

THE OSTENSIBLE PURPOSE of the House Committee on Un-American Activities' investigation of Hollywood was to expose its domination by Communist elements. What the Committee succeeded principally in accomplishing, however, was to give the American public a graphic picture of fascism in action. It was a warning that will not go unheeded. After listening to two days of the hearing, Charles MacArthur commented sadly, "I could see the Reichstag burning!"

The behavior of the Committee itself, the witnesses who hurled accusations and smeared reputations without fear of rebuttal, and the obscene gloating of the worst newspapers in the United States made even Hollywood's biggest magnates, some of whom had favored the investigation in the first place, realize finally that the objectives of the Committee were not the castigation of a handful of miserable little Communists but a brazen attempt to dictate to Hollywood exactly what kind of pictures were to be made or shown in the future.

Motion-picture producers were not the only ones who observed the spectacle with dawning consciousness of what was at stake. People of the theatre, publishers of newspapers, magazines, and books, and all writers left of the Menjou-Dixon line, wondered who was next on the list if this Committee was allowed to continue its hatchet work. Several of the Committee's best trained seals threw off unmistakable hints of future activities in this direction.

As for the crowds, who jammed the Committee room "cheering madly" every idiotic remark of the curious array of witnesses, they were there, of course, to gape at Gary Cooper, Robert Montgomery, and suchlike. They would have cheered just as madly anything these gods had had to say about the tapioca crop in Brazil. . . .

ADDENDA TO the Bernard Shaw Legend: An engaging young British journalist was sent down to Shaw's country home in Ayot St. Lawrence to wheedle him into writing a piece called "How to Grow Old Gracefully." Shaw's answer was justifiably unfit for publication, but then he took pity on the journalist, and said, "I know you are trying only to carry out a ludicrous assignment. To keep you from going away empty-handed,

I'll tell you how I happened to settle in this little town. I was here on a visit, and in the course of one of my long walks I came upon a graveyard. One of the tombstones bore an inscription that ran something like this:

MARY ANN SOUTHWORTH
BORN 1815—DIED 1895
MAY HER SOUL REST IN PEACE
HER TIME WAS TOO SHORT

"That settled it! I decided that if eighty years was the villagers' idea of a short life, Ayot St. Lawrence was the place for me!"

Michael Blankfort has sent me a copy of a letter he addressed to Shaw in 1944, when he (Blankfort) was a captain in the U. S. Marine Corps:

Dear Mr. Shaw:

My daughter who is seven and who has a passion to find out just what God looks like, plagued me over one week-end liberty to show her a picture of God.

I am one of the thirty-five-year-old moderns whose philosophical teeth had been broken on Spinoza, Shaw, and Marx, and instead of admitting that there was no picture of God, I tried to sell her a simple pantheism. But children are not philosophers. They are cynical realists. How could God be in everything and everybody? The facts were against it. He was either a giant who held the world in his hand—or he was "pretending." If Jesus isn't God—then who is—and what does he look like?

With the usual duplicity of parents, I shifted the burden to her. I gave her two books—a collection

of Michelangelo and a collection of Rodin. I suggested that she look through the pictures and pick out the one that seemed to her most like God. I warned her to take her time, for once she had decided, I was going to cut the picture out and pin it on the wall. She accepted the challenge and went to work.

As of today, the picture on her wall, over her bed, is a large reproduction of Rodin's George Bernard Shaw.

Once, as in my case, you were held up as a devilish perverter of children. Now, via Rodin, you are their deity.

I thought you would be interested in this story, not that it will surprise you—rather because it will probably confirm your own judgment.

Shaw replied promptly as follows:

The victory is not to me; but to Rodin over Michaelangelo. But where everyone shaves, the Beaver is godlike. People say that the Rodin bust is not like me. I alone know that it is, though it is unlike my reputation, which is only a part that I act. Kiss your daughter for me. . . .

PUBLISHERS LOOKING for a story with a brand-new twist are referred to the talented Hollywood producer Nunnally Johnson. Nunnally's acquisition of the screen rights to "Mr. Peabody's Mermaid" prompted him to delve into all available lore on the intriguing subject of mermaids. "In all the stories," he reports breathlessly, "they are pictured alike: the top halves are beautiful girls, the bottom halves fish. If somebody will commission it, I have a different tale to tell. My mermaid's upper half will be the fish, her lower half the girl."

Johnson adds that he knows just the star to play the title role in pic-



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DOUBLEDAY



"Hey, Mom, what are we having for Sunday breakfast?"

tures, but prefers that somebody else
offer her the part. . . .

Joe Hazen, another Coast lumi-
nary, contributed this story:

Two college chums met for the first
time in twenty years, and after the
usual greetings, one asked, "What's
happened to those four fine boys you
had?"

"The oldest," reported the father
proudly, "is a great legal light. He's
working in the district attorney's of-
fice now. The salary is very low, but
the training will help him soar to
the top.

"The second son is an engineer.
You should see the bridges that boy
has designed! He's worked only for
the WPA so far, but his break is
bound to come.

"My third son is going to be a re-
nowned surgeon. He's an interne now,
and we have to support him, but that
will all be changed one day."

The father showed no inclination
to go on, and his friend had to remind
him, "But what about your youngest?
You haven't said a word about him."

"Oh, him," said the father with a
pronounced lack of enthusiasm. "He
drifted out to California and became
a motion-picture producer. He's mak-
ing four thousand dollars a week,
but what kind of work is that for a
son of mine?" Then he conceded, "Of
course, if it wasn't for him, the rest
of us all would be starving to death."

MISS GENE TIERNEY attended a fash-
ionable party in Westchester where
her dinner partner's idea of fascinat-
ing small talk turned out to be a
verbatim recitation of the contents
of the current issue of a famous dig-
est magazine. An article on the habits
and potential menace of white ants
had impressed him most. "They build
whole cities with one-way streets,"
he declared. "They have captive
snakes who serve as bridges to span

creeks and rivulets. Someday an
irresistible army of millions of white
ants will invade this very State of
Connecticut. . . ." Miss Tierney drift-
ed into a deep reverie at this point,
and completely lost the trend of her
partner's chit-chat. By the time the
speaker recaptured her attention, he
had completed his dissertation on
white ants, and, mentally thumbing
the pages of his source book, had be-
gun boring the assemblage to death
with the story of some obscure pro-
fessor who could unravel the most
intricate code in a matter of minutes.
Miss Tierney restored everybody's
spirits by interrupting the narrator
angrily, "You don't expect us to be-
lieve now that white ants can de-
cipher codes!" . . .

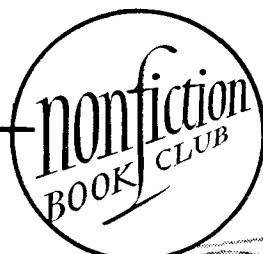
TWO ENTERPRISING PUBLISHERS found-
ed a partnership and over a period
of years built up a profitable line of
low-priced juveniles. One spring day
the elder of the two actually was
lured away from work to join a golf
foursome. At lunchtime, however,
he made a bee-line for the telephone
in the locker room and called his of-
fice. "Anything happen this morning?"
he asked anxiously.

"Anything happen!" echoed his
partner excitedly. "We got the big-
gest order in our history by wire
from Marshall Field, that's all." "Have
Miss Jones read it to me right away,"
cried the senior member of the firm.

Miss Jones came to the phone and
said brightly, "Here it is, Mr. Stern.
'Ship immediately forty dozen "Pin-
occhio." Stop. Eight dozen "Black
Beauty." Stop. Seventy-three dozen
"Mother Goose." Stop. . . ." The angry
voice of Mr. Stern interrupted her
recital, "Listen," he screamed to his
partner, "would you be kind enough
to leave that girl alone till she fin-
ishes reading the telegram?"

BENNETT CERF.

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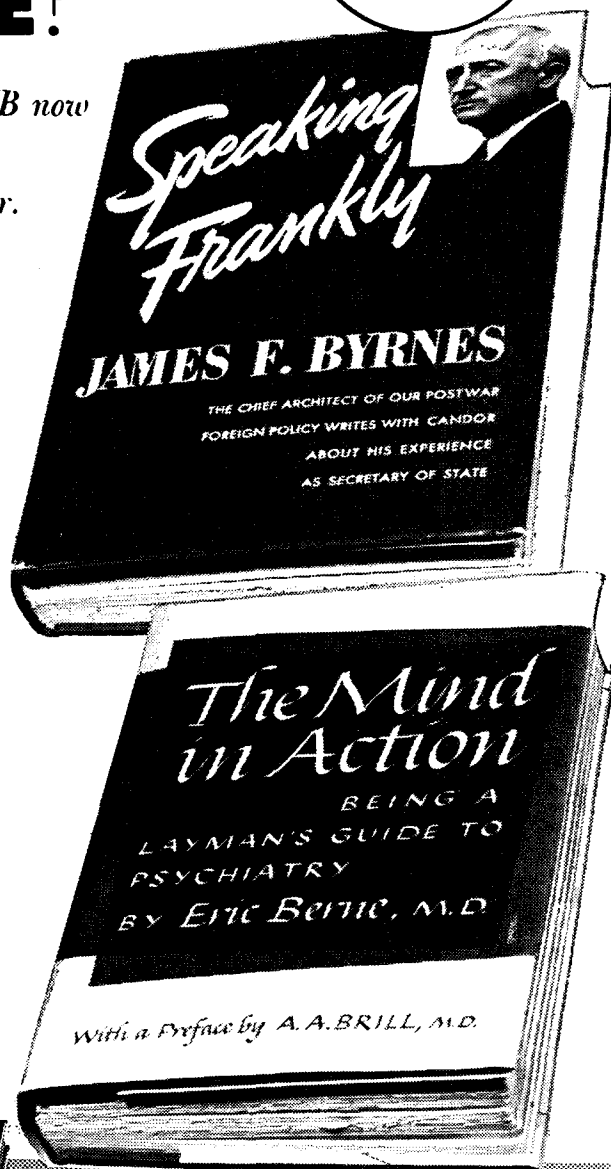
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NOVEMBER 8, 1947

Invitation to a Party...

R.S.V.P.



A GREAT MANY New York City people have a way of saying "upstate" so that it means everything from Parkchester on. We ourselves have softened so that it now includes parts west and north of Albany, though at one time "upstate" meant Buffalo and the hundred odd miles west of it around Lake Erie to the Pennsylvania border. It's a nice part of the world. Some wags would have it that there are just two seasons there: winter, and the Fourth of July. Other people like to walk through the snow. They like to fish through the ice of Lake Erie after driving half a mile out from shore in ancient jalopies that can't remember what it's like to drive on land. They like the stretch of days that permits October a little of the warmth of July. They like August and September, and the times when grapes are ripe for picking on the farms near Fredonia and Dunkirk and Westfield. People who come from upstate are apt to think that grape vines stretching away from the lake are a prettier sight than buildings, or that a field of warm red tomatoes is friendlier than a sky line.

Fredonia, New York, is probably a representative upstate town. It's a pretty place. There's a little park in the center and one important business street crossed by another that goes on to Dunkirk one mile away by Lake Erie. There's a traditional rivalry between the two towns, the way there sometimes is between kids who grow up next door to each other and aim for the same things. People who live in Fredonia are proud of the fact that Jean Webster lived there. Fredonians may not have a harbor, but they have DADDY LONGLEGS, her most famous piece of writing. There's a strong chance that most Americans over

twenty-five have read the book or seen the play.

The Websters used to live in a big house where two streets intersect and form a kind of V so that the lawn slopes down on three sides to a public thoroughfare. Jean Webster's brother Samuel was born in New York City, but he spent a good part of his life in that house and when he was in the office the other day we talked about the town and some of the town's people. His new book, although it was written for children, has that deep baritone sense of humor and fantasy that does not exclude the grown-up reader. We think Fredonians may take it less hard if Dunkirk should beat them at football this season, because the Webster family has a way of reflecting a considerable amount of literary light, and *THE KING GIVES A PARTY* is going to be a favorite book to lots of people.

The story itself is wonderland stuff, with a firm, tough core of realism. Factually, it's the adventure of a boy called Teddy who attends Cinderella's ball as Ambassador Extraordinary from the United States. But he gets there seven hours early and those seven hours are spent with one of the most amusing Kings who ever lived in fiction.

The King turned to Teddy. "You see, Teddy, what a marvelous system we have here? I systematized it myself. Before that everything was in a mess. All one big pile. Now it's all regulated. But you have to know your alphabet. Do you know how to spell, Teddy?"

"Some," said Teddy.

"Well, you see, we want butter. That begins with a B, doesn't it?"

"Yes," agreed Teddy.

"Well, that's the B pile. You go over there and you'll find everything we want—butter and bananas. You hunt on that side of the pile and I'll hunt on this side. But don't make too much noise because we mustn't wake the storekeeper."

Teddy could hear his voice continuing on the other side of the pile as they set to work. "It used to be an awful job to find things, but now it doesn't take half the time. System's a wonderful thing, Teddy."

"But everything's so mixed up!" protested Teddy.

"Not if you keep things in the right pile," said the King. "Be careful not to throw anything into the C pile, because that up-

sets the whole system. There! I've got the butter. There are some buttons in it, but we can use those around the house. You always want buttons, Teddy."

"Wouldn't it be better to sort things out?" suggested Teddy.

"They're already sorted out," replied the King. "Have you found any bananas, Teddy?"

"I've got a few," said Teddy. "They're a little squashy."

"You want them soft," said the King. "They digest better."

Teddy kept on burrowing. He found books, baseball bats, and a bicycle. At last he came out triumphant with two dozen bananas. He was a little tired when he drew away from the pile and went around to the other side. He found the King playing with a banjo. It was rather sticky, as there was some butter-scotch on it.

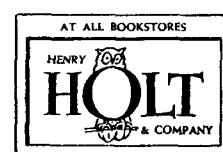
"You know, a store like this is very instructive," said the King. "You find all sorts of things you want. Now this banjo. I never played one before, and I find I can play it as well as anybody. I think I'll take it along. I have a gift for music, Teddy."

Maybe Sam Webster couldn't help writing a good book and a wonderful story. His grand-uncle Mark Twain kept running into the same difficulty and his sister Jean Webster was similarly vexed. We happen to be thoroughly delighted by his gift for combining wit and lightness with incisive satire, but we're not prepared to lay it to heredity or to the upstate air. This is nonsense and logic by a born storyteller and a careful artist who just happens to have quite a literary background. You don't have to be an upstate New Yorker, you don't have to be a child; if you are at all like us, you'll be happy with the world that Webster makes in *THE KING GIVES A PARTY*.

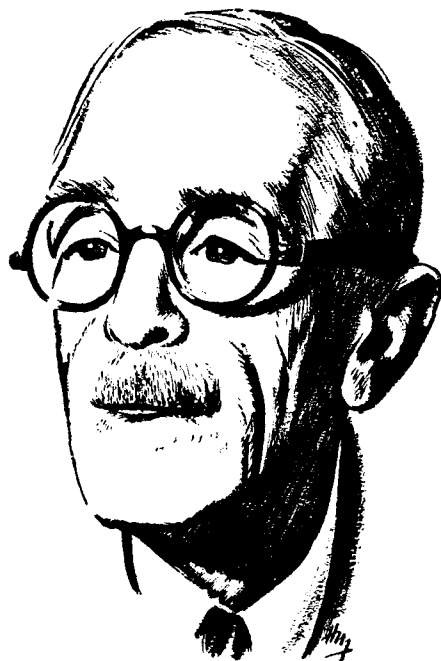
THE KING GIVES A PARTY

A Children's Book for Nonsense-Lovers
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The Saturday Review



A New "Hugo" for France

JACKSON MATTHEWS

IT MAY be said in strict seriousness that Paul Valéry died in July 1945 at the right moment. France, with almost nothing left but her language—reduced, it would seem, to her essential glory—was in sad need of a hero. The moment and the need produced . . . the death of Valéry. His funeral, to the surprise of all outsiders, and with sudden, almost unintended ceremony and splendor, became an occasion of national mourning. All sorts of public honors (election to the French Academy, to a chair at the Collège de France) had made of this modest man, "poet of the intelligence," writer of difficult and illuminating little essays, somehow the official literary figure of his country, despite his protest that he was not really a man of letters at all. And I believe we shall see, when the impossible confusion through which he lived has been turned into a more possible past, that the figure of Paul Valéry stands for his age, as Voltaire and Hugo stand for theirs. As hero and symbol of the mind he is of their stature and, even in his symbolic death, illustrates the only France of his time.

Valéry was a southerner, meaning in France a Mediterranean man. His Italian mother and Corsican father

lived on the quay-side at Sète, where he was born in 1871. Until he was grown he had hardly been out of earshot of the Mediterranean, and from that sea his sensibility absorbed the images and energies that stocked his memory: the harbor at Sète, the noise of dock machinery, the fishing boats, and the bed of bright fish-entrails under the green surface near the wharf; the old park at Montpellier darkened with Poësqe cypress trees; the aquarium at Monaco; the steep streets of Genoa, where he spent his vacations, and the powerful water he drenched himself in all summer. The old cemetery overlooking the sea at Sète, where Valéry is buried, became in his mature imagination a great poem.

At school, boredom drove the boy's interests to architecture, poetry, mathematics, music, painting. He read Poe's *Eureka*, the poems of Mallarmé, and studied mathematics and Wagner's music with passion. A chance meeting with Pierre Louys at Montpellier in 1890 brought him Paris, André Gide, and the decisive personal influence of his life, Stéphane Mallarmé.

Mallarmé's work had given Valéry a peculiar formative shock. These marvelous little "crystal systems," as

he called Mallarmé's poems, struck the terror of perfection into him. Reading them, he could feel nothing but despair ("beauty is that which makes us despair"). He was himself already writing some very good poems indeed, but now his mind was driven past poems themselves to wonder how these "crystal systems" were constructed; the one thing superior to a perfect poem, he thought, would be a full knowledge of how it was made. He was soon to give up writing poems himself and turn his intense powers to the study of "the preparation of these beauties," the generation of poems in the poet's mind. Valéry was already coming into possession of his own and proper subject: *the mind behind the work*.

His decision to renounce poetry was very much like a conversion. The crisis came at Genoa, on a stormy night in August 1892: "A frightful night . . . my room brilliant with lightning . . . and my whole fate being played out in my head . . . between me and me." He decided to leave Montpellier for Paris, where he put up in a student hotel near the Luxembourg Gardens. His room was like a monk's cell, one picture (of a skeleton), and a blackboard always covered with mathematical equations. He was a favorite at Mallarmé's Tuesday evenings.

Giving up poetry was by no means a simple matter. Valéry had for some time felt in literature and art certain serious inadequacies. They did not satisfy the range of his demands to know himself and the world; as method they were too vague, as instruments they were not precise. He was powerfully drawn to mathematics and the exact sciences, to the possibilities of precision, the means of discovery he saw in many branches of knowledge. His rejection of poetry was thus a manner of freeing his mind of an exclusive preoccupation, a manner of clearing his head for the application of new intellectual methods—an acquisition of freedom. Already the range of his interests, the erudition he turned into resources of wit, the serious meanings at play in his gaiety and personal charm, astonished and fascinated the young poets and *littérateurs* who were his friends.

But his new freedom was not easy. Valéry now felt in himself the conflict between several visions of the world demanding to be reconciled. He admired Mallarmé's solution: to make of poetry a metaphysics—conscious control of the poetic processes carried to the point of heroism. In Poe's *Eureka* he found, to our surprise in America, one of the century's great efforts to solve the conflict by turning scientific vision into poetry. But