

TV and Radio

TOURS OF THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE BBC

TELEVISION is in its golden age of "firsts." This is a heyday year, of course: a king's passing, an atomic blast, a Presidential abdication, a "live" Kentucky Derby—all have been gilt-edged TV firstlings. Two more were added to the record recently—the television tour of the rebuilt White House, personally conducted by President Truman, and a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the British Broadcasting Corporation's telecast by the "Johns Hopkins Science Review" program in a special series produced in England at the BBC's invitation (the first such invitation, by the way, extended to any American television program by a foreign country).

Harry S. Truman, at home, was a pooled effort of the TV divisions of the ABC, CBS, and NBC networks. It was a telecast first, Saturday afternoon, May 3, and repeated variously on film the following week, a kinescope of the event winding up finally, with due CBS-TV ceremony, in the archives of the Library of Congress. I took one of the tours of the executive mansion with the President and his three associate guides from the officiating networks—Walter Cronkite, Bryson Rash, and Frank Bourgholtzer. Mr. Truman was an amiable host; he seemed liberally and spontaneously informed about White House history, and he played the pianos—two of them. I learned, among other items, that the eagle of the official seal of the United States now faces peacefully toward the olive branch rather than, as formerly, belligerently toward the arrows, thanks to Mr. Truman; that Dolly Madison did not cut the picture of George Washington out of its frame when the British were coming in 1814, as legend has it (she had it carted away, frame and all—which seems logical); and that there was no library in the White House until 1929, a year that touches footnote to history with casual irony.

I am undoubtedly richer for these facts; and I think it was a good thing that the completion of the renovation of the nation's first house, a political year, and television's expanding reach combined to privilege me and great numbers of my fellow citizens with so rare a glimpse of an historic American shrine. My only regret is that television, which grows more peripatetic, I am glad to say, seems unable

to organize its embrace of the actual world around some vital ideas, to breathe, in short, a little life of art into facts. What a rare cast! What an epic setting! And what a pity to experience no measure of the deep emotions inherent in the national drama!

As in Washington so in London. Mr. Lynn Poole, producer of the "Johns Hopkins Science Review" (Monday evening on the Dumont Television Network), was deservedly honored by the BBC invitation to originate the first American TV production in England. For several years he has pioneered in effectively harnessing a commercial network and an educational institution in the production of informative programs. In choosing BBC television as his first overseas subject he chose "a natural," as they say in the trade. With the BBC operating as a non-commercial state monopoly, and about to take a fling at a new, limited-sponsorship system, interest in its values, techniques, and audience satisfactions is high, in the light of the accompanying fact that American television, historically commercial, is about to have its own fling at the exclusively "educational" variety.

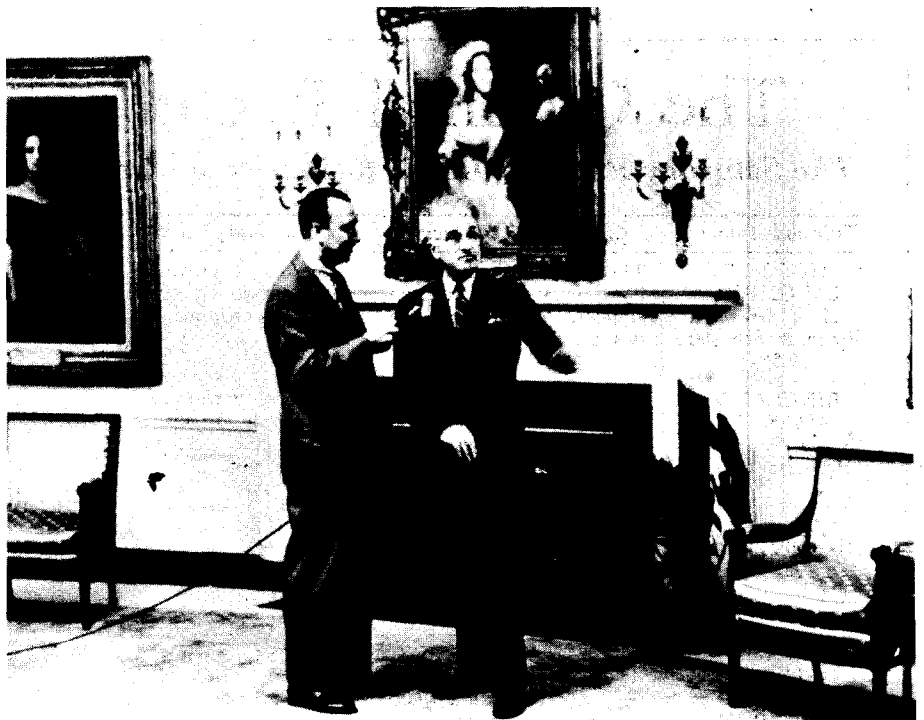
What then did we see? Mr. Poole being met at the airport, shots of the

studios and control rooms, diagrams of the BBC relay systems, transmitting towers, some technical museum pieces, and two English lady announcers. The ladies had dignity and charm, an indigenous English combination rarely exportable; and the vague, fitful images caught by a pioneer English thirty-line television receiver had high photographic interest. But, for me, the totality was a disappointment. True, the Johns Hopkins review is a science program. Mr. Poole's interest runs properly in technical channels not in comparative cultures. Also it is quite a challenge, a stranger in a foreign field, to put together a program in a hurry, as the producer obviously had to do. Mr. Poole gave us a quick, commendable once-over of the BBC-TV exterior, but no more.

Similarly, it is understood that the three networks which shared the White House tour could not "produce" Mr. Truman's program. It was strictly the President's show, and protocol, mechanics, and politics all combined to keep the affair proper, polite, and superficial.

It is in the nature of television, particularly "special event" television, to be rough, ready, and thin—so it is claimed for this medium which deals with the world on a transient run. Correct and sad; for this is the Achilles heel which makes the television cosmos largely trivial. And even if television is too lusty and busy and confident to care, it ought to be reminded from time to time that it might, if it took pains, be grand.

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.



The President and Walter Cronkite—"What a rare cast!"

BELLES-LETTRES

(Continued from page 16)

tire authenticity which is this biography's great virtue. Certainly one looks forward with particular anticipation to the completion of the enterprise out of which the Hansons' book grew, an edition of Jane Welsh Carlyle's collected letters.

Belles-Lettres Notes

THE CRITICAL PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE: 1890-1900. By Grant C. Knight. University of North Carolina Press. \$3.50. A vigorous socio-historical approach to the complex literary battle of the realists (Bierce, Garland, Crane, Norris) versus some now-forgotten romanticists (Johnston, Major, Ford) during the 1890-1900 period. Although the untenable thesis proposed by the title tends to have a strangulating effect, the body of material survives intellectually energetic.

JOSEPH CONRAD. By Oliver Warner. Longmans, Green. \$1.85. A new, appreciative study of Conrad's life and writings, with brief plot summaries of many of the stories and novels. Copious quotations from Conrad's writings help to make this volume a good, basic survey.

AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. By Heinrich

Straumann. Longmans, Green. \$2.25. From the vantage point of Zürich University, the author categorizes American literary events from William James to Arthur Miller and provides a sensible, objective introduction to the relation of life and letters in America. There is noticeable enthusiasm in this handbook and a telescoping of content and thought of American media of expression without sacrifice of accuracy or reader's interest.

THE SWEDISH THEATRE OF CHICAGO—1868-1950. By Henriette C. K. Naeaseth. Augustana Historical Society and Augustana College Library. \$3. This detailed volume belongs on the shelf of studies devoted to foreign language theatres in the United States. Analyses of repertoires, records of play performances, reviews from Swedish newspapers, anecdotes, discussions of production and casting problems, audience tastes, and actors' backgrounds—all contribute to an understanding of the Swedish stage as a social institution in Chicago.

AN INTRODUCTION TO SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE: From the Earliest Time to Our Day. By Elias Bredsdorff, Brita Mortensen, and Ronald Popperwell. Cambridge University Press. \$4.75. In encompassing so large a territory as the whole of Old Norse, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian literature, the respective authors have space to present only an array of primary figures and general literary trends. —SIEGFRIED MANDEL.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THEY DIED LAUGHING Alan Green (Simon & Schuster: \$2.50)	TV comic gets lead in head; New Hampshire hotel owner resents murder on premises, solves it.	Somewhat over-whimsied and wordy; Q&A routine substituted for action.	Wise-cracky
RING AND WALK IN Miriam Borgenicht (Harpers: \$2.50)	Divorced hubby deplors sinister conduct of ex's new mate; two youngsters in jeopardy, he plays detective.	Sensitive, well-organized job; hero inept at times, heroine <i>ex machina</i> ; treatment on whole fluent, intelligent.	Nice specialty
THE OTHER ONE Catherine Turney (Holt: \$2.50)	Cal. newlyweds jolted when bride gets fantods; no wonder: deceased wife moves in.	Metempsychosis theme not productive of spine chills.	No Dracula
ONE WAY STREET Nick Marino (Holt: \$2.50)	Mike Macauley of DA's staff (Midwest town) battles local corruption setup; gets knocked about a bit.	Gangsters, night-spot operators, society gals, etc.; twist end fails to save story.	Naive

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