

ternationalist tendencies. How could such a contradiction be sustained? Professor Gilbert's words are instructive: "... they could be regarded as compatible with each other because there was a common factor between them, though only of a negative character: isolationism existed in a sphere of timelessness; internationalism existed in the future. Neither existed in the world of the present." To see isolationism and internationalism as compatible, to recognize that both derived largely from the same Utopian Enlightenment source, to understand that the nation might prefer one at one moment, the other at the next, and that neither was adequate for coping with real international situations, since both ignored the fact of power, is to say more than the author does, but only what his argument implies.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON saw the dangers of eighteenth-century American Utopianism, and understood that there was no possibility of escaping from power politics. America had to give thought to its proper interests, and this required something other than the reading of the *philosophes*. "No Government," Hamilton wrote, "could give us tranquillity and happiness at home, which did not possess sufficient stability and strength to make us respectable abroad." He did not share in the illusion that "permanent peace between the states is possible."

When Hamilton urged America to play no role in Europe's rivalries, it was not because he believed that such a policy would protect the country and keep it out of all wars or that it would cause Europe to abandon its old and wicked ways, but only that such a policy would serve to maximize United States influence in the Americas, where Hamilton believed it needed to be paramount. He had no fear of the word "power" or even of being called a "realist." As Dr. Gilbert explains, "To Hamilton, sovereign states, competition among them, and power politics were necessary factors in social life; successful political action depended on proceeding according to these presuppositions."

Professor Gilbert makes few attempts to suggest the present-day implications of his eighteenth-cen-

tury study, but on his last page he goes so far as to say that "America has wavered in her foreign policy between Idealism and Realism," and that "her great historical moments have occurred when both were combined." The temptation to agree with so reasonable a statement is overwhelming; if one hesitates, it is only because one realizes how rare have been the instances of real synthesis. Winston Churchill's words about Woodrow Wilson come to mind: "If Wilson had been either simply an idealist or a caucus politician, he might have succeeded. His attempt to run the two in double harness was the cause of his undoing."

Hamilton may not have cared to be an idealist; this may have been the measure of his strength and insight. Jefferson may not have wished to be thought a realist; this may have been the source of his great power. In an age like our own when too many wish to appear as both idealist and realist, there is a terrible hazard that in a crisis many will prove to be neither.

A Salute To Elmer Davis

LOUIS M. LYONS

DON'T LET THEM SCARE YOU: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ELMER DAVIS, by Roger Burlingame. Lippincott. \$5.95.

Though Elmer Davis has been dead three years, his words come back timely and timeless. He sounds absolutely contemporary in a 1953 speech announcing that what the local enemies of freedom are against "is no particular administration but government itself, and they are continually trying to weaken its power." At a time that would seem to call "for as high a degree of national unity as is possible in a democracy . . . instead . . . we have a good many citizens who seem to think that the enemy is their fellow citizens who disagree with them, rather than somebody abroad . . ."

McCarthyism waned, and Elmer Davis's unterrified resistance was a

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factor in halting its destructive course. But immunity was not achieved when the virus had run its course. The infection spreads again, and again too many are scared to think out loud where they may be heard and smeared to the detriment, if not destruction, of careers. Again it needs to be said with the clarity and confidence of Elmer Davis that "This republic was not established by cowards; and cowards will not preserve it."

His biographer has caught the conviction and candor of Elmer Davis's plain speaking, his searching insight into the fogs and frustrations of the public scene it was his business to survey, and his sinewy style. To reread the essence of Elmer Davis is almost to hear again that flat Indiana voice, calm and contained whatever the pressure and confusion of the newsroom, measuring out the gist of the news in five minutes that told more and made more sense of what it had to tell than any other voice was ever able to do in three times as long.

CHARACTER was the first word for Elmer Davis. But also he was a master craftsman. It was not an accident that he became the greatest reporter of his time, or that when summoned in a world crisis to a new role as broadcaster, in his fiftieth year, he immediately became a national voice to whom millions turned for clarity and sense in the confusions of the times.

The voice came naturally to him, right out of gravelly southern Indiana. Aurora was an undistinguished riverbank town on the Ohio when Elmer Davis was born there in 1890. His father was a cashier in the bank and active in the Baptist Church. His mother and aunt, daughters of an 1848 German immigrant, had both taught in the high school where Elmer prepared for Franklin College in another small Indiana town. Latin and Greek were at the core of the curriculum and a factor in Davis's style. Forty years later a professor of Greek was urging his classes to listen to Davis's broadcasts for "his masterly use of connectives"

He was college editor and wrote plays. He was a top student and won a Rhodes scholarship; so in

1910 he took his Indiana twang to Oxford, companion of Christopher Morley and John Crowe Ransom. There he took his Greats in Greek for an Oxford degree. He got in a summer of travel in the Balkans before coming home. He knew then what he wanted to do—write. He set out for New York to free-lance. His start was mitigated by a ten-dollar-a-week editorship of a magazine called *Adventure* and further eased a year later by a reporter's job on the *New York Times*.

He had ten years on the *Times* of active reporting, which ranged from Billy Sunday's revivals to the Ford Peace Ship. But he was writing before he began reporting and he kept on writing, both fiction and topical articles. His most notable reporting was itself fiction. Davis's chief distinction on the *Times* came from his invention of an old-fashioned character, Godfrey G. Gloom, whose salty comments on the 1920 conventions proved more interesting than the nominations of that inauspicious year. Davis then wrote the *History of the New York Times* for its seventieth anniversary year, 1921. By this time he had two novels under his belt, and in 1923 he left the newsroom to turn again to free-lancing.

But his magazine work, much of it in *Harper's*, was reporting of the broadest gauge, on the national and world scene. It took him abroad, and he was in Europe when Hitler moved into the Rhineland; he then reported for *Harper's* on the rape of Czechoslovakia and the background of Munich.

So it was natural for CBS to call on Elmer Davis for a pinch-hitting job at the microphone when the opening of the Second World War caught the network with its sententious radio star, H. V. Kaltenborn, in Europe. That emergency job found Elmer Davis with the background knowledge, the competence, the maturity, and the style to register immediately as a man in command of the situation. CBS quickly made him a fixture, and his news summary at five minutes of nine became a national habit. No one else on the air put so much meaning into a sentence, so much weight into a word, so much suggestion into an inflection. There was noth-

ing casual about a Davis broadcast. He wrote it with a sculptor's care at home, to an exactly measured number of lines. Then he got early to the studio for a final check of the late news. If this required an addition, he carved out the requisite number of lines to insert a tightly condensed statement.

But before he began to write, he had spent half the day reporting. Nobody prepared the "news package" for a Davis broadcast. He wrote his own. As much as possible he wrote from firsthand reporting. He attended the press conference or the Congressional hearing himself. Even in handling news that came off the wire, he was his own reporter. He didn't tear off the ticker bulletin and edit it down. He read it from the machine, penciled his own brief note on it, then sat down and wrote the sentences required. Thus his report in every word was Elmer Davis himself. He had assimilated it all. It was as concise, informed, and clear a statement as journalism of any form ever produced in his time. His was the broadcast Ed Murrow listened to in London in 1940 to get the whole sense of the news.

Everything of his life went into this—his Midwestern small-town background where he grew up on the Bible and the ancient world, his travel, his ceaseless reading, writing, digesting, and analyzing, and his unstudied but disciplined art with words—to make each do its share of the work of each sentence.

THE WAR cut off these broadcasts. President Roosevelt then reached for Elmer Davis, as naturally as CBS had done in 1939, to take on the job of informing the nation on the war. For three awful years Elmer Davis fought with the military bureaucracies to get news out, while fighting a rear-guard action with bitter-end congressmen who were sniping and slashing at his Office of War Information. Administration was not his bent. He was not an organization man. He could have done more by staying on his own job of analyzing the news. What he contributed to the government's confused dilemma of news and propaganda, separate or mixed, was the clarity of his own convictions and

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the force of his own character. Probably nobody could have done more or better, even though in the clutches of harassment he seems at times to have fired the wrong people, those whose convictions were most like his own, much as Henry Wallace had done a decade before, when head-on collisions in crises always found the liberals expendable.

From hindsight, it is clear that Elmer Davis should have stayed free during the war. His weapons were his own words, which had now largely to be spent in guerrilla warfare with jealous and secretive government agencies. The administration could have done with smaller-bore artillery, leaving Elmer Davis his full scope.

HIS RETURN to the air was with ABC, in a longer period of "news analysis" that freed him from the CBS limitation to objective reporting. His biographer says Davis distrusted the whole idea of objective reporting. "It inevitably omitted an element of depth which kept it from telling the whole, three-dimensional truth." Probably what Davis resented was the sterility into which "objective" reporting had fallen in its failure to explore the surface fact, and especially the timidity with which it was applied in broadcasting. There has been a development of depth since 1945, though not enough. McCarthyism was to trap the press in its self-limiting "objectivity" and force it to look behind the quoted "fact." But ABC gave Elmer Davis his head.

The era of investigations set in, and the air was soon full of dead cats. Davis took his stand on the historic right of Americans and their feeling for fair play and horse sense. "I see no sign of such peril to the republic today that we need to throw away the Constitution in order to save it," he said. (President Kennedy said much the same thing in his speech to the publishers this spring.) When McCarthy attained the headlines in 1950 with his charges of 205 or 81 or 57, or anyway five, Communists in the State Department, Elmer Davis stood in the breach, defending nightly the Constitutional rights of Americans. Roger Burlingame brings back this epic in its heroic proportions.

A Priest's Return

GOUVERNEUR PAULDING

THE EDGE OF SADNESS, by Edwin O'Connor. Atlantic-Little, Brown. \$5.

What kept *The Last Hurrah* from being a maudlin book was the fact that the eccentric Boston Irish characters who peopled it were never permitted to run away with it. The novel never depended on dialect; no matter how garrulous the speakers, they were never vaudeville Irishmen; no matter how richly comic they were, the author never forgot their background of remembered hardship. What was specifically Boston Irish was important to him, and to the reader, but only in so far as he made it serve the novelist's purpose of throwing a little more light on man's condition. *The Edge of Sadness* is still about the Boston Irish, but it is as if Mr. O'Connor, grown in confidence and in artistry, now feels free to go straight to the heart of his story without recourse to set pieces of extravagant comedy; his wit is quieter now, his touch is more sure; and he produces the people he knows so well without pasting labels on them. This is a deeper novel than the other.

IT is a middle-aged priest who tells the story of the Carmody family, and he maintains that it is their story, not his. He is wrong, for when a man is fascinated by a family and its affairs, he may think that he is only watching it and telling about it, amused or saddened by it, but he cannot escape involvement, and the family's fortunes will be his own. It is in him rather than in the family he observes that the greatest changes will occur. One can never live other people's lives; but one cannot live one's own, in any fullness, unless the lives of others finally come to count for the most. The exemplification of this truth constitutes the theme of this moving novel.

After years of separateness, during

which he viewed all human activities, including his own, as if they were taking place at an immense distance, the narrator, Father Hugh Kennedy, returns to live in communion with mankind. He had been a popular young priest, busy, far too busy, with good works. Then his father died. He started drinking quietly, and then not so quietly; he was sent out West for a cure. After four years he returned. This is when the story starts.

The Edge of Sadness is not a French novel by a Bernanos or Mauriac: no demons attack Father Hugh; there is no debate about God's existence and no despair; this priest says his Mass, he prays—with difficulty, but he prays. There is nothing more dramatic than the fact that the only man he loved was his father, and in consequence there was the separateness. The Carmody family, which finally breaks down the walls that close him in, is not tormented in the fashion of the French Catholic novels by varied and dramatic lusts: the old man who heads it has done nothing worse than get very rich by being hard on the poor. He tyrannizes his family. These are respectable people. They also are found to be quite unhappy people as, little by little, one Carmody or another reveals his troubles to Father Hugh—they all spring from the absence of love. In this, again, the matter of religion does not enter; it is not because he is a priest that the Carmody turn to him. The absorbing interest in this relationship, in this breaking down of their separateness and of his, consists precisely in the fact that this is a secular and not a religious novel.

Of course what gives it depth is the author's awareness that these people live beneath the eye of God. The truth is simply that all lives are of considerably more interest when they are related to a system, any system, that provides a standard of immensity against which to measure them. The system can be Thomas Hardy's, somber and disheartening, in which man is despairingly alone beneath the stars. It can also be—why not?—the poetics of Christianity. That is the system Mr. O'Connor employs and it works quite well.