than the other nine characters combined. But that ain't the way *they* heard it; for they often referred to her as the dumb *shickseh*. The other nice thing I learned from Margaret was to enjoy Henry James; and stop snickering — have you any idea what was crammed down our collective craw in 1910?

Then there was the theater — that was an open book to the characters; especially to Martin, who taught English literature in high school. He was supposed to saturate the gangling gumps with Shakespeare and the Restoration dramatists. But what does he do on his nights off? He makes like a long-hair violinist sneaking off to a jam session. He sidles in on all the big Broadway hits. And how does Martin feel about Shakespeare? "Anybody who compares him with Shaw is a moron." I'm not kiddin' yer, Buster: in them days most of the "intelligentsia" held that opinion. It was *le dernier cri;* and for a good reason: Shaw was a Socialist crying his heart out for the common man, while Shakespeare was a no-good renegade who had actually felt sorry for royalty. Obviously these characters played GBS for straight, place and show.

And what odds do you think Bookie Shaw was making on himself? Ten, six, and two he'd have Shakespeare walking the plank backwards. And to prove that he goosed the Bard into the rain barrel he wrote that B. O. gusher, "Caesar and Cleopatra." It still goes big —especially with the Hollywood elite seeking victuals 'twixt pix. As for me — a dumb cluck of nineteen — I concluded that if Shaw was in Shakespeare's league then Edgar Guest had swallowed Dante, and Aristotle was a bum pitcher's batting average.

Now, I want you to know that I told all this to Martin. He musta bin astonished, for he sayeth not. But Louise? She throws the manifesto at me — like as if I was a crum bum. Too bad I had not yet run across "The Devil's Dictionary," for she was at that moment "A gift of the gods entailing virtue without humility." What she said to me you should never say to your dog.

MARTIN had come up on the train with Louise. They arrived before the Fourth, and were sticking around until Labor Day. They could: Martin had a ten-week vacation with pay; while Louise was a collector for a well-known charity, and this sojourn was strictly business. Margaret, however, had knocked off a hospital case of six weeks straight, including Sundays, and she was sore because the stint brought no tip. She said she came up for a month "to let off steam."

Then there was Sergei, of whom more anon. He was a dentist who took a summer-long vacation on the installment plan: he came up Thursday nights and left Monday mornings.

I couldn't figure the Martin-Louise combination. They exuded less sex between them than a clothespin. I once talked to Margaret about it in the impenetrable gloom of an extra-inky night.

"I know Martin for years," she said, "and his whole family — even his sister the witch. The house was lifted out of Mother Goose: Martin hasn't yet been told the facts of his own life."

"What about Louise? Doesn't she go for him?"

"With what?" she asked. Margaret shivered closer in the gloom. "I once asked her about Martin and she said he did not stir her. Incidentally, I also asked him about her and he said it was a beautiful friendship because it was platonic."

Platonic was a great cover-all in 1910.

"Do you think anybody could stir her?" I asked.

"No, she just ain't woman."

It was strange conversation, in 1910, coming from a "nice" woman. But Margaret was Margaret. However, Louise's "strict upbringing" was no barrier to discussions on sex. Louise did it in a "nice" way and only about art — especially literature. The four-letter words were treated to polysyllabic transitions. Incidentally, all the characters discussed sex in polysyllabics, even when the dames were not around; the men never once used a four-letter word as an interjection in my presence. But those were the days when "nuts" was a shocking word . . . as horrible as "spit."

THESE characters were strictly playing house. Their palaver was for puberty — including the perennial Martin and Louise. It might have been for me also, had I not mavericked my childhood into a slugfest. When you keep running away from home as soon as the cops bring you back, and work sixteen hours a day in the scullery of a tramp steamer before you hit seventeen — you learn fast. And one of the first things you learn is not to believe in state or private cornucopias; for the best they give you is a sliver of what they slice off your own hide.

My Old Man he comes up to the country one week end. He gets an earful of the characters' palaver and he says, "They're kids playing grocery store with fake money." He passes Martin off as "the decaying head of a celery stalk." As for Sergei, my Old Man posilutely thinks he is fascinatin.' He calls Sergei the "lost *Luftmensch*"; perhaps because Sergei keeps harping upon the coming ambiguous "Revolutzee." Indeed, my Old Man hollers he heard all that Revolutzee stuff in Russia as a child and that most of it came from "well-meaning idiots like that shrimp," and he is pointing at Martin.

Sergei claimed that when he went home to visit his mother in Odessa he fought in the aborted revolution of 1905. His face took on a beatific glow as he exclaimed: "My old classmates were behind the barricades, and that's where I belonged!" I couldn't picture it. His lean and hungry look libeled the generous portions of pot roast and chicken he stowed away at the table.

He cocked his head as he talked or listened, and it made me think of a crow in a field with one furtive eye on the farmer. Even his long, angular and slightly turned-in nose reminded me of a crow's beak. Smallpox had pitted his face and cruelly condemned his eyes to different planes; and they were so close together that you could have speared both eyeballs with a single jab of a slightly angled salad fork. Moreover, Louise didn't like Sergei because he had fox ears, and that meant that he was not to be trusted because he had no lobes; and all people without lobes couldn't be honest if they tried. No, I couldn't imagine Sergei with any weapon deadlier than a dentist's probe.

In the impenetrable gloom Margaret once broke the mood with a burlesque of Sergei exhorting on the coming Revolution. She cruelly mimicked his rolling Russian R's and the nasal yam, with such rubbish as, "When the R-R-R-Revolutzee comes, even the poor-r-r will wear chest protectors."

And yet, despite his strange make-up and his politico-evangelism, there was something sweet and soft about Sergei. He humbly admitted that he had hated to give up his Greek-Catholic Church — that it had been the pivot of his family for many generations. He loved the country because it was mystical, he said; that is why he loved the smell of harvest, and the manure in the fields, and even the little field mice. No, Sergei definitely was not ugly. Your tremors at the sight or sound of him ceased after the initial horror of his very being receded from your consciousness. Sometimes, as I listened to his circuitous talk circuitously routed to me, I would say that there was even something beautiful about Sergei. I once asked Margaret if she also saw him that way.

"Are you kidding? Let me ask you: would you marry a lady with a face like a nightmare just because she could do beautiful embroidery? Even his wife Gruscha doesn't like him, because if she did they would now have a houseful of kids."

"What makes you think Sergei would like that?"

"Because he loves kids. Why do you think he buys them ice cream sandwiches?"

It was so. He looked at them, when they passed, as a leashed dog looks at his departing master. I thought I would take it up with Sergei — perhaps because I was too young to be anything but fresh.

Sergei looked at me obliquely. Like a blue heron in the marsh when it hears an alien noise. His eyes welled. "I always wanted children . . . all my life."

"Is your wife barren?" I asked.

"No — and I'm not sterile; because she has had four abortions."

"Then why?"

"Because Gruscha and I had made a pact before marriage that we would not have any children until the Revolutzee."

THOSE were the pioneers—the loins which produced our commissars of tomorrow. Odd and unbelievable, you might say, that they have inherited the earth and made it a slaughterhouse. But don't let your naiveté get you down; if you believed that the Martins, the Louises and the Sergeis couldn't hurt a fly, you were merely following an historical pattern. The early Christians were very meek and they talked like Sergei; but less than a century after they were being thrown to the lions they had Constantine in *hoc signo*. Incidentally, who could have been nicer or more intelligent — or what possessed more integrity — than the authors who wrote "Malleus Maleficarum" (alternately called "The Witches' Hammer" and "Inquisitor's Manual"), which became "the handbook from which they [the Inquisitors] plied their tortured victims with questions and were able to extract such confessions as they desired; by a strange perversion these admissions, wrung from their victims by rack or thumb-screw, were described as voluntary."

The quote is from Enc. Brit. 11th Edition — and incidentally doesn't that sound like the purge trials in Russia? And speaking of the Bolsheviks, during the twenties the liberals told us that butter wouldn't melt in Lenin's mouth. Lenin liked to pet kittens. He liked to listen to Beethoven.

And don't forget that Himmler was a school teacher also.

From Our Readers

Our Foreign Policy: Needless Blunders

The Great Debate and the MacArthur inquiry have taken both a backward and a forward look — as is proper. President Truman points to successes — terminating the Berlin blockade, thwarting Communist control of Greece, upsetting the Soviet timetable, etc. Successes of a kind these have been. But would the international situation have descended to this perilous condition requiring these costly and bloody countermeasures if the Administration had pursued, from mid-World War II to, say, 1947, different policies and acted upon information and analysis which was *then* available?

It is not fair to judge government officials in terms of hindsight. Yet there were many people who knew what Russia's postwar plans were and tried to do something about them.

Before the war's end was in sight, the Chamber of Commerce of the United States hired a Russian expert to advise it on Soviet Union foreign policy. Shortly thereafter he brought to my desk the names of about ten people who, he said, would take over Austria when the Soviet Army moved into that country. I said, "What do you mean, take over — who are these people — where are they?"

He said they were Austrian Communists then living and working in Moscow. He even identified each individual in terms of the specific task he would perform back in Austria: transportation, communication and propaganda, fuel and mining, police, etc.

But more significant, he informed me that there was in Moscow a similar committee for every Euro-