

In Our Readers' Opinion

A Criticism from Hungary

This month our Readers' Opinion Department is given over in its entirety to a thorough-going appraisal of THE MERCURY from behind the Iron Curtain. It originally appeared September 27, 1951, in Budapest in the Irodalmi Ujság (Literary News), the official publication of the Magyar Írók Szövetségének (Hungarian Writer's Union). This specimen of Communist invective was picked up and translated by Robert Meisner.

THE EDITORS

THE AMERICAN MERCURY is one of the most influential periodicals in the United States. It is by no means a comic book or a scandal sheet whose cover is disgraced with pictures of nude prostitutes or bloody gangster heroes. It has a conservative appearance — completely opposite to the American taste.

In the August issue, the latest to reach us, THE MERCURY openly states on page 124: "THE MERCURY is not written and edited for the people. The people don't read it. It is written for those few who prefer to think." Obviously THE MERCURY is

the journal for the cream of the American elite whose members not only despise all other nations but turn their backs in open disgust on their own unprivileged brothers, the American people.

Let's take a better look at this noble organ of those cornerstones of American culture, the drawing rooms of Washington and New York. The first article is entitled "Homosexuality in American Culture," and the table of contents lists such other features as these: "Gangsterism in Night Clubs," in which a famous singer by the name of Frank Sinatra reports "confidentially" on how he was started on his career by a group of gangsters; "In the Chains of Alcoholism," in which Armand Kashmanian, a Chicago criminal now serving a 15-year sentence, offers a colorful "psychological" essay on the development of his personality; and "Wolves and Night Flies," which describes the life of American youth in Greenwich Village.

Then what do Americans call pornography and filthy literature,

the reader might ask, if THE MERCURY, which opposes filth, looks like this? And yet its editors are correct: THE MERCURY is not an average publication. It is the best expression of American culture! It's Truman himself and what he stands for! The culture represented by THE MERCURY is as rotten, corrupt, and filthy as the culture of Hitler or Mussolini or Horthy. THE MERCURY is a repetition of the loud-mouthed, bragging fascistic publications; and it is more hypocritical, because in America the garbage dump is covered with the white veils of Puritanism, snobbish pretense, and limitless lies. Hitler burned books, but in America the progressive writer simply could never find a publisher.

Goering used to brag that he instinctively reached for a gun when he heard the word "cultured." The Goerings of the U. S. A. are more refined; they respect "culture" and over its slain body they make mournful speeches in defense of "human rights" and "Western culture." The Nazis in their ecstasy virtually glorified their own rottenness; THE MERCURY fights against homosexuality, uncovers gangsterism, and becomes alarmed at the moral depravation of American youth caused by narcotics, prostitution, and Hollywood. THE MERCURY is not ashamed to admit that only those young writers succeed who submit themselves to the unnatural desires of publishers.

It is indeed a disgusting, nauseating, inhuman, and rotten world we see looking down from the high moral pedestal of THE AMERICAN MERCURY. But the "sharp attack" it launches against evil is merely the peacock feather of the Roman patricians: it only prompts the comfortably reclining "people of culture" to vomit so that they can develop an even keener appetite for eating on with snobbish indifference and a clear conscience. The critics, reporters, essayists, and short story writers of THE MERCURY are the exact Broadway replicas of Boccaccio's jolly monks who insisted on learning everything from the confessing sinners, down to the juiciest little details, as the price of absolution and salvation.

LITERARY CRITICISM, too, has a place in THE MERCURY. Ralph de Toledano, a true gangster of journalism whom we have never heard of before, assures himself a prominent position on the black list of future war criminals with an article which calls attention of the authorities to the fact that in the past year several literary critics have dared to write occasional objective, approving reviews of progressive books. He calls those reviewers who criticized or neglected anti-Soviet books the Gravediggers of America.

And, also, as befits a significant periodical, THE MERCURY takes a look around the world. One article

describes how the American way of life is being born in Berlin; another is a satire, "How to Get Along in Mexico," by a decadent French writer; a third one deals with the Italian cultural problem — "That Lousy Spaghetti"; and the fourth is from a novel, "By The Waters of the Danube," the story of former counts and princes trying to adjust themselves in Budapest to the new world of the Soviet Union.

But business is business even for a magazine published for residents of the ivory tower. So the last article deals with Harry S. Truman, of whom it conclusively and provably states that (1) he is a notorious liar; (2) in 1922 he went bankrupt without paying his bills, causing his mother and brother to refuse to lend him any money; and (3) he is dishonest. We also find that a previous issue has published more details of Truman's personal life, and that it not only sold out but in some places people paid four times the regular price to get it; the White House itself ordered all U. S. attorneys to buy up available copies, using public funds. Not for purposes of prosecution, of course. Beyond the 138,000 copies already sold, *THE MERCURY* counts on one million additional people to buy reprints of the Truman article.

All this about Truman, of course, is a special treat for the refined readers of *THE MERCURY*. "Why should we waste our valuable time

reading about untalented gangsters," they ask, "when we have the juiciest scandals and the most fascinating gangsters in the White House?"

SUCH is the elite publication of U. S. culture in August 1951. The highest-ranking Yankee lords may, indeed, be proud of themselves. They are not like the millions of unfortunate, misled, physically and emotionally crippled American workers. These elite are not selling dope, they don't have to sing in nightclubs, their daughters don't have to sell themselves as do the daughters of the workers, and no one meddles in their affairs.

The readers of *THE MERCURY* are above all that. They know that a seething swamp is bubbling around them, and while they moan reverently and painfully about corruption, they wade happily in it themselves, like pigs in filthy wallows. "Our America is sinful but it's good for us," they shout, and "we are determined to defend this way of life against 'Red propaganda' even if it costs millions of workers their lives."

Dante in his poetic dream banished sinful, immoral criminals to the deepest recesses of hell. The people, with the inspiration of the Soviet Union, are building sufficient strength today so that they can banish the editors of *THE AMERICAN MERCURY* to a latrine in the inferno of history. MIKLOS VASARHELYI

A doctor asks:

HOW ARE YOU?

MAX JACOBSON, M.D.

ACCORDING TO SOME anonymous wit, a bore is the kind of person who, when you ask him how he is, tells you. In the ordinary world, there is nothing more dispiriting than a lengthy detailed account of the ailments of a casual acquaintance. There is no more pathetic sight at a party than a reluctant listener trapped in a corner by a voluble hypochondriac or even a genuine invalid. The average man has all the medical complexities he can handle in the health problems of himself and his immediate family. Symptoms that would fascinate a medical man leave him as cold as stone, whereas he will respond warmly to any social topic from the amours of Hollywood stars to the zigzags of his alma mater's fullback.

But the doctor, in his office at

Max Jacobson lives and practices medicine in New York City. When pressed, he modestly describes himself as a "specialist" in general practice.

least, is an entirely different sort of individual. An endless recital of complaints and groans, aches, pains, twinges and tics, is as familiar and engrossing music to his ears as the tuning up of an orchestra to a conductor. He is not only willing to listen, but deeply grateful for any information his patients can give him about their physical and mental condition. Unfortunately, the number of people who can be trusted to tell the truth, when the doctor asks them how they are, is minimal. Scarcely one person in ten is able to give a straightforward, intelligent report on his health. As a result most practitioners must learn not only to interpret physical signs, but the ordinary speech of people, to find out what lies behind the garbled, confused, grudging, or garrulous responses he receives when he begins probing verbally into the condition of a patient.

Thus, when the doctor asks the simplest and most common of all