



## GOOD NEWS—FOR A CHANGE

IT was suggested in these columns several months ago, when the world seemed to be in hourly danger of tumbling about our ears, that writers and publishers could do much toward taking an active and effective hand in the moral co-efficient of the fight to preserve the things we value most in life and which, for want of a more original term, we have come to call free institutions. It was pointed out that while the world of books can and should be rightfully proud of the many distinguished titles it has fathered in the literature for liberty, the job to be done may be said to begin there but it certainly does not end there. A vast new group of readers had to be reached—in short, the non-book reading public, since surveys showed that four-fifths of the population were outside the direct reach of books as such.

Moreover, an important part of the job required recognition that the time for hedging on democracy as a practical instrument was over. It was suggested that writers state our record for what it was in living conditions, wages, hours, and employment, pointing out the definite existence between jobs and liberties, which the totalitarian state glossed over or ignored; emphasizing, also, that while it is true that democracy thus far has been unable to offer more than possibilities without promises, this was at least preferable to the promises without possibilities of the dictator.

In this connection, *The Saturday Review* is especially happy to report on several projects—one a book, one a pamphlet, and one an organization—which are hitting the bull's eye in dramatizing democracy as an instru-

\**SPEAK UP FOR DEMOCRACY*. By Edward L. Bernays. New York: The Viking Press. 1940. 128 pp., with appendix. \$1.

†*FREEDOM OR FASCISM*. By the Connecticut League of Women Voters. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1940. 56 pp. \$25.

ment with practical achievements and practical possibilities. The book is Edward L. Bernays's "Speak Up for Democracy"; the pamphlet is "Freedom or Fascism"†, published by Yale University Press for the Connecticut League of Women Voters, and the organization is The National Foundation for Education.

Mr. Bernays's book is direct, forceful, realistic. It creates a sphere of intelligent operation for the individual in the larger offensive against totalitarianism. It is possible that scholars or social philosophers may criticize the work as perhaps unsophisticated or lacking in profundity. Yet this book was not intended for the specialist, who already has several shelves full of more abstract works to suit his purposes, but for the average person who is subjected to a barrage of information or propaganda from all sides and who would like to know just what he is supposed to do and how. Anyone who has traveled throughout the country the last few months—especially during the weeks following the fall of France—was a witness to the uneasy feeling of frustration or helplessness that seemed to have settled like a cloud over the nation as a whole. The individual wanted to help but his own role was not too clearly defined; in a sense, we were all dressed up for democracy with no place to go. Mr. Bernays, widely recognized as our leading authority on public opinion and public psychology, has written a book, therefore, which is certain to fall on fertile ground. What is more important is that he suggests means which are compatible with ends—no small feat in these days of shifting expedients. His program for the individual

or organization is clear, sensible, constructive.

"Freedom or Fascism" is a small, attractively-designed pamphlet admirably suited to group or classroom discussion. Point by point, it answers arguments raised by advocates of totalitarianism. This is an excellent example of what can be done in intelligent and effective pamphleteering. It is also an excellent example of at least one way in which organizations—in this case the Connecticut League of Women Voters—can actually crystallize their own feelings and views while contributing to the crystallization of the views of others.

It is impossible in the brief space of an editorial to do adequate justice to an organization such as the National Foundation for Education, whose chairman is Samuel R. Harrell of Indianapolis. The Foundation is concerning itself with fundamentals by co-ordinating the efforts of teachers, parents, and officials in a program for schools which might properly be called, "Democracy for Use." As part of its work, the Foundation has outlined suggested courses in citizenship and government. So convincing was the presentation in its original form that it has already compelled action in the revision or adoption of courses at several universities. The object of the Foundation is "not to promote any dogma but to seek the truth and to educate," in line with its belief that "the principles of fundamental truth well taught will preserve the best in government." Its program of education, as we understand it, is seeking to teach students the facts of life as they relate to forces at large in the world today.

N. C.

## In the Desert

By Joseph Joel Keith

HERE is where silence grows still, as the listening ear remembers what it knows, like a clear

imprint lettered in stone.  
Here is a breathing sound not lost; though one's alone, this ground,

air and the joshua trees  
whisper and pray and tell  
the heart what it will seize  
and know well.

Wandering silence is spread.  
The racing heart and mind  
are touched and quieted,  
and they find,  
here where all thought is fed,  
what they will find.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## "Weep and Prepare"

SIR:—In his anxiety to condemn "Weep and Prepare," [SRL, Oct. 12] Mr. Louis Untermeyer did not escape the clumsy injury of his own axe: he twice misquoted lines, made one positively untrue statement. The first lines he quotes should have read (the italics indicate the line omitted):

and with an uneasy feeling  
of disaster  
left among the photographs  
of friends

(so I suppose)  
the rancid ashes of the hearth  
and litter of delphinium

(or were  
they roses  
roses—were  
there roses in another room)

I do not consider worth more than mentioning the fact that even in the scope of these lines he twice indicated a pattern of them, by translation of bars to indicate line terminations, which never existed in them. In the third of the quotations, the words "sudden leaves" are misquoted for "sodden leaves," and in the fourth a word is inserted, damaging the sense, the word "our," which I italicize:

the Nails, the Nails pierced *our*  
the Flesh, the Hands—

Incidentally, the quotations were made in an ambiguous fashion, implying a derivation for them obscure to me. May I ask that Mr. Untermeyer be asked to afford the exact passages he supposes to be the derivation of my lines in poems by Eliot, MacLeish, Pound, Cummings?

As for the untrue statement, it is this: "Weep And Prepare" is my *second*, not my *third* book, as Mr. Untermeyer would have it.

RAYMOND E. F. LARSSON.  
Staten Island, New York.

SIR:—(1) I regret the exigency of space which compelled the use of diagonal bars to indicate line divisions.

(2) I regret the not altogether vital omission of the word "and" and the typographical error.

(3) I regret that I thought "Weep and Prepare" was Mr. Larsson's third book instead of, as Mr. Larsson would have it, his second. The acknowledgment page lists four volumes "by the same author." Perhaps we are both poor mathematicians.

(4) Most of all, I regret Larsson's inability to recognize his obligations—obligations in tone and accent rather than exact quotation. I was not alone in discovering his indebtedness to Eliot, Pound, MacLeish, and Cumings. Others added Gerard Hopkins and the Imagists to Mr. Larsson's "influences." But I did not wish—nor do I wish



"It's this way, madam—if you came into the store with \$4.25 and spent one-third of it at the novelties counter, and had 40c left—that's how much this book would cost you."

now—to turn a short review into a bill of particulars.

LOUIS UNTERMAYER.  
Elizabethtown, New York.

## "No Time for Comedy"

SIR:—This is a reply to Mr. Davis's editorial, "No Time for Comedy?," [SRL, November 9].

Regarding Mr. Chaplin's "The Great Dictator," then, I beg leave to disagree with Mr. Davis, who announces that Hitler and the rest of what he terms "the Situation" are "no longer funny." This, according to Mr. Davis, is what ails the Chaplin picture. Now I would be the first to acknowledge that "The Great Dictator" has its faults (and so have Hitler and the Situation), but I object to this arbitrary definition of comedy's subject matter.

A thing is funny if you think it is funny. Mr. Davis does not think the Nazis are funny, even in Mr. Chaplin's inspired misrepresentation of them, and so for Mr. Davis they are not funny. But for me, and for Mr. Chaplin (who of all people takes the menace of the Nazis seriously), the humorous or satirical attitude is supremely enlightening.

No subject is necessarily so solemn, nor is any situation so grim, as to be sacred from the humor of such a talented and tactful clown as Mr. Chaplin. When he sets out to burlesque a Hitler speech, *that speech is funny*—no matter what the tragic consequences of an actual Hitler speech might be. I am of Jewish descent, and I have heard that Mr. Chaplin is of Jewish descent. Neither of us is likely to feel that what the Aryan bully-boys do in the Ghetto is a joke. I am convinced, nevertheless, that satire of the subject is just.

Mr. Davis might be reminded that

current British journalism and folklore make Hitler a target of ribaldry and caricature, and that so far this does not appear to have inhibited their defensive warfare. The author of the recent "Letters from the Corsican" also applied his subtle humor to "Hitler and his doings;" I should like to know Mr. Davis's reaction to that book's barbed irony.

Many of the episodes in "The Great Dictator" which deal with Hitler seem to me to be among the finest achievements of satirical drama. True, the "bubble dance" with the globe is overdone; the pie-throwing scene with Mussolini is likewise too much of a muchness; the peculiar use of Wagner's music, which Mr. Davis admires, is rather questionable; and a number of passages are badly written or performed by inferior actors. Yet the Hitlerian satire, a complete innovation in Chaplin's repertory, is magnificently effective. Mr. Davis admits this, but chooses to call it "essentially . . . tragic." The Ghetto scenes are less effective, not because their subject is intrinsically non-comedic, but because they are not as meaningful nor as competently done.

Swift's essay on a certain economic problem of Ireland advises a disposition of infants which is normally hateful, if not unspeakable. There were Englishmen in his day who said Swift had made a tactical error, but that essay remains a classic of satire. I venture to suggest that Mr. Davis's criticism is equally unfounded.

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## "Water Babies . . ."

SIR:—Basil Davenport surely merits a flood of thanks for his "Water Babies with Plain Water" [SRL, Nov. 16]. I hope that copies marked with red ink have been sent to the editors of the various children's magazines; these periodicals abound in the faults Mr. Davenport deplores and are, generally speaking, woefully inadequate. In one of his essays Stephen Leacock has made one or two of the points of the article, in his own manner and very amusingly.

By the way, what has become of that revived *St. Nicholas*? I can learn nothing whatever about it.

ALICE C. CRAMER.  
Tampa, Florida.

## Literary I. Q.

SIR:—YOUR LITERARY I. Q. DECEMBER 14TH ISSUE QUOTE A SCORE OF 75 OR BETTER IS EXCELLENT UNQUOTE ITS NOT ONLY EXCELLENT ITS A MIRACLE MERRY CHRISTMAS.

THOMAS R. COWARD.