

A PREFACE TO LIPPMANN



1. PHILOSOPHER-JOURNALIST



By JOHN MASON BROWN

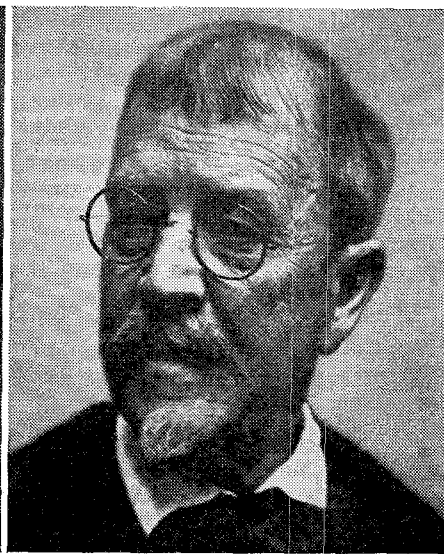
This is part of a series of studies on eminent contemporaries by John Mason Brown. Previous articles dealt with President Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson as Presidential campaigners, with Mr. Truman and his last days in the White House, and with Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., our Permanent Representative to the United Nations. This article is the first of three on Walter Lippmann.

THE philosopher-king was an ideal in the "Republic" of Plato; the philosopher-journalist is a fact in the person of Walter Lippmann. No one can read his column, "Today and Tomorrow," without sensing that his approach to the contemporary scene is different from that of the countless other newspaper commentators here and abroad whose province is national and international affairs.

Their eyes may be equally sharp; their search for the significance of passing events no less constant. They may be as well, if not better, informed in this or that particular field. They may write with a color and vivacity which he neither commands nor attempts. But none of them brings to his task the same background, the same concerns, the same sustained calmness of tone, the same lucidity

of style, or the pitch of mind that Lippmann does.

He stands apart from his profession in his looks and living no less than in his thinking. Meeting him, one would never guess that he had seen the inside of a newspaper office, so much closer does he seem to a library, a drawing room, or a campus. He is a lean, dark-haired, fastidiously dressed man of sixty-four who takes scrupulous care of himself, appears ten years younger than he is, and lives and works in a charming Georgetown house which is as beautifully ordered as his daily routine. When young he was nicknamed "the Boy Buddha." He has not lost that Buddha look. His is a contemplative face, ascetic in addition to being thoughtful, which is dominated by his somewhat protuberant brownish eyes. More than being unblinking and



Mable Dodge and Lincoln Steffens—"[Lippmann] was not a batik or barricade type."

bright, they are uncommonly alert and give the impression of seeing far beyond what is immediately at hand, which indeed they do.

Though one of the best known and most widely syndicated of present-day journalists, Lippmann is in character when he confesses he has never considered journalism his real calling. In spite of the millions of words he has written about current issues for newspapers, his truest interest lies in the dateless subjects he has pursued in the more important of his nineteen books. For the past four decades he has lived a double life professionally, giving most of his time, but never all of his mind, to questions of the day. Beyond the ephemeral particulars of the present, other problems, ethical, general, timeless, occupy him; problems upon which the contemplative have brooded over the centuries; problems dealing with the inward meaning of events rather than their outward appearance; problems involving the nature of the ideal society and the spiritual no less than political values by which the individual must live.

MOST people in Washington, including those who write about it, live only in the hectic present. Quite understandably, the Republic which occupies their time has no more conscious connection with Plato's than their "Politics" with Aristotle's. Lippmann, though immersed in the conflicts and issues of the day, does not forget the past. He is haunted by the problem Aristotle raised in the seventh book of his "Politics"—how to find a bridge between man's environment, which is complex, and his political capacity, which is simple. His best columns betray in their style and tone the philosophical bent of

his mind. His mentors in journalism were Lincoln Steffens and Frank I. Cobb, vivid figures who would have left their mark on almost anyone else. But it is such teachers he knew at Harvard as William James, Santayana, and Graham Wallas who gave Lippmann's thinking its direction and whose clear, calm voices can still be heard in his calm, clear prose.

His followers sense this off-beat quality in Lippmann and are grateful for it. They do not expect reporting from him. They turn to him for an analysis of what has happened rather than an account. They do not want him to cover the news; they rely on him to uncover its significance. They know that, instead of treating the issues and happenings of the day as if they stood alone in time, he will endeavor to relate them to yesterday and tomorrow, giving the long view, not the short one. They realize he seldom indulges himself or his public by writing about personalities.

Ideas, not people, are news to him, and Lippmann makes them news for others. He never descends to gossip, is above name-calling, and seeks to think rather than to feel his way to his conclusions. He sees his job as a serious one and performs it seriously, denying himself and his readers the entertaining cajoleries by which a writer can win and hold attention. His austere assumption is that those who turn to him care, as he does, for logic and enlightenment. Accordingly, he comes to grips at once with the core of his subject, dispensing with non-essentials, however tempting. Dispassion is in itself a kind of passion with him. No matter how heated his convictions, the chill of reason is on his copy. Indeed, so detached is he in tone and attitude that often, when he writes of history in the making,

it sounds like history already made.

Lippmann was already well known as an author and journalist when, on that September morning in 1931 (the 8th to be precise), the *New York Herald Tribune* began publishing the column that has made him famous here and abroad. He had written ten well-received books, the last of which, "A Preface to Morals," was a best seller in 1929. His contributions as an editor of the *New Republic*, in the days before and after our entry into World War I, had established him as a leader of liberal thought. His editorials for and ultimate editing of the *New York World* during the decade before 1931 had won him a wider public and an even greater reputation. It was not, however, until that incomparable paper had folded and he at forty-two had started his syndicated column for the *Herald Tribune* that he emerged as a national and international figure.

"Today and Tomorrow" caught on at once. Free of all sensationalism, it was a sensation over night. Within twelve months Lippmann's name up and down the country was almost a household word. In him the United States had discovered its own Delphic oracle. He was acclaimed not as a pundit but as *the* pundit. He was quoted everywhere and with special gratitude by those uncertain of what they thought until he had done their thinking for them. There was as much truth as humor in Perry Barlow's *New Yorker* cartoon (prized by Lippmann and even now hanging in his study) which showed two dowagers in a dining car, one of whom, buried in the *Herald Tribune*, was saying, "Of course, I only take a cup of coffee in the morning. A cup of coffee and Walter Lippmann is all I need."

THE Lippmann fever raged among people of every kind and profession. In the *American Magazine* of September 1932, Beverly Smith, after describing Lippmann as writing "in language which is precise enough for a Supreme Court justice, simple enough for a ward-heeler, and entertaining enough to woo a magnate from his grapefruit," saluted him as "the Man with the Flashlight, the Great Elucidator." The epidemic reached out to include historians. In January 1933, in this very magazine two months before Franklin D. Roosevelt took office, James Truslow Adams ran a risk few historians would choose to run by hailing Lippmann as "the only national leader who has appeared in these postwar years." Nor did Adams apply the brakes there. He added, "What happens to Walter Lippmann in the next decade may be of greater

interest than what happens to any other single figure now on the American scene."

There were those who were immune to the Lippmann fever and those who reacted to his rise from "success" to "eminence" with a heat which was itself feverish. Among these none was more violent or vocal than Amos Pinchot. No broadsides aimed at Lippmann (and there have been many during his long career) have been more blistering than the four articles Pinchot published in *The Nation* in July and August 1933. The editors explained that, "since the creation of an informed public opinion is indispensable to the functioning of democratic government, the factors which tend to mold that opinion require vigilant scrutiny." They did not deny that Lippmann was probably "the most influential journalist of our time."

It was this very influence which whipped Pinchot into a Peglerian frenzy. To him "the Great Elucidator" was an "Obfuscator de Luxe." He admitted Lippmann's excellence as a writer but accused him of being a "salesman of plutocracy" and an equivocator who could be "quoted on either side of almost any question." He dubbed Lippmann "our Merlin of journalism," an "ambassador of good-will to the philistines," and "a David with a smile instead of a sling." He described him as "once a votary in the house of Marx" who "now worships in the house of Morgan."

In his serialized excoriation Pinchot insisted that Lippmann did not believe in democracy. He charged him with having done an immense amount of harm, with having confused the thinking of his readers, with soothing them to sleep where the public good required vigilance, with telling them what they wanted to be told, and confirming them in unconscious Bourbonism. On important policies, Pinchot contended, Lippmann "is rarely ahead of his time. And as a good pragmatist, who avoids being right at the wrong moment, his opinion is generally the postscript of the least illiberal group in Wall Street."

DURING the years that have followed Lippmann has had his other detractors. No self-respecting man could fail to who writes regularly about public figures and issues. Among the most withering was Fred Rodell, a member of the Yale Law School faculty since 1933. In the *American Mercury* for March 1945, Professor Rodell enumerated Lippmann's errors as a prophet and his political inconsistencies with the relish of a cannibal dining off a plump enemy.

He implied that Lippmann was pop-

ular not because he made people think but because he made them think they were thinking. He sneered at him as someone who "was simply living, breathing, writing, of the right people, by the right people, and for the right people." Professor Rodell railed against what he held to be Lippmann's "almost uncanny knack of using words in such an impressive way as to appear to be sapient and lucid and even liberal." Lippmann's huge success, he maintained, was due to a mastery of a species of distinguished and high-grade double-talk. This, according to the Professor, "has required a complete forswearing, as to himself, of all humor and all true humility. It has required an air of Olympian omniscience coupled with a sort of patient pedanticism that condescends now and then to words of one syllable in order to clear things up for the class." Above all, it has required "the temerity to state the disputed as though it were obvious and to intone the obvious as though it were profound."

Such attacks have done no real damage to Lippmann. The fever of the first months may have subsided but his appeal has continued. Few serious syndicated columnists have commanded so large and steady an audience. Although his position has shifted in popularity polls, for more than twenty-two years Lippmann,

without ever catering to mass tastes, has held a place among the top ten commentators. His prestige continues to be as great in his own profession as with the general public. Only last fall his name headed the list submitted by 111 American editors and editorial writers rating columnists on the basis of their reliability, fairness, and skill in analyzing the news.

One hundred forty-one papers carry Lippmann's column in the United States, fifty-two in foreign countries. In London it can be found in the *Daily Mail*, in Tokyo in the *Yomiuri*, in Paris in *Le Figaro* as well as the *Herald Tribune* European edition. It is published in such far-spread lands as Canada and Greece, Belgium and Australia, Spain and India, Brazil and New Zealand, Uruguay and Sweden. An accurate count of his readers is impossible, but his syndicate estimates, in a perhaps promotional and therefore overoptimistic mood, that he may have as many as thirty-eight million weekday readers in the United States, and that his foreign papers command a circulation of approximately ten million. In the language of diplomacy, this is quite a sphere of influence.

WHEN Lippmann started his column, free to write (as the *Herald Tribune* expressed it) "what he likes (Continued on page 36)"



—From Rollin Kirby's "Highlights" (cartoon dated Dec. 4, 1923).

"I sympathize deeply with you, madame, but I cannot associate with you."

Hillbilly D. P.'s

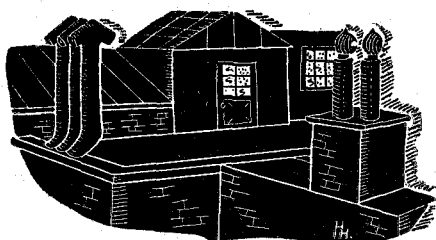
"The Dollmaker," by Harriette Arnow (Macmillan. 549 pp. \$5), a story of a family of "displaced persons" from Kentucky lost in wartime Detroit, tied for first place in fiction in SR's Spring Critics' Poll (April 10).

By Walter Havighurst

ONE of the grim, laconic phrases given to the language by World War II was "displaced person." At a touching point in Harriette Arnow's novel, "The Dollmaker," among the Mexican and Polish children in a schoolroom in the alien world of wartime Detroit, little Cassie Nevells announces, "My country is Kentucky." She speaks for all the "hillbillies" who were uprooted like tumbleweeds by the winds of war. "The Dollmaker" is a story of displaced persons in the war years in America.

The novel begins with strong and primitive people in back-country Kentucky, the people and the country of Mrs. Arnow's memorable "Hunter's Horn." Gertie Nevells, homely, rawboned, indestructible, is an embodiment of the mountain folk. As first pictured, she is riding a mule through pouring rain, carrying a sick child to the doctor. Behind her she has left a bed-ridden mother and a sodden cornfield trampled by the hogs; she has just learned that her brother was killed on a distant battlefield, and now her youngest child is choking with diphtheria. But Gertie Nevells, poor in all but courage and endurance, has armor against troubles like these. Later, in a sordid housing project on the edge of the vast industries of Willow Run, she encounters hostilities too subtle and impersonal for her powers.

This long, somber, and moving novel shows Gertie Nevells struggling to save her family from a sordid and grasping world. By steady accumulation of detail, with a dogged narration that traces every step of the struggle,



Mrs. Arnow builds up a growing weight and shows it pressing upon the spirit of a strong-willed woman. The novel might have been more selective, and more readable; as it is, it moves like a steam-roller, ponderous and ineluctable.

From their remote Kentucky valley Gertie Nevells pictured Detroit as a land of promise. There would be "a nice house with the electric and running water, both hot and cold maybe"; there would be schools and playgrounds for the children. But before she got through the crowded Detroit station she heard the scornful word "hillbilly," and at Merry Hill she found endless rows of cramped and airless flats lining bleak alleys. Her husband, making \$100 a week, had discovered the paradise of instalment buying. Soon the children were crying, "Buy um, Mom. Buy um. . . . What's a nickel? What's a dime?" In the midst of down payments, flashy gadgets, and the endless avid desire for more, Gertie Nevells remembered the warm feel of a cow's teats and the hardness of a churn handle. She began to whittle blocks of scrap wood.

THE act of wood-carving runs through this novel with growing meaning and emotion. Around Gertie Nevells other aliens were losing their identity, and her children were lost in the luring, leering world of radio, juke box, comic books, magazine advertisements. Her husband, a shadowy figure beside the rough-hewn Gertie, is idled by a strike which he does not understand. While he is on picket duty, Gertie sells wooden dolls to keep food on the table. At this point a wounded soldier comes home to Detroit, to labor violence and to a bitter realization: "Now I'm home—peace. And it's allasame."

Gertie Nevells carved dolls, birds, animals, and throughout her losing struggle she dreamed of carving a Christ. But with all the faces around her she could not find a face for the half-shaped figure with bent shoulders and bowed head. Still she went on carving, as though the meaning of life were in that block of cherry wood. At the end she realized that she could find a face for the unfinished figure. This final symbolism is cloudy and inconclusive, but "The Dollmaker" remains an unflinching and compassionate novel of contemporary America.



THE AUTHOR: Gertie Nevells—"big, ugly, strong-willed, and self-reliant," the description of her on the dust-jacket of "The Dollmaker," Harriette Arnow's new book—is a splendid example of a character doggedly in search of a novel. Gertie first turned up about a decade ago, and nothing Mrs. Arnow did during all those years to make her feel unwelcome had any effect.

Mrs. Arnow did some things that weren't exactly ladylike, either. She wrote a novel about Nunn Ballew—"Hunter's Horn"—even though Gertie had been around long before Nunn. That was in 1949. Next she signed to do a non-fiction book on the Cumberland River country. For any character of sensitivity, that would have been the *coup de grâce*; Gertie, however, like any self-respecting heroine of fiction, was undaunted. "I tried to shake her off," Mrs. Arnow candidly reminisced the other day at the family farm near Ann Arbor, Michigan, "for with this country living, two children, etc., there isn't much time for writing. But day in and day out Gertie awakened me at four in the morning—sometimes at three—and we worked until I had to wake my husband and children around seven. Fiction, once you start it, has such a horrible pull."

Mrs. Arnow, who was born in Kentucky in 1908, has always been a chronic but cheerful victim of horrible pull. "Always I was writing, submitting stuff, though I was thirteen before I had a type-writer," she confessed. She then added some autobiographical bits and pieces: She taught during part of the Thirties, quit. Went to Cincinnati, married. Wrote a great deal, sold—first to the little magazines, later a short novel, "Mountain Path." Her husband, on the staff of the *Detroit Times*, helps her in her writing, discussing characters, typing manuscript, and finding misspellings. Nowadays, with Gertie between covers at last, Mrs. Arnow has time to garden, chauffeur the kids to school, and sleep uninterruptedly.

—BERNARD KALB.