

"Untiring Fighter for Human Rights"

SIR: Ten years ago, in the late summer of 1933, I happened to stay at the famous Czech spa of Marienbad whence I had moved from Vienna, expecting my native country, hapless Austria, to be annexed by Nazi Germany "without the firing of a single shot." At Marienbad, however, which is not far from the German frontier, there existed some doubt as to the "peacefulness" of the Nazi methods, since one of Germany's outstanding exiles had just been assassinated there by German gunmen.

The Jewish cemetery where the murdered philosopher was buried in a grave of honor was surrounded by police. Significantly one of the wreaths deposited on his grave bore the inscription: "To Theodor Lessing, untiring fighter for human rights, from a friend, in the name of millions of Germans."

Lessing was hated by all German chauvinists chiefly because, in 1925, he had warned the nation against electing that dull reactionary, Field Marshall von Hindenburg, President of the Reich, foreseeing that this senile fool would be a tool in the hands of the rapidly growing anti-republican, anti-democratic forces eager to overthrow the republic. In the eight years to follow, Lessing wrote many brilliant articles attacking the New Barbarians.

To the emigrés from Central Europe the late Professor Lessing has become a symbol of their resistance to the powers of darkness. Regrettably, his work is little known in this country. Lessing, who held both Ph.D. and M.D. degrees, taught philosophy at the Technical College of his native city, Hanover, from 1908 to 1925 when he was forced to retire on account of his Hindenburg articles. He was very active as a social reformer, fighting against state-controlled prostitution and alcoholism, and for woman suffrage, clothing reform, and international good-will. He published learned philosophical studies as well as fine romantic prose poems, but his fame rests chiefly on his large, profound, though popularly written books "Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen" and "Europa und Asien."

The first book is a frontal attack on historiography, clerical, nationalist, Marxist, or otherwise, a sincere endeavor to destroy historical legends and contortions of truth. According to Lessing, the purpose of history is to convey meaning to that which in and by itself is without sense. The widespread belief that history is a true mirror of sense and reason, of progress and justice, is wrong. If there is a relation of cause and effect in the process of history, this causality usually differs from that other "caus-



"No, he's not writing a book. He's holding up his end of a literary feud that began in 1903."

ality" which is a *post festum* product of the historian's own wishful thinking.

The second book is also an attack, namely on intellectualism, or rather on the cold merciless rationalizing type of intellect prevailing in Europe, as opposed to the tender, noble soul of Asia. Man, alienated from Mother Nature, ruthless, egotistical, ugly, has lost himself and is headed for chaos. It is to be deplored that Occidental man had diluted and desecrated the heritage of the Orient, thus depriving himself of beauty, truth, and nobility and turning into a sort of shrewd gorilla.

Since Lessing's books are, of course, *verboten* in Germany and none of his writings available in an English translation, it might be a good idea if some American publisher would pay attention to the treasures hidden in the late Lessing's literary work.

ALFRED WERNER.

New York, N. Y.

"Citizen Tom Paine"

SIR: I respect Janet Deitrick's independence in protesting against Howard Fast's "Citizen Tom Paine." I can chuckle over her paraphrase, "erudite reviewers . . . praise the lie and pass the information." It must be admitted that Fast's book does not agree in every detail with the authoritative biographies of Thomas Paine. But I am not offended by any "stench" from Mr. Fast's book. I do not agree that it presents a "shamelessly false" portrait of Thomas Paine.

I do not believe that Paine was a character out of Parson Weems, re-

fusing to drink a single toast until the age of fifty-four. (By the way, should not a truly scientific historian tell us the month, the day, the hour, and minute when Citizen Tom drank this toast?)

Critic Deitrick, like a professional historian, has gone to some trouble to find specific inaccuracies in "Citizen Tom Paine." But is she not refusing to see the forest because of a few particular trees? The total impression of the character, Citizen Tom, is what should be judged. The concept of Paine formed by Howard Fast's book is that of a man who had experienced enough of oppression and tyranny and special privilege that he would say, "There are some situations for which no language is too strong!" Gin Row in London helps to explain his character. The total impression of this book is not one of which Mr. Fast need be ashamed.

Mr. Fast's finest ability is that which enables him successfully to create characters who think and act and live. The critics who have praised this book have wisely ignored such inaccuracies of detail as are present.

If I have any quarrel with Howard Fast it is on the grounds that he is viewing American history as he wishes it to be. Can he point to recent American history and show that its current is revolutionary and progressive? Or is it growing more traditional and reactionary? Even if this pessimistic view should be nearer the truth, the book "Citizen Tom Paine" has value as a positive effort to keep the spirit of progress alive in America.

DAVID K. BERNINGHAUSEN.

Cedar Falls, Iowa.

ONCE EVERY SIX MONTHS or so, Henry Commager consents to leave the Columbia campus long enough to come downtown and lunch with me. We dispose of various world problems with the soup course, and settle down to a really serious discussion of just how terrible the next year's Columbia football team is likely to be. Last week we talked about Columbia's funny paper too—the *Jester*. . . . Morrie Ryskind was the editor of *Jester* back in 1917, but got the heave-ho for printing an editorial that displeased President Nicholas Murray Butler. I was only a Sophomore at the time, but inherited Morrie's job because there was nobody else around to take it. I ran into trouble with my very first issue. The dance craze of the moment was the "shimmy," and our full-page frontispiece showed a young couple shimmying violently, with an English lord watching in amazement from a ringside table. "What do you think of that dance?" asked the lord's companion, to which he replied, "All H'I can sye is, H'I 'opes 'e marries the gal." . . . The day after *Jester* appeared on the stands, I was summoned to meet President Butler—the only time I ever saw him in my college career. "Mr—er, Cerf," he pointed out coldly, "it might interest you to know in the first place that English lords usually do not speak in a Cockney accent." This put me on the ropes immediately. And a gentle reminder of what had happened to my predecessor sufficed to conclude the interview, and send me out vowing to turn *Jester* into a little brother of the *St. Nicholas Magazine*. . . . Shortly thereafter the whole staff was inducted into the army. Judging by what we got away with after we came back to college, President Butler had stopped reading *Jester* entirely. . . . George Macy inherited the editorship when I graduated, and was followed in turn by Corey Ford. . . . *Jester's* greatest advertising manager of those years was Horace Manges, who is counsel for several publishing houses and important authors today. Manges not only shattered precedent by ending the year with a credit balance, but personally bagged two typewriters, a case of Bevo, two dozen Arrow Shirts, and a carload of Horlick's Malted Milk Tablets in exchange for advertising space. . . . Henry Commager is responsible for all these reminiscences. He is also responsible (with Allan Nevins) for the best short "History of the United States" on the market.

Little, Brown publish the cloth-bound edition; Pocket Books have sold a half million copies of the reprint. . . . Henry says he won't come downtown again until I've read Rebecca West's "The Judge" and Henry De Morgan's "Joseph Vance." I have my order in for copies. . . .

FRANK LUTHER MOTT, Dean of the University of Missouri's School of Journalism, is at work on the most comprehensive history of the best-selling books in America that has ever been attempted. It is scheduled for publication in the Fall of 1944, by Macmillan, under the title of "Golden Multitudes." Dean Mott's list, based on a sale of half a million copies and more since 1880, and on a sale equivalent to one percent of the total population of the country before that date, includes over 200 titles, although it omits Bibles, textbooks, almanacs, cookbooks, and manuals. The list is headed by Michael Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom," published in 1662, and concludes at the moment with Wendell Willkie's "One World." There will be other titles added before the book is ready for publication; the powerful assistance of the Book-of-the-Month Club and low-priced reprint editions put many more titles into the golden half-million class than was possible in earlier years. Typical examples are: "Grapes of Wrath," "For Whom the Bell Tolls," "Mrs. Miniver," "Berlin Diary," "The Moon Is Down,"

"Song of Bernadette," "See Here, Private Hargrove," "Guadalcanal Diary," and "The Human Comedy." . . .

READERS who are still goggle-eyed over Margaret Mitchell's assertion that "being the author of 'Gone with the Wind' is a full-time job," are referred to a story about Harriet Beecher Stowe, told by Annie Fields in "Authors and Friends": "A visitor to Mrs. Stowe remarked that he wanted to shake the hand that had written 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' 'No,' she said, 'this hand did not write 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'" 'What?' shouted the visitor in surprise. 'You didn't write it?' 'No,' replied Mrs. Stowe gently, 'God wrote it. I merely wrote his dictation!' " . . . Ever since a bemused admirer assured Dale Warren that he is the spitting image of Vincent Sheean, America's handsomest correspondent, fellow Houghton Mifflinites are absolutely desperate. . . . A group of designers, publishers, and printers stationed for the duration in or about Washington's Pentagon Building have organized an informal book club, which meets once a month. Observed at a recent session were Colonel John T. Winterich, Lester Douglas, Lt. Daniel Bianchi (son of Updike's partner), Joseph Blumenthal of the Spiral Press, James D. Hart and Carl Wheat of California, James Oliver Brown, and Edmund B. Thompson, of Hawthorne House. . . .

SOME TIME AGO Russel Crouse promised to write a foreword for a reprint edition of "Life with Father." Pressed for delivery of same, he wired "My understanding was that this foreword was to be a joint contribution of Lindsay and Crouse. Now you'll have to wait until I get Lindsay in a joint!"



"I just thought of a swell answer to give the sergeant on that argument we had, and I'm glad I didn't think of it sooner."