

TV and Radio

TIME ON MY EYES

BEFORE this year's nominating enclaves began there was much rumor suggesting that the demonstrated revelatory effects of TV would cause the party officials to modify pre-TV convention practices. The reader, even if he does not own a TV set, has probably gathered that the rumors were false. Despite various predictions, the fact is that all the frontier accoutrements and tin cans of political cut-up, horseplay, and wind-baggery that we have come to identify with conventions were regrettably and offensively present.

Now there is again talk of how the American people simply will not stand for this horse-and-buggy politics in their contemporary living rooms. Specifications are laid down for the streamlining of convention business, for reducing the number of delegates, decimating the demonstrations, water-barreling the phoney consciousness of "historic decisions," and running an abrasive wheel along the greasy edges of the pompous oratory.

Well, we shall see. First, there is the stubborn fact that conventions are business meetings and not dramatic creations; they cannot, worse luck, be firmly "staged" by the talented hand of a bold, imaginative *regisseur*. Secondly, it may well be that TV's great social modification potential has been overrated. All television has never known a more compelling show than the 1951 Senate Crime Committee hearings chaired by the erstwhile candidate from Tennessee, Estes Kefauver. The potential dynamite was atomic (or so it seemed in the hey-day of Hill, Halley, and Frank Costello).

Nevertheless, the writer has not heard or read of any gambling laws passed by Congress to deal with a patently revealed national situation. As for local laws, my radio informed me recently that this year only a handful of New York's bookies renewed their operating licenses. The white-slip boys are chesting again in their contempt for the law.

Lacking a creative renaissance in the strategy committees that plan the conventions, the 1956 nominating sessions will be substantially the same in tone and *mise-en-scène* as the 1952 "deliberations." The non-TV reader, if he buys that set in the meantime, will be faced foremost with the unmanageable proportions of his viewing experience. The five-day stand embracing more than one full sweep

of the clock on some days cannot be articulated into any comprehensive esthetic form.

One can only dip as his circumstances permit and finger morsels in the bowl; there is no telling which will be sweet or sour. Opening rituals should be completely avoided. They include bland invocations and flustered troopings of the colors duly distributed among faiths and veterans' posts. Climaxes may be sadly lost, as when many who patiently watched the final donkey doings simply fell asleep waiting for Governor Adlai Stevenson's towering acceptance of his nomination at three in the morning.

Egocentric tenors interpolating patriotic doggerel into their chestnut hymns may be gratefully missed, as well as Broadway songwriters teaching "sure-fire campaign hits" to awkward delegates. On the other hand, you may get a choice mixture of high comedy and drama such as the screen flashed when Eisenhower and Taft made their joint victory-defeat statement amid a mass of human battering rams otherwise known as TV and radio reporters and technicians.

The blunderbuss rhetoric of the keynote, nominating, and guest speeches may disgust you; the synthetic snake-walk demonstrations appal you; the

doubtfully motivated polling of the individual state delegations drive you to tune off. On the other hand, there will be moments when you sharply search candidates' faces and voices, gestures and ideas. The speaking camera will reinforce many of your impressions about individual politicians, completely reverse others.

You will find yourself struggling to organize your responses into some sort of consistent attitude to the mingled yet fragmented tedium, the sharp insight and the passive acceptance of images moving in a slow procession of blurred focus. In fact, you will doubt more often than not the wisdom of your purchase of the television set and the sanity of the nation. But there will come the blue-chip moments when out of the earthquake, wind, and fire of your emotions the still small voice of meaning will emerge.

AND that will be when the delegates vote. And when the roll-call begins you should get a thrill. For these men and women are free, and this is democracy with a small "d." You may except as you will that the delegates are people in politics serving their own ends and that these ends are not always consistent with what we vaguely call "the public good." You may talk of machines and bosses and the cynical realities of how government really operates—and you may be right.

Notwithstanding all, however, there is still the undeniable truth of choice. In the same delegation the delegates splinter. One man is Eisenhower, another Taft; one Harriman, the other Russell. And the provincial fervor of their announcements as they call out their votes for the chairman, the convention, the folks back home, and the nation to hear is a drum-beat for spirits depressed by the signs of the times.

It was not always so in the long record of governments and men. It is not everywhere so today. Barely seven years ago it was not so in Europe and Asia—how quickly we forget!

Television also covers the elections in November and we see and hear the reporters as the votes roll in. But in November the voice of the people is in its hand, marking an X or pulling a lever—and the hand is silent, invisible. Only in July every four years, via TV, is the voice in the open, identified with a face, touched with the diverse accents of a sectional homogeneity. Listen to that voice; look at that face closely. They should be familiar. They are, after all, the voice and face of our free institutions.

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.



MEN OF LETTERS

(Continued from page 19)

very immature mind which is recording events as they occur to a very susceptible temperament; but one closes the book with an impression that the author does wish to think, and is no longer so apt to confuse feeling good with seeing the truth.

Men of Letters Notes

THE THREE IBSENS: *Memories of Henrik Ibsen, Suzannah Ibsen, and Sigurd Ibsen.* By Bergliot Ibsen. Translated by Gerik Schjelderup. American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York. \$3. This memoir is composed of what Fru Bergliot Ibsen, widow of the playwright's son Sigurd, has fetched from her personal recollections and from her collection of letters and memorabilia. As source material it is to some extent valuable. Not so much for her memories, since she never knew Ibsen intimately. But she prints many letters from and about him and other prominent Norwegians, including Grieg and her father, Björnson. The family letters, which make up the bulk, are without literary distinction; they are the kind

of pleasant homely letters exchanged in families but hardly worth the bother (to a stranger) of steaming open. The author's own writing is clumsily amateurish, without any ability to dramatize an episode or a personality. How objective her portrait of Ibsen is we can judge by her defense: "But what has not been said about Ibsen! Nothing irritates people so much as blamelessness." Other shortcomings of the book are the awkward translation and the absence of either a table of contents or an index. The author's motive in erecting this family monument is blameless enough; and the printing of these letters will further an understanding of Norwegian literature and of a universal playwright.

FIRE-BIRD: *A Study of D. H. Lawrence.* By Dallas Kenmare. Philosophical Library. \$2.75. In this strange, cranky book, Miss Kenmare sets out to treat only Lawrence's poetry, and in the course of her diffuse, repetitious essay she discusses his ideas—love and hate, especially—and she expounds his gospel that modern life and civilization are deeply corrupt. Her tone is often stridently evangelical, and she seems to confuse the writer of her book with its subject. She shares his ideas to such an intimate degree that one wonders whether that does not constitute a primary disqualification for the job of critic.

She says almost nothing about the poetry as poetry except vague general praise. What saves the book are the generous quotations of Lawrence's poetry itself—which shines with vivid and eloquent clarity. For all its gaucheness and peculiarities, the essay at least reminds us that besides his varied prose—novels, stories, essays, criticism, letters—Lawrence wrote poetry of a very high order.

THE BURIED LIFE: *A Study of the Relation Between Thackeray's Fiction and His Personal History.* By Gordon N. Ray. Harvard University Press. \$2.75. This compact study has several claims to importance and provocation. Most of it is an exhumation of Thackeray's relatives buried in his four best novels. (Or, perhaps, people buried in life and incarnated in the novels.) His wife served as model for Amelia in "Vanity Fair," his mother and uncle as Helen and Major Pendennis, his beloved Mrs. Brookfield as Lady Castlewood in "Henry Esmond," and his blundering stepfather as Colonel Newcome. As a literary sleuth Mr. Ray is an Inspector at least—thorough, judicious, and convincing. His literary detections are fascinating.

But he is less persuasive in defending Thackeray's shortcomings as novelist, particularly the uncritical sentimentalism. To understand why Thackeray allowed himself to wallow in the tears of his insipid characters does not pardon his doing so. As for his readers' avid taste for sentimentalism—a classic transcends the emotional fashions of its time. The impartial reader today will continue to accept Thackeray's weakness along with his considerable strength.

The most regrettable thing about the book is its wretched makeup, especially the unreadably small type for quotations. Fortunately, Mr. Ray will use some of the material in his biography of Thackeray, which, one hopes, will be as well printed as his edition of the letters.

NIKOLAI GOGOL: *A Centenary Survey.* By Janko Lavrin. Macmillan. \$2.50. To celebrate the writings of Gogol, who died one hundred years ago, Professor Lavrin has written a thoroughly excellent introduction to that great writer. His short stories are remarkable for a sensitivity to earthy beauty and brutality and for the mysticism of folk superstition. They were his first literary success. His best play, "The Inspector General," makes its impact through the bitter humor of a farce of mistaken identity. And his only novel, "Dead Souls," a monument of nineteenth-century fiction, shows the depths of a corrupt bureaucracy and squirearchy so elo-



The Sisters: Flesh & Spirit

By Babette Deutsch

THE two live in one house, are sisters, keep
Twin memories of table, chair, and floor;
The offerings of the path beyond the door;
The giant Shadow that would threaten sleep;
The uncertain aureole of the fountain, and
The daily creatures with their certain ways;
Distinguished if impure, all holidays;
Small punishments that both could understand.
Of these they may speak now, but in silence miss
What those good children lost, losing their fears
And hopes of a tall future, shrunk to years
Pieced out in weeks and hours and days like this.
Time is divided. An unweaponed feud
Divided them with time, so that they live,
Neither forgetting what they would forgive,
Together in a populous solitude.
There was no quarrel, and the cruellest sting
Has withered, but for each now nothing's right.
Who once were busy with the same delight
A fierce envy constrains in everything.
Thus they must live, two women driven wild,
Together till they die, till their houses fall.
Yet if the elder hear the younger call:
"Martha!" she answers: "Mary?" like a child.

