the noise!"

From me: a loud, low, sinister growling; the dynamo in action. Followed by a zzzzzzzing: the spark, leaping from wheel to wheel.

Me, triumphantly: "And that's how electricity is made."

And then last week Paddy said: "What's the spark made of?"

Me: "Electricity, sweetheart."

Patrick: "What's electricity?"

Me, furious: "I've been whirling and whirling for months! I must say. . . ."

Patrick, coldly: "I can do a dynamo." He does, up to the spark. And then: "What's the spark made of?"

Me, weakly: "Electricity, but that's enough for today. And your father will be coming home soon to read you a *nice* story, and . . ."

Patrick: "What's electricity *made of*?"

Me: "Lots and *lots* of little sparks, honey, millions of them, *millions, trillions!*"

Patrick (deflected, but happy): "Trillions and *trillions*?"

However, you can't use this trillions gag forever. The day will come, probably tomorrow, when Patrick and I will get right down to cases. I've been boning up all winter on Willy Ley's wonderful godsend to distracted parents, his little book called *Days of Creation*, and I have the solar system pretty well under control, not to mention kangaroos,

which came in handy the last time Paddy went to the zoo with his father.

Now if somebody could only recommend a book on elementary physics, something simple that I could work my way through, I might be able to keep one jump ahead of my voracious offspring. But I fear the worst. While Daddy keeps busy bluffing along on questions about whooping cough inoculation to dear Patrick, I stand by, trembling, waiting for the inevitable: "But what is electricity *made of*?" Not that whooping cough inoculations are simple. "Well," Patrick's father says, bravely resisting the impulse to plead a headache, "you see, my big son, you take a cow, or maybe a rabbit. . . . Ruth, is it a cow, for whooping cough? . . . A horse? That's diphtheria. Anyway, you take a cow. And then you take a lot of nasty old whooping cough germs—and then you . . . let's see. . . . Ruth, does the damned cow *get* whooping cough? That doesn't seem likely, a cow with whooping cough! Well, anyway, the fine, brave cow struggles along and makes a lot of good soldiers to fight the whooping cough, and . . ."

From me: "I think that's vaccination. Inoculation is different."

Patrick's father: "Oh. Oh yes." Unpleasant laughter. "Daddy was all mixed up!"

Patrick: "Where do the good soldiers come from?"

Patrick's father: "Well. The doctor shoots this fine nice medicine into your arm and then all the red corpuscles start fighting the bad soldiers in the medicine, and . . ."

Patrick: "Where do the good soldiers come from?"

Patrick's father: "Let's go down to the corner and get an ice cream cone, what you say, Paddy old kid? Nice *chocolate* ice cream cone?"

Patrick: "Okay. But where do the . . ."

Patrick's father: "Yes *sir*, a whole big *chocolate* ice cream cone. . . ."

I have my mind made up. I know the child-raising books deplore it, but comes the question on electricity, and I shall take my stand with the elves. "Electricity, dear?" I shall say tenderly. "Why, the little elves sit up nights capturing star-beams and then they just put all those old star-beams right in the dynamo and that's how we have telephones, darling!"

And Patrick will probably answer: "Elves are super-stich-un."



Sylvia Wald



THE WEEK IN REVIEW

Where the War Stands

WITHIN the last two weeks we have had three major speeches on the war. The first came from Hitler on April 26, and everyone agreed that it betrayed signs of the real internal crisis which Germany faces, after the winter of near-disaster. The Nazis are preparing heavy blows against the United Nations, but they are alarmed about their home front, and they have misgivings about the chance of a full military decision for the Axis this year.

The second speech came from the President on April 28, and dealt primarily with domestic economic issues. But it was noteworthy for its deep-felt determination to see the war through, which is characteristic of our people. It predicted action to prevent the French empire from being used by the Axis; (the occupation of Madagascar, as we went to press, is a very encouraging first step); it gave words of encouragement to China; it paid tribute to Russia, whose "great armies" have done more "than all the other United Nations put together." And while the emphasis was all on a difficult struggle and a long one, the President spoke of "careful attention" being paid to the Mediterranean area, and said that "soon American Flying Fortresses will be fighting for the liberation of the darkened continent of Europe itself."

Finally, there was Premier Stalin's order of the day on May 1. It was addressed primarily to the Soviet people; it reiterated the educational ideas which Soviet leaders have been stressing to the conquered nations and the German people in the last five months; it was not, properly speaking, a review of the war as a whole. But what did stand out in Stalin's address was the emphasis on crushing the Nazis this year. Stalin did not go into the nature of the assistance the Soviet Union expects from its allies in order to achieve victory in 1942, beyond expressing thanks for the material aid thus far received.

Adding up these speeches and the circumstances under which they were delivered, it seems clear that the war has entered a new and grimmer phase. The Axis is feeling the effects of its great setbacks on the Soviet front. It is feeling the pressure of the conquered peoples, which must be repressed by ever grimmer reprisals such as the shooting of fifty-five hostages in Lille, France, last week. The potential of the anti-Axis coalition, which is now being transformed from economic to

military strength, confronts the Axis with defeat, especially if a second front were opened before next fall. On the other hand, for the Axis to end the war this year requires such an exhaustive mobilization of forces and such a supreme gamble that the Axis chieftains hesitate before it. The air warfare over Germany is having a cumulative effect, and while there is no certainty of a second front, the mere possibility, combined with a possible Soviet offensive, poses grave problems for Hitler and Mussolini.

The Axis tries to keep its head above water, but the tides are eddying higher and higher. The United Nations have gotten their heads above water. They are gaining a fresh wind. They sight land. Whether they will make the most of their opportunities this year and transform dangers into advantages is still the big question mark.

IT IS CHARACTERISTIC of the Nazis that simultaneously with big military projects they are working hard on diplomatic levels of the war. Diplomacy has come to the fore in a big way. First of all, there are inner Axis issues. Laval's accession to power necessitates new discussions with Mussolini; just what part he will play in the Mediterranean must be dovetailed with the role of France. Hitler's problems in the Balkans still remain unsolved, and there too Mussolini is a factor. The subjugation of Yugoslavia, the further mobilization of Hungary, the active involvement of Bulgaria must have been issues for the discussion at Salzburg.

Another and more important level of diplomacy involves the desperate Axis effort to make a "weapon of its weakness," as Dorothy Thompson phrased it in one of her columns



last week. In the tight spot that Hitler is in, it is only to be expected that he should try, even against odds, to break up the United Nations by offering peace.

Russia will not listen to it: her armies have shown that, and Stalin's address confirms it. Newspapers say that something like seven offers to Britain have been made in recent weeks via Stockholm and Ankara; the Free French news agency reports a proposal that the Axis remain in control of Europe, that the British empire be guaranteed, and that everybody pitch in against Russia; Walter Lippmann speculates that Hitler is offering to turn against Japan if London and Washington will "listen to reason."

But London and Washington will not, and cannot. This war has struck deep roots in the masses; the President's speech reaffirmed the American will to fight through to victory. Except for those "bogus patriots" who "echo the sentiments of the propagandists in Berlin and Tokyo," and those "noisy traitors" who "have in their hearts and minds yielded to Hitlerism and would have this republic do likewise," Archibald MacLeish's warning of a coming Nazi peace offensive has already been heeded by the overwhelming majority of Americans.

But the danger of the fifth and sixth columns remains and will grow as the Nazis use their weakness as a desperate political weapon. Just as the strength of fascism inspired some people to try to come to terms with it a year ago, so the spectacle of its increasing weakness, fear of Nazi defeat, will also inspire circles in this country and abroad to seek a solution of this war short of victory. All the more reason why every appeasement group in the press, in the administrative agencies of the war, in the labor movement has got to be watched and eradicated.

IN THE FAR EAST the Japanese have scored another heavy success by practically finishing things in Burma. Lack of Allied air power, inability to win over a large part of the Burmese population, failure to achieve full coordination of Chinese and British forces, even though the American Lt.-Gen. Joseph Stilwell tried hard—these are the reasons for this defeat. The Japanese now have the perspective of opening an attack on China from the south or on India from the east. Simultaneously they gain a position from which to survey other possibilities: a drive to cut Australia's communications from the United States, and second, an attack on Siberia. And the possibilities of a Japanese peace offensive, directed at China and India ought not be underestimated.

That brings us to India. From the meager information in the American press, India's crisis has grown in the past month, and now