# "Books are Weapons in the War of Ideas"

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*This panel discussion on books in wartime was held under the auspices of the Council on Books in Wartime and The New York Times, in The New York Times Hall, Wednesday evening, May 13, 1942. Members of the panel were:*

*Clifton Fadiman, Chairman*

*William Rose Benet*

*Major Alexander de Seversky*

*Lieutenant Colonel Joseph I. Greene*

*John Kieran*

*Eric Knight*

*Paul Schubert*

*Rex Stout*

# "Books are Weapons in the War of Ideas"

A PANEL DISCUSSION

*Chairman Fadiman:* Ladies and Gentlemen: This evening is the second, as I understand it, in a trilogy of evenings, the idea being to discuss from a number of viewpoints the place of books in the present conflict. What kind of books, I imagine, will be defined by some of the speakers.

"Books are weapons in the war of ideas," it says here. As to whether books are good weapons in the war of ideas, or feeble weapons in the war of ideas, is something perhaps that might be discussed this evening by the speakers.

We owe this evening to the combined efforts of a large group of men and women connected in one way or another with the book business. Some of them are book sellers; some of them are publishers; some of them are reviewers; some of them are writers. All of them have an interest in books, both a specific commercial interest, in some cases, and a general professional interest in all cases.

A large number of speakers—seven, I believe—have been gathered here this evening to express various points of view with respect to the question of books.

I do not want to take up your time by keeping you from hearing them, but there are one or two things perhaps that I might say just as a way of defining our terms. In the first place, as I understand it, the discussion tonight will center in books, not in words. There is a very great difference. Books are words bound in a particular form, and sold—usually at too high a price, to far too few groups of people. Words, on the other hand, are a very different thing. You hear words over the radio freely; you read words in the pages of great newspapers like The New York Times (whose guests we are tonight) and also in the pages of the Chicago Tribune. Those are words that cost very little.

Now, it may be that words in general are weapons in the war of ideas, and that books, which are a particular form words take, are not. But I hope the speakers this evening will speak of books.

If they are going to speak of words in general, then they will have to speak of words in newspapers, words spoken in taverns and other low places (which are often very important), words in magazines, words used over the air.

Each of the gentlemen, I think, with the exception of myself at this table is an author. I am not an author, I am a book reviewer. The other gentlemen are authors. They write books, they tell people things. People who are specialists often get the feeling that their specialty is enormously important. If you go over to talk to the Theatre Wing, as I did two or three weeks ago, you will get the impression that actresses and actors can win the war. If you talk to the writers of books, you get the impression that books can win the war. And, I imagine, Colonel Greene this evening will know from his experience with other military men that those who are in the Tank Corps are probably of the opinion that tanks are tremendously important. If you talk to men in the Air Corps, they are of the opinion that airplanes are most important. That is the specialist's viewpoint.

It is naturally reasonable to assume that we are interested in something (and all of those here tonight are interested in books) and that that particular thing is of vast importance. I do not know how important books are, but these seven gentlemen here tonight are going to tell us.

I happen to believe, personally, that words are not going to win this war. I have used too many of them too cheaply myself to have any too great respect for them. The only thing that will win the war—and this is not a military secret—is the killing of large numbers of Germans and Japanese. [*Applause*]

My own impression is that the people who do the actual killing are going to win the war for us on the main front. Nor do I think—and here I take issue with many of my colleagues who are of a more idealistic bent than I am—that telling the truth is going to win the war at all.

I do not believe that truth is necessarily stronger than untruth. I do not believe it will matter a darn when the bombs begin to drop on this city and on Detroit and on Chicago (not so bad, in that case) that the truth that we have told in this city or in Detroit, or in Chicago is going to help us under those circumstances.

I do not believe that "Truth crushed to earth will rise again" at all, unless the man who utters the truth is alive to make the truth rise again, and if enough of those truth-tellers are killed, and quickly, that truth will die.

There is one other thing that we might think of in defining our terms. Books, as I said at the beginning, are products. They are sold commercially at a price. Books run at a price from two dollars up to five dollars. Most people haven't got two dollars, and therefore most people do not read books.

In considering, therefore, the influence of books on the war in general, and on the minds of American citizens in general, remember that the very great majority of them never see a book unless they have inherited one from their fathers and mothers, and therefore, that the influence that books have on people like those who are gathered here this evening may be incalculably large and may extend to only a small fringe of the population of this country.

In other words, books, if they are to be made a really terrific weapon in the war of ideas, in my opinion, ought to be given away, just as words on the air are more or less given away. Books should be made a commodity, a utility. That does not mean we are going to do it. Some of my best friends are publishers, and I know that that is never going to be done. But a real weapon is a weapon that you do not have to buy. When a soldier is inducted into the Army he is given a rifle;

he does not have to buy a rifle. If books are to be made real weapons, I know they cannot be given away but perhaps they should be made much cheaper than they are.

Well, that is plenty from me.

The evening's program is divided into two parts. We are going to have a number of very informal talks from these seven gentlemen, who will speak from three to ten minutes. I shall ask each of them not to speak longer than ten minutes. After they have finished we are going to have a round table discussion—or is this a round table? It is part of an ellipse; an elliptical discussion, then. [*Laughter*] But whatever it is, I am going to ask a number of questions, some of which will come out in the course of the evening, some of which are merely noted down for me to ask, and any of the gentlemen here may answer or try to answer any of the questions.

In this particular case, Mr. Kieran has a great advantage, because he has had experience along this line. [*Applause*] But I will try to preserve a balance so that everybody will have a fair chance.

We are going to begin tonight by listening to a man whose voice most of you, I am sure, have heard on the radio. He is a very well-known radio commentator on naval affairs, the author of a number of books, most of them dealing with naval matters. His latest is "Sea Power in Conflict." I think you know Paul Schubert, a graduate of Annapolis, has served as an officer for five years at sea before he devoted himself to being a writer. We are going to listen to Mr. Paul Schubert, who is an expert in two fields—first, he is a writer of books himself, and secondly, he knows something about the war. Mr. Paul Schubert! [*Applause*]

*Mr. Paul Schubert:* I have approached the question of books during wartime from two aspects; first, after the last war I wrote historical matters about the last war, and among matters, studied the books that were written during the war and got some perspective as to the approach they made to the war. Second, during the present war I have written one book, may possibly tackle another before the war is over, and have seen the thing from the inside of the problem of the author who must write a book while the war is on.

As to the question of giving books away, it is very notable that the book which has had the greatest single influence upon the course of the present war I think was not given away in a single instance, barring a few friends of the author. I am speaking about "Mein Kampf," which was a tremendously profitable venture for the man who put it out and saw that the book had the widest sale of any current book during our time.

"Mein Kampf" is a typical example of one form of book intended to promote military operations. The time of a war is only a time of fact, of details, of exact information to the generals who conduct the military operations. From the broader point of view, war is a time of passion, of emotions, of feelings of people who are willing to endure hardship in order to get an end, who spend their feelings as people in time of peace spend money.

When it comes to influencing those feelings, books, because of the solid reputation of the thing between covers as compared to a thing in newsprint or spoken over the air, have an air of authority that makes them very powerful weapons in the war of ideas.

In contrast to the approach of the totalitarian states which rigidly limit the ideas that are put out beween covers, democ-

racies have to approach a thing like war from exactly opposite points of view, and it is notable that the books which have been produced during the years since 1939 which are now coming out, represent the greatest possible diversity of opinion.

Those books argue passionately for a great variety of weapons, for a great variety of strategies, a great variety of ways to win the war, and out of that form in which it is presented to the limited audience that reads books, are then passed on by their wider influence through newspapers which they write and the radio programs which are put together and are then passed on to the mass audience in one way or another.

The books now being produced are a forum of ideas, passions and emotions which are very definitely playing a part, for better or for worse, in our conduct of the war this year. Education and information may be weak weapons but they are in many ways the best primary weapons that a democracy has, and if we can survive it will be by "jelling" the ideas current in a time of war and impressing them upon Congress, and in that way, by what we call "power politics" in a democratic sense, impressing them upon our leaders and getting done what we want done.

For that reason I think that, whether it is the best way or not, the way we have approached the problems of books in wartime is the only way possible for this country. And so far as I have seen in the course of the last two years, it is a way that is working out all right.

Thanks, very much! [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* I for one was delighted to hear Mr. Schubert say that if books are published, get Congress to read them. I had no idea that that was possible. I have not seen

very much indication that Congress in general reads books, shall we say, voraciously. [*Laughter*]

As for the sale of "Mein Kampf," that is perfectly true; it had an enormous sale, and still has, but not entirely of what you would call a voluntary nature. True, people can buy "Mein Kampf," but all of Germany is a sort of compulsory Book-of-the-Month Club—they sort of have to take it. [*Applause*]

We are going to listen next to one of our most distinguished poets and editors who has been connected for many years with the Saturday Review of Literature. He has written a great many books, many of them books of poetry, and this year one of his books, "Dust Which Is God" is the Pulitzer Prize Award.

We are going to listen to Mr .William Rose Benet! [*Applause*]

*Mr. William Rose Benet:* Ladies and Gentlemen: I take slight issue with the Chairman tonight in his remark about "truth crushed to earth." The winning of a war (and it has been going on since mankind first began) is always accomplished by weapons, by armies, and the best weapons known to man. At the same time, it seems to me that the truth is the most important thing in the world, and the thing that all writers should represent and try to arrive at.

Of course, as a famous English poet once said, "The truth is mighty and shall prevail, when none cares whether it prevail or not." But that is a rather skeptical attitude toward the truth.

In this particular war, it seems to me that truth is tremendously important. Naturally we will win the war by having the best fighting force. The United Nations will win it by being stronger than the Axis; but nevertheless, it is very important to

the writers, it seems to me, to keep before the public (and this is their chief function, as it seems to me, in this war) the truth as we see it, which I think we today see pretty clearly as opposed to the ideals of our enemies.

Hitler has been very frank in backing what he calls the "dynamic lie." The other day I spoke at West Point to the third class, and in that probably rather dull talk I nevertheless stressed this idea of dynamic democracy, and of them, as future officers in the United States Army, and all of us being together in the forces fighting for that particular thing.

In a way, it is a vague thought, I suppose. You have perfectly logical schemes worked out by the Communist party, for instance, and other political parties; but nevertheless, in general we are backing, and I think we are going to win for that very thing which can develop into something very remarkable —dynamic democracy.

But what I am chiefly supposed to speak on this evening, I think, is the role that verse might play, being a versifier. Poetry is a different thing, and you cannot write poems to order, as everybody knows. The poets of America can do a job for their country in various ways now. They cannot write poems to order, but they may be able to turn their gifts of versification into fields of propaganda as a side issue to their art, which may be very useful. Or they may go into the Army. That will depend upon their physique and their circumstances. [*Laughter*]

As for popular poems and their influence on people, we have an instance today in Mrs. Alice Duer Miller's poem, "The White Cliffs." Quite aside from your opinion as to whether that is great poetry or not, it is a poem that has had a great influence in this war. It has had a great influence for the simple reason that Mrs. Miller reflected in it the feelings of the major-

ity of people toward England, a country with whom in the past we have had our differences, but a country many of whose ideals we greatly respect. Mrs. Miller happened to say the whole thing in a compact form that most people agreed with. And it was necessary to say.

I myself got worked up during the time when I felt that it seemed that England really was in great danger of being invaded, and the great contribution that England has made to literature seemed in danger of being overwhelmed, and I wrote a short three verses called "Prayer for England," which Franklin P. Adams printed in his "Conning Tower." That happened to be picked up and printed or reprinted in England.

I do not defend it as a poem at all; it probably is a bad poem. But it happened to reflect the feelings that most people had about England at that time; for that reason it was quite widely read.

Now, that sort of thing where the versifier, we will say, can reflect the common feeling of the people toward an issue, is very valuable. They needn't call it poetry. There is a great wealth of heroic material appearing in the newspapers every day today. There is so much that poets as well as prose writers ought to be able to make use of it.

In time of war it has been proved that people turn to poetry, as was proved in the case of England when she was almost subject to invasion and was subject to terrific bombing. One member of a publishing firm over there told me that as never before they were buying books of poetry. That is because people turn to poetry for a sustaining and vitalizing influence in time of stress, and also for an emotional outlet.

As I say, poets can turn their gifts to writing verses for various parts of the war effort. Poets can do all sorts of things.

We have an instance of an outstanding poet in charge of the OFF, and also head of the Congressional Library, in Archibald MacLeish, who is doing a great deal for his country. Poets are needed today over the radio, and can do a great deal in that way.

My brother, Stephen Vincent Benet, has done a great deal in writing sketches for the radio as propaganda for this war. I believe in that not as a side issue, because it is very important, but as an adjunct to their regular work, the inspiration of which cannot be controlled; I believe that poets can do a great deal in writing and in radio work, dramatic work, to help our present war effort.

Thank you! [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* Thank you, Mr. Benet. Remember that when we thought of this little discussion I said, "Let's keep in mind the fact that books and words are sometimes not the same thing." In the case of "The White Cliffs," by Alice Duer Miller, there you have an example of a book which was pretty influential as a book, which was bought by a couple of hundred thousand people who amount to an infinitesimally small fraction of the citizenry of this country, but the real effect began to be noticed when Lynn Fontanne read it over the radio.

When you can carry words to a mass medium, I think they begin to have a tremendous influence, as has been the case, as Mr. Benet reminds us, with some of the moving sketches and plays of Mr. Stephen Vincent Benet.

The next speaker is a man of action, a kind of poet of the air, one might say, because some of the machines that he has invented have a grace and a poetry about them which perhaps even a regular poet might envy. Major de Seversky is an American citizen who was born in the homeland of one of our Allies,

Russia, although at that time it had a somewhat different set-up. [*Laughter*]

Major de Seversky was one of the greatest of Russia's aces in the last war, and many would consider him to be the greatest. He came here at the end of the war and has remained here ever since. He became a United States citizen in 1927 and was commissioned Major in the Air Corps Specialists Reserve in 1928.

You know he has been responsible for some of the most important improvements in the design of airplanes and in the design of the bomb-sight of modern times. Major de Seversky is particularly qualified to speak to us on the role of books in wartime, because he is the author of a book, a recent one, which unquestionably has had a great influence on people's thinking. I am referring, of course, to "Victory Through Air Power," and I am most happy to introduce Major Alexander de Seversky! [*Applause*]

*Major Alexander de Seversky:* Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: I am flattered and quite a bit embarrassed to find myself in company with so many famous authors. On the whole, I should say I am more embarrassed than flattered. In fact, I shall feel a lot better if I emphasize at the outset that I am here as an aeronautical engineer and student of aerial strategy rather than an authority on war books. The only book with which I am thoroughly familiar, I am sorry to say, is the one I wrote myself —"Victory Through Air Power." [*Laughter*]

Books like mine, like Mr. Schubert's and Colonel Greene's and the like, raise the whole issue of whether we are justified in publicly discussing questions of strategy in time of war. There are military men in high places who resent such books. Strategy is the domain of experts or specialists or professionals only, something that the public should be taught to accept

respectfully without questions. I am convinced that their viewpoint is a mistaken one.

I believe that the public interest in the question of larger strategy, the public excitement over new weapons and new methods of conducting war, show a wholesome eagerness to take part in the war. It seems that the American people are anxious to participate not merely with their bodies and their money but with their minds.

The old division between civilians and combatants has been wiped out. The advent of air power has stirred the entire nation into a three-dimensional front, and every resident of the nation into a direct participant. The public not only has a right to know the main lines of strategy, but it has a duty to understand those lines and to contribute their brainpower to the total effort.

I happened to be in France just before the war started. The nation was blindly proud of its brilliant General Staff as a kind of hangover from the previous war. Those few who dared to criticize the defensive strategy represented by the Maginot Line were considered heretics and meddlers.

By this time we know that those who looked with fear and misgivings on the German Luftwaffe and the German Panzer Divisions were closer to the reality of modern warfare. We know by now how much better off France might have been if they had been encouraged to probe and to criticize the strategy in the military domain.

When it comes to new weapons which revolutionize the science of war, like aviation, intelligent laymen are often in a better position to judge and to act than the professional military men. The civilian at least has nothing to unlearn; he can follow the logic and the common sense of a situation without having to jump the hurdles of prejudice, inhibitions, lifelong

training and older methods, and a natural desire to save face and prestige for an older service.

In our great democracy, I believe an enlightened public opinion on the broader strategic problems is absolutely necessary. The official information, after all, is one-sided in the sense that it is always an education in the course now being followed. We must have unofficial and unorthodox presentation of the facts so that the people can have both sides of the great military questions before them.

In relation to air power specifically, it is a fact that public opinion is away ahead of official military opinion. The ordinary outsider sees the obvious absurdity, for instance, of leaving our air forces divided and without unity of command. The layman senses that the struggle for command of the skies is the most important factor in modern warfare. Unlike the orthodox military men, he does not try to squeeze the new facts into the old strategic forms. On the contrary, he wants to give the new weapon unlimited scope for development, and so if there is one idea that I can hope to contribute to this weighty discussion it is this, that the American people should be encouraged to think strategy, to talk strategy and to understand the war effort.

In total war there is no place for the mystery and technical hokus-pokus that used to surround war. Every American is a participant. Every American should comprehend what he is doing and why.

War books, therefore, are a genuine consideration and contribution to the total war enterprise. They can provide additional leverage in obtaining what all of us in our different ways are after, a decisive victory and a durable peace. [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* Thank you, Major de Seversky.

I introduce the next speaker with particular pleasure, per-

sonal pleasure, because without him I would be unable to make a living. [*Laughter and applause*] Of course, I think that is a very small contribution to the war effort, I will admit. [*Laughter*] I think you all know of whom I am speaking. He makes a living, such as it is, by working for The New York Times as their sports expert, and of course you know him on one of the finest radio programs. This program you can hear every Friday night at eight o'clock on the Red Network. [*Laughter*]

But I think that Mr. Kieran is not here either as a general expert or as a sports expert tonight. I should like to introduce him as a man who knows more about literature than practically any professional litterateur I have ever met. Mr. John Kieran! [*Applause*]

*Mr. John Kieran:* Thank you, Kip. Ladies and Gentlemen: I think the best thing for me to do would be to reach over and get Major de Seversky's speech and read it over again. [*Applause*]

With regard to this problem of books in war, I think that is like getting equipment for war. We have so many different branches of the service. In the first place you have the Army and the Navy and the Air Corps. Then we have Artillery and Communications, and then the Mechanized Division and the Cavalry, Machine Gun, and all that.

You give them different ammunition and different weapons, and I think you must do the same with books. There are certain books that you want for certain kinds of people, and other books you want for other kinds of people. Some kinds of books you want for the men in the services, and other books you want for civilians, and the background.

I believe that books like Colonel Kernan's book, "Defense Will Not Win the War," is a very good book for a certain part

of the population to take up. I believe that Sam Small, the "Flying Yorkshireman," is another good book for another large part of the population to read. I believe Bob Considine has just written a paper-covered book selling for fifty cents which is called "MacArthur the Magnificent," and if I had any influence in this country I would have a million copies of that printed and given away.

I think it would be a great thing for all the young people of this country to read that book, because it would give everybody a lift in these times.

I believe that poetry can help to get us set for the job we have to do. I do not think I would hand out Wordsworth at this time, I think I would rather have Kipling. That is what I mean.

We have a task to do. Now, if you had a wagon and were hauling a load (and we are all liable to be having wagons pretty soon), and you got a dry axle and were stuck every few minutes, and you had to wait until that cooled before you could go on, if a man came along with a bag of pure gold with him, it would do you no good at all. But if a fellow came along with a small fifteen-cent box of axle grease, that would be great, and you would get going.

Whatever it is we need, whether it is axle grease or gold, that is what I think we should turn out and should encourage and be for in the literary way. It may not mean sticking to the highest standards of literature at the moment, but I think the chief thing that we have to do, all of us now, is to win this war, and I am for any kind of literature that will help win the war.

I would like to pick up periodicals now and read these war stories, Mr. Forester's naval stories, and the "Sam Small, the

Flying Yorkshireman" stories (that's a free ad, Eric) and of course, perhaps Major de Seversky's book. But that is for a different type of person. You wouldn't find it of any use to hand that out in the subway, because not enough people would be able to grasp the problem as he presents it.

I believe the Al Williams series of articles in the World-Telegram on air power are good. These are all good; they appeal, however, to different classes, to different minds, and we must get out the literature that will reach all these different classes and different minds and different men in different places.

To skip any part of that would be like leaving one branch of our armed forces without equipment and supplies. I think we need a united effort to put over a whole job and I think it is going to take a good deal of equipment of various kinds.

Thank you, very much! [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* Thank you, John.

In introducing the next speaker I feel it is my duty to refer back to what Major de Seversky said when he said that the layman is often in a better position to grasp new strategical ideas than is the professional soldier. Perhaps it is only fair to have a professional soldier here to speak for the services, and perhaps to lock horns with the Major, and so we have with us a man who is in the fighting forces today, connected with the ground forces, a graduate of West Point and the author of a leading service magazine, "The Infantry Journal," which I imagine contains material far more interesting to read these days than most of the novels and books of history I have to review. If you would like to send it to me, Colonel, I would be very glad to read it.

I am very happy and proud to introduce Lieutenant Colonel Joseph I. Greene! [*Applause*]

*Lieutenant Colonel Joseph I. Greene:* Ladies and Gentlemen: A central thought that the Council on Books in Wartime has is that books are weapons in the war of ideas. But I believe we can go farther than this. Long since, the war of ideas has also become a war of battles on every place in the earth. I believe that books are not only weapons in the war of ideas, but weapons and tools in the war of battles.

In the broadest sense, all books, of whatever kind, have a military value. All books help to make the people of a nation what they are, and these are the same people who make up the armies for the wars that inevitably seem to come.

In a total war, moreover, I think we must say that the books a nation writes and reads and treasures on its library shelves are a part of its military strength, for they are a vital part of the nation itself. But to weigh the books of a nation in the scales of war would be a year's job for a General Staff in collaboration with those who know books best. I shall therefore narrow it down to a sector in the battlefront of books that will not take more than a few minutes to reconnoiter.

There is the sector of standard military books, books for the citizen and soldier that help them to learn of the means and methods of war, books that were neglected for twenty years before this present war except by military leaders and a score or so of poets and writers realistic enough to know that war might come again, and that the military must somehow continue as a normal side of American life.

Best books are of more than one kind. Some are practical texts about weapons and fighting, and these must be revised whenever new weapons and ways of war appear. More of them, however, are historical in basis because some sides of warfare do not change. For example, you will find again and

again in such books how an army must never let an enemy attack by surprise, and the ways in which leaders of troops guard constantly against such attacks, lessons that commanders of armies of a dozen nations, and the nations themselves, have tragically neglected.

Indeed, all the problems the leader must meet and train for in directing and inspiring his troops are found in these books. During the twenty years of peace a few small publishers kept the standard military books alive and now the country as a whole is finding that such books do exist, that most of them are readable, and that there is much to learn from them of war.

A great expansion has also come, of course, in the writing of military books for the citizen himself, books written to explain war to the general reader who now wants to know more about it.

I agree heartily with Major de Seversky in his opinion that such books are of value. If I may be frank, there was a lack of realization to begin with, that to write on total war, or for that matter, any kind of modern war, was a duty of writers. A more inaccurate group of books on any subject than those produced on war in 1939 and 1940 has never come from the American binders. [*Applause*]

There are some fine exceptions, of course, and last year and this we have seen the quality and the accuracy of these books steadily rise. The citizen has now available, at least, one ably written book on almost every aspect of warfare. These are often helpful to the soldier as well as to the citizen. Anyway, the citizen is more and more the soldier or the potential soldier, and I like to look upon sound military books for the citizen or soldier as standing in a single category.

These are briefly the thoughts, thoroughly unofficial, that I have on books in war. Mr. Fadiman feels that you cannot win wars with books or with words. Perhaps not, but I am very certain this war we are now fighting could never be won without them. [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* Thank you, Colonel Greene!

I do not think the Colonel need have any worry, because if we are to judge from the number of books that are coming out on war, this war and several wars can be won with them. [*Laughter*]

The next speaker was born in England of Quaker parents, but that did not deter him. He ended up as a Captain in the U. S. Army. You know him as the author of the best seller, "This Above All," one of the finest novels that has been produced by this war, and also, as Mr. Kieran (who is, of course, paid for saying these things) has reminded us, he is the creator of the Flying Yorkshireman, Sam Small, a kind of Yorkshire Paul Bunyan.

Mr. Knight was in the first world war. He enlisted in the famous Princess Pat Infantry. He got all through it and managed to stay a buck private without any difficulty, but later, as I told you, he became a Captain in the U. S. Army. [*Laughter*]

It says here that he also gave up his art career because he found he was color-blind. I don't see why that should have deterred him, because he could have become a surrealist and done very well. [*Laughter*]

I am very happy to introduce to you Mr. Eric Knight. [*Applause*]

*Mr. Eric Knight:* I wouldn't quite believe all that!

I can start from books from any given point, but like a given point in a play, you have to give them point, and I don't

know who gives it. But I will start from where you dropped the hint about cheap books. I think that is one of the important things of this war. We must have cheap books. It is part of this revolution we are in. We don't make revolutions, we live them. Part of this revolution is this $25,000 ceiling, which they had to put in just when I wrote a best seller. [*Laughter*] All money values will go very quickly lower here, as in other countries. I would like to see books come down; cut the royalties to the authors and they will get along.

In England today, that is, in Britain (I'm sorry, our Propaganda Service says "Always say 'Britain' ")—In Britain, then, there are millions of twelve-cent books, six-penny books, and they are exceedingly good and fill the bill, because in a war there is a great hunger for books.

I pick a fight with John Kieran on the necessity for any stepping down in books. An army in wartime is a wartime army, and actually an army is exactly the same as a peacetime population; it has just as many intelligent, sensitive men, and among them there is a great hunger, a great cultural hunger.

I know that in the last war many men satisfied that cultural hunger with small books—in fact, John Kieran himself showed me some time ago a small Shakespeare, and he happened to say that he had carried that through the war behind Cambrai. And it reminded me that behind Cambrai one day I picked up a piece of paper, the torn page of a magazine that somebody had stuck into a package from home, and I started to read it. I was with the Canadian Army then. We could sit and read a great deal, because John Kieran and the American engineers were up in front with pick axes, and so I sat down and read this page. [*Laughter*]

I couldn't make out what it was, it was torn, as I say, but I carried that page with me for a month and read and reread those four or five hundred words. It was glorious to me, it seemed very stirring. I made up beginnings and endings to it. It was not until three years later that I got around in peacetime to reading "If Winter Comes," and discovered my four or five hundred words. I think I did a much better job of the beginning and the ending, to tell the truth. [*Laughter*] That is merely ego, though.

The serious thing about cheap books is that in England there is no mediocre writing in them, and such books as the "Battle of Britain" and various sorts of reports of the Government come out free. Paper-bound copies are coming out about as fast as they can make them. We have just one problem over there in that connection, the shortage of paper. In the great blitz of 1940, Paternoster Row was about wiped out. My publisher was about wiped out. I went into his basement, and he had copies of books dating all the way back into English literature. There were great losses there. There were losses in one library of 75,000 copies in Plymouth, and libraries in Birmingham and London were bombed and blitzed, and Guild Hall, and so forth.

On top of that they cannot spare the shipping to bring paper pulp in to make up more paper, and it is now a case of how many copies of a book they can sell; the publisher says, "How many tons of paper can we allot to this particular book," so that there is no mediocrity now. It is either at one extreme or the other. The most popular book right now is Tolstoy's "War and Peace" —strange, isn't it? You see soldiers walking along with "War and Peace" stuffed in their pockets.

Another best seller now is "Orchids for Miss Blandish." The author writes about American gangsters and sex. I don't

know whether he has been in America, but he writes about America with amazing facility. Not bad. He has an amazing ear for dialogue, and in these books he writes at a tempo like—well, something like the subway at 42nd Street and Broadway at the rush hour.

Now, between the two extremes, people don't read. They are either at the top or at the bottom. The Government has done all it can to keep paper supplied for the publishing business. I think it is an important thing, because they have realized one thing, that in this war a few hyacinths for the soul's sake can be quite as important as a loaf of bread for the body.

The day of pamphleteering is back, and I think you will see it here. If it means cheaper books, I'm for it. [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* I know we were all very attentive to what Mr. Knight said. I have never seen more strained attention given by any audience than by the thirteen publishers who are here when Mr. Knight referred to his willingness to have his royalties cut down. [*Laughter*]

The next and the last speaker who will wind up for us is the creator of a very gratifying mystery, the famous detective, Nero Wolfe. He has written other more serious novels—perhaps one might even say less serious novels—than the Nero Wolfe series.

Mr. Stout is known to all of us as not only a creator of Nero, but what might be called a kind of pamphleteer of the radio, to use Mr. Knight's term. He is in my opinion, and the opinion of many, the nearest thing we have today to Tom Paine in this crisis. I know he will be very flattered by that comparison, particularly because Tom Paine was inferior to him in one respect—he didn't have a beard. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Stout comes to us as something of an expert on this question, also because he is the Chairman of a group of writers known as The Writers' War Board, which is endeavoring as best it may to help out when any Government department wants something printed in any of the magazines or newspapers or wants it put on the air. This group of writers attends to that by mobilizing the efforts of others in this connection—there you are, always shoving the work on other people. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Stout has a very intimate acquaintance with the written word—not books, mind you, necessarily—but the written word and what it can do to help the war effort. Mr. Rex Stout! [*Applause*]

*Mr. Rex Stout:* I would like to say to Mr. Fadiman that if he had to look for a pamphleteer for a flattering comparison, Plato had whiskers. [*Laughter*]

British publishers certainly must be very polite. Mr. Benet says one of them told him there had been a very large increase in the demand for poetry in England since the war started, and one of them told me they were selling detective stories like mad. I guess they know what to tell us, Mr. Benet! [*Laughter*]

The book I would like to whoop for a couple of minutes —and this may be kind of foolish and useless—is one which hasn't been written, probably won't be, and if it were written it would have to be given away. The first famous campaign biography in an American national election was written in 1860 by William Dean Howells about Abraham Lincoln, and since then in every presidential election campaign there have always been campaign biographies.

Last year there were (in 1940, that is) two given away about Roosevelt and one about Willkie. Three about Roosevelt were sold and three on Willkie were sold.

What I would like to see this year is a campaign biography written for the elections which we are going to have next November. I would like to see the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee each do all they can to collect a large fund to finance it and pool the money, select a writer by common agreement, and call it a "Campaign Biography of America." I think it would be a pretty good stunt.

That does not mean that I think Parties ought to be abolished for the duration of the war—far from it. In many of the election districts it will be possible to continue, at least on the surface, this Summer and Fall, the election campaign, the old conflict, the old scrap of Conservatives against Liberals or Radicals, or Democrats against Republicans, or labor men against capitalist men, or any of the old lineups.

But there are about eighty-five or ninety Congressional districts and Senatorial campaigns where I think it is not only desirable but essential to the winning of this war that the differentials between Republicans and Democrats or between Conservatives and Radicals or Liberals be completely forgotten for the duration of this campaign.

The war, of course, like every other war, has got to be won twice. We have to win the war against Germany, and we have to win the war against Japan, and then we have to win the war against the people in America who resemble those people who cheated us out of our victory the last time. [*Applause*]

There certainly can be no question today in anybody's mind that Senator Lodge and LaFollette and Johnson and others who helped them the last time, did cheat us out of our victory. We fought that war either to make the world safe for democracy, or for nothing, and they made it impossible for us to use our victory

in any way whatsoever to make the world safe for democracy. [*Applause*]

Up in Putnam County, New York, part of the 26th Congressional District, where Ham Fish is going to try to get re-elected [*Laughter*] the situation is this: Fish is going to try to get the Republican nomination. He may not get it, and he may. If he does, then since that district is preponderantly, overwhelmingly Republican, if he is to be defeated a great many Republicans will have to vote for a Democrat.

Now, if he doesn't get the nomination, he is going to run independently. He has said so. In that case it is going to be a free-for-all, and there even is a very real chance that in that three-cornered fight the Democrats will try hard to elect a Democrat, and the machine Republicans will try hard to elect their man, and Ham Fish will go around and get the biggest number of votes, so that on Wednesday morning after election there will be a headline in The New York Times, "Ham Fish Re-elected by Plurality of 241."

The tragedy of it is, it would be so darned easy to lick him. The district is overwhelmingly Republican. In anything faintly approaching normal times, the Representative from that district will be a Republican, inevitably, so it seems to me that the only decent, even the only honorable thing for the Democrats of that district to do (and I am a strong Roosevelt man) would be to go to the Republicans and say, "We want to lick Ham Fish, and nearly all of you do. Since this is an overwhelmingly Republican district, you nominate a Republican, a life-long Republican of good character and in good standing, one who understands what this war is about and what we have to do not only during the war but after it, and all of us Democrats will vote for him, too."

I know there are objections to that from the standpoint of practical politics, but I am not quite cynical enough to think that all practical politicians are incapable of patriotic action, or one which is obviously for the welfare of the country. If they were, certainly we would not be on our way to defeat even our outside enemy, let alone our inside enemy.

Practical politicians, after all, are running our Congress and our Government, and I think on the whole they are doing a pretty darned good job.

Why can't we go ahead and lick Ham Fish by so simple a method?

Well, that is all; that is what I think the American Campaign Biography of America ought to say, and I think something like that ought to be done, and I think that is what ought to be done in about ninety Congressional Districts in the country. I think it could be put over, and I feel sure it can be.

I will close with the comment that if I had a nickel now for everybody in this audience who does not even know the name of his or her Representative, let alone how he voted on any of the nine most important issues in the last three years, I would have plenty of money to buy all of these men a drink. [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* I was glad to have Mr. Stout, who is an author, confirm the feeling I have always had as a reviewer, that the books which are not written are inevitably more interesting than those which are.

Mr. Schubert, who has just left, had another appointment and could not stay for the discussion. I know you will excuse him; he wanted to stay.

We are going to spend a half-hour or forty minutes, or as long as you wish or until these gentlemen get tired, in a very informal discussion of some of the issues raised in the course of

the talks this evening, and in discussing some of the issues that I shall raise myself by reading them off this paper.

We do not have to stick to those questions, gentlemen, we can talk of anything we please, as long as it is in line with the subject of tonight's program.

I am going back to school now, and you raise your hand high (you remember, John, how that is done? [*Laughter*]) if you want to answer a question or to interrupt someone else, or to refute anyone else, or whatever.

Suppose we begin with a very simple question which may elicit a response that may be useful to some of us:

> *"What book, in your opinion, has done the most to aid the Allied cause since the outbreak of hostilities?"*

I don't know whether that means since Pearl Harbor, or since the beginning of the war itself. Suppose we take the latter meaning. Is there any book that any of you think has helped toward aiding the war effort perhaps more than any other?

*Mr. Knight:* Modesty forbids me from saying what book. You boys all ought to help me out on that. [*Laughter*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* I don't think your modesty is overweening. I can say, as a reviewer, that Mr. Knight's book, "This Above All," has certainly helped a great deal, perhaps more than any other book—perhaps there is no one book which has helped the most. Perhaps there is no way of finding out.

*Mr. Stout:* I would like to say, after "Victory Through Air Power" and "This Above All," I nominate Joseph E. Davies' book, "Mission to Moscow," because it has helped more than any other book.

*Chairman Fadiman:* I think that would be true. Certainly Major de Seversky's book has had an enormous influence, as had

Mr. Davies'—both have been best sellers, and, more important, books even if they are not read, are talked about second- or third-hand.

*Mr. Benet:* Don't you think Bill Shirer's book, "Berlin Diary," has had quite an influence, too?

*Chariman Fadiman:* I think it has.

*Mr. Knight:* I think, truly, that "Mein Kampf" has done more to win the war for us than anything else. [*Applause*] I know of no book ever written in my lifetime that so flagrantly and boldly announces just what it is determined to do to pervert this world if it gets a chance. Therefore, I think we should give the medal to Adolf Hitler for writing this valuable book for England and America. [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* I think it should be given him posthumously, don't you? [*Laughter and applause*]

*Major de Seversky:* I think I would like to mention Colonel Kernan's book which I think made a remarkable contribution and service to our war effort. The funny part of it is that I agree with very little in this book. He completely ignores air power and the Navy, and still I think he contributes a great deal to our war effort because he has, for the first time, given us the impetus of offense.

From the very beginning of the war we were stunned by the various surprises that our enemy sprung at us, and we gave the initiative to him, and accepted it as a regular procedure that we react to an enemy action rather than to act on our own.

Finally, Colonel Kernan could stand it no longer and he decided it was about time for us to think in offensive terms, and whether or not the technical aspects of his book are practical or accurate in every detail, I think it did quite a service to the United States by giving us that offensive spirit at last. [*Applause*]

*Colonel Greene:* I have a point I would like to make here on a book of wide distribution. In his introductory remarks, Mr. Fadiman said that the soldier gets a gun. Also, the soldier gets a book, and he gets it free. There are nearly three million of them issued or sold.

Mr. Knight brought out the point of the cheap book. The only way it was possible so far to get that particular book before the American public in general has been to issue it in a cheap form. I think it should be given away. I am speaking of the Official Soldier's Handbook, which every soldier gets when he goes into the Army. It is nothing but a manual of what the soldier himself needs to know—how to take care of himself, the elements of war.

I think in considering the effect of books in general on winning the war, you cannot pass over books of that type.

*Chairman Fadiman:* You think it would be a good book for civilians to read, or is it intended entirely for soldiers?

*Colonel Greene:* It is written in very simple language. [*Laughter*] What I am driving at is that there is hardly any military jargon in it at all; it is meant for the new men.

It has actually been in print for five or six years, but the Government only decided through the War Department to issue it a year or so ago.

*Mr. Kieran:* There is another very important and very popular book that is issued for soldiers; I believe it is very popular. It's called the "Pay Book." [*Laughter*]

But we are indebted to Germany for another great book. It is a technical book in its way. I have forgotten the exact title, but it was a book written by the Medical Chief of the Luftwaffe, and it has to do with the physical requirements for modern combat flying and bombing. It came to British notice when it was

found to be issued to all German pilots, and they found a copy of it in the tunic of one of the captured German pilots. It was translated to find out what it was, and it was so good that now every British and Canadian pilot gets a copy of that book. It is of immense value, I believe. I don't know that the American Army has gotten around to it yet—we're a little slow—but when we do, I believe it will help us a great deal, too. And we ought to thank that gentleman, too—posthumously. [*Laughter*]

*Major de Seversky:* I think there is another person we ought to honor here, General Mitchell. He wrote several books. [*Applause*]

I would like to make a quotation here from something he wrote thirteen years ago, which is quite appropriate to our present situation. In 1929 he wrote, "Alaska is really the key point to the whole Pacific Ocean. Airplanes can fly there and back without taking on additional fuel. The best defense of the Philippines against the Japanese would be a direct attack against Japan from Alaska. To do more than this would mean a useless waste of life and material in case of war. Air power is a decisive factor in our defense of the Pacific."

Isn't that remarkable?

*Chairman Fadiman:* Now, gentlemen, with your permission, suppose we go to another question I have down here. I am going to ask Mr. Knight to answer it, if he will be so good, because I know he has a special point of view that he wants to express. This is the question:

*"What older book or books that were helpful perhaps in the last war are still relevant today, and why are they effective?"*

*Mr. Knight:* Well, I think there are about three books from each country in the last war that could contribute greatly toward

American attitudes and towards war. One was an American book by the author Stephen Crane, "The Red Badge of Courage." Curiously enough, that destroyed forever the cardboard figure of the soldier who charged bravely into battle, and when the flag fell, he rushed to grab it, and when he died, he died singing "Just Break the News to Mother."

Crane's hero never went to war. He heard stories as a boy in his town from the Civil War veterans, and they were talking off the record. He wrote a book in which, I think for the first time in modern literature, the hero ran away. He ran away one night; he fled in terror. The next day he joined the charge. He charged and was brave. No one knew why, and he didn't either.

Crane destroyed the cardboard figure of the soldier for the first time. Shaw did it later in "Arms and the Man," but from that book stems our modern war fiction.

In the Boer War there was one grand book—do read that, by Dennis Rise. It would be an important book to read today. After the World War we had a series of books which had something of great importance for today. In America, you had "Three Soldiers," and of course "Farewell to Arms" was a grand book and still is.

Another, "The Enormous Room," is by E. E. Cummings, a remarkable book in that it has qualities that I think last. Of course, I cannot speak for the immortality of a book. I don't know what it is. But those books are, I think, important.

In England we have three books worth reading today, "Memoirs of Foxhunting Man," by Sassoon, and another which came out as written by PRIVATE 24066. I think that last is the most remarkable book of all the war. I think it personally expresses most clearly what I felt during the war, so I am preju-

diced, of course, but that is a very important book, I think, even now. It lets you know how a soldier's mind works.

In France, of course, you had "La Croix au Bois," by Gorgeles, and much later you had "Verdun," by Roumeri, which came out recently. Those books had something to say and also "Le Feu," by Barbusse. They had something to say about war from the French point of view.

In Germany there was "Schlumpf" and you had, of course, "All Quiet on the Western Front." Then you had one of the most important books, "Schweik," and it is still a good one. It came out in Vienna and was written by a Czech. It was the only book, I think, written during the war and published during the war, in which war was satirized and mocked. Of course, "Schweik" was the oaf of a soldier—well, he was a pretty keen-witted lad, after all, who went through all those amazing experiences in the Austrian Army.

Those books had one thing to say. Those books in general discussed the horror of war. Those books, however, do not suffice for this war. I think one who writes today and says exactly the same thing is absolutely dead; the book would be repetitious and would mean nothing. I think in this war there are added qualities that must come into a book. Lang, of the last war, is the only man to touch on it. He said, "War is not fought by gods, nor yet by beasts. War is fought by men, and being fought by human beings war is essentially human." He was coming near to something, and that is the question I am touching on now.

The question is, What is there about war? Why do we have wars? The rest of the war books, I think, that are to come out, to be written at a future date, will not only speak of it and discuss it and our disgust with war (for, heavens alive, we shall come out of it!), but they must go on. Militarists say that merely

to say war is bad does not settle anything. What the writers have to do is something further; to find out why we have war, and when we get the peace, what are we going to do with that? We have got to find out why this world keeps on having new wars, and why we can't take a war to help us build a new world when we get to the peace.

Well, thank you very much! [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* Are there any comments on older books that might be helpful or effective today?

*Mr. Benet:* Just in regard to strategy in the Pacific, an obvious book, an older book, was written by a little hunchback many years before the last war, Homer Lea, who wrote "The Valor of Ignorance." Clare Booth revived it or wrote a story about it in the Saturday Evening Post. That apparently called the turn on the Japanese in the Pacific at that time.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Along that line, I wonder whether I might recommend a book myself that I read a couple of weeks ago. I do not know whether Major de Seversky or Colonel Greene agree with its conclusions. It deals with war in the Pacific and is entitled "Victory in the Pacific," by Kiralfy. It impressed me as a layman, because it seemed to offer the most detailed account of how the Japanese military mind works and why it works as it does, why they fight in the way they do.

Until we realize that they fight in a special kind of way, different perhaps from the armies of other countries, we may commit many costly blunders in trying to meet their attacks and go beyond them. It seemed to me one of the best books on strategy that as an innocent layman I had come across.

Colonel Greene, did you happen to read that?

*Colonel Greene:* I haven't read it yet, Mr. Fadiman.

*Chairman Fadiman:* It hasn't had a large sale because it is not written in simple language that the Colonel prescribed for civilians [*Laughter*], but it is an excellent book.

*Mr. Benet:* Could we know the publisher?

*Chairman Fadiman:* It is published by John Day, a very excellent publisher. (I hope he is here.) [*Laughter*]

*Major de Seversky:* Another old book which I think is very timely is the book of Admiral Mahan, a remarkable book, because you can take his book and substitute the words "air power" for "sea power" and it will be the most remarkable book written today, even more modern than my own.

Let me impose on you once more by quoting from his book these statistics:

"Changes of tactics have not only taken place after changes in weapons, which necessarily is the case, but the interval between such changes has been unduly long. This doubtless arises from the fact that improvement of weapons is due to the energy wasted in men while the changes in tactics have to overcome the inertia of the conservative class, but that is a great evil," and we do feel in aviation exactly the same way, that it is a great evil that it takes such a long time to change tactics and to adopt new weapons. [*Applause*]

*Colonel Greene:* May I add just one word for the book that does not idealize war, but makes you feel that some things are worth fighting for and makes you wish you had been there. One book I am thinking of is "The Forty Days of Musa Dagh," and others are "Arundel," "Rabble in Arms," by Kenneth Roberts; "Drums," by James Boyd; "The Red Badge of Courage," and "For Whom the Bell Tolls."

I think those books that picture war so realistically and show you there are sometimes things that you have got to fight

for should be considered as having molded thought since the last war and as being of extreme importance now.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Along the same line, there are two books, and I might call them documents, which perhaps put more clearly than any of those, even, which Colonel Greene has mentioned, what we are fighting for. They are not read very much today, particularly in Chicago. One is "Federalist Papers" and the other is the Constitution of the United States. [*Applause*]

Now I think we might perhaps go on to another question:

> *"What is the value of books of an inspirational nature in a war of production like our own? What kind of books help morale, or do any inspirational books really help morale?"*

That is a kind of vague question. Any notions?

*Mr. Knight:* I think all inspirational books help morale, because morale springs from inspirational qualities in life.

*Chairman Fadiman:* I have often wondered whether mo rale in the Army itself, Colonel, is something that can actually be created by means of books, even partially. I mean, does the regular soldier actually feel a stiffening of feeling when he reads a book such as the ones we have been discussing?

*Colonel Greene:* I think he does, Mr. Fadiman. I know many books—so does Mr. Knight—were read by soldiers in the World War. In this war you have an army nearly 50 per cent high school graduates, or better. Therefore, there are far many more books read. I think undoubtedly what you say is true.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Mr. Knight?

*Mr. Knight:* Mr. Fadiman, I think that clearly an inspirational book helps in a war. I think that perhaps I helped in the last war, at least I sat in a trench a long time and perhaps helped by being present. The only reason I was present was that I read

a book by Ian Hay called "The First Hundred Thousand." I remember reading that, and the next thing I knew I was on a train to Canada to enlist, so certainly inspirational books help. I know it had inspirational qualities, certainly.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Well, there it is, you see. The question is whether any book is good that is inspirational, even if it is a lot of hooey, such as Ian Hay's book, or whether books should be good and inspirational. I have never been convinced that Edgar Guest ever made a better man out of anybody, but he is an inspirational writer. I don't know. I feel that books that have come out of the war so far are more honest, are truly inspirational in the sense that they are more truthful than some of the earlier books, such books as Arthur Guy Empey's "We Were Young," and "Over the Top," and such nonsense.

The books that have come out, books such as Mr. Knight's, and others, seem to me to be of a thoughtful quality; they are not fakes. They were not endeavoring to idealize the soldier's life; they weren't endeavoring to catch you up in a whirlwind of false emotion, and perhaps, in the long run, the more truthful and quieter books have the finer influence.

Here is a question which may seem a little tactless to ask in the presence of military gentlemen:

> *"Do such books as Lieutenant Colonel Kernan's book—which has been mentioned—'Defense Will Not Win the War,' and Hoover's help or hinder the Allied Command?"*

That is to say, is it a good idea to release books of that thought, that type of thought, which allow civilians in large numbers to discuss what they say? Does that embarrass the High Command which, after all, has to fix the strategy without

reference more or less to what the public thinks? Any opinion on that?

*Mr. Kieran:* I think that Kernan's was a good book. Everybody is interested in that sort of thing. True, there is a lot of intelligent criticism and comment to date, and I do not think it is embarrassing to the General Staff, not even a little bit. But if Hoover's book is the one, it first appeared serially in the Saturday Evening Post with regard to the causes——

*Chairman Fadiman:* Herbert Hoover? I don't know what that is. Do you know that, Colonel?

*Colonel Greene:* It will be published, I think, in a week or two, by Herbert Hoover and some one else.*

*Mr. Kieran:* He had a series of articles in the Saturday Evening Post with regard to the Peace Conference and also the last war. I should not consider that a particularly helpful book to come out at this time.

*Mr. Stout:* That is not offense, it is really offensive, isn't it? [*Laughter*]

*Mr. Kieran:* Well, no; I don't care to make any criticism of a book on that basis, but I would make it on the basis that I used before in my metaphor about a wheel going dry when you have to haul a load. You don't want gold or flowers or anything else; you want axle grease, and we want axle grease with this job.

I think Bob Considine's book that sells for fifty cents, "MacArthur the Magnificent," is wonderful axle grease, and regardless of its other qualities, the forthcoming book of Mr. Hoover is not axle grease for this job.

*Chairman Fadiman:* If the Hoover that is down here is Herbert Hoover, he will certainly neither help nor hinder the

* "THE PROBLEMS OF A LASTING PEACE," *by Herbert Hoover and Hugh Gibson.*

High Command. I don't think they will pay much attention one way or the other. I think the purport of the question is, is it a good idea to have major strategical considerations discussed by the public in a general way which has never been done before to the extent that it is now?

I attended a meeting at Columbia University recently. The boys got together—and the girls, for that matter—to hold a meeting to indicate they were anxious to have a second front opened up. These are the boys that are going to do the fighting, all youngsters, and they indicated their willingness to serve under such conditions.

Is that a good or a bad thing, to have that sort of mass demonstration when, after all, the question of a second front is a matter to be decided by the higher military officials?

*Colonel Greene:* I don't think it has any great harm or good. We must always remember, in considering such books and such discussions, that those who write them—or, we'll say, part of them—cannot possibly have the inside dope on what is happening in the war, what is available, and so forth.

It is conceivable, I think, that such a book might be a bit embarrassing if it seized the whole public, but I like to see any book popular that will make people think about the war and make them feel more of a sense of participation in it. If it is a discussion of strategy, I think that is a fine thing. In general, I don't think it does a bit of harm.

*Major de Seversky:* I would like to refer to my original statement. This is a total war, and I think it is important that the people of the United States understand the strategy and the tactics of our various services, and in that respect I think Kernan's book has made a wonderful contribution.

I think the strength of democracy lies in the fact that they understand the situation and pursue their course with open eyes. The Kernan book aroused terrific interest in what our people are doing. Some people, perhaps for the first time, heard the word "strategy" and they got all interested about it. People are getting more and more interested; they participate more and more in our military effort and, at the same time, appreciate the stupendous task that lies upon the shoulders of our military men, and they feel they all have to do everything possible to help. I think it is a very fine spirit.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Thank you, Major.

I am going to ask a question now which may be of interest to a fairly large minority in the audience. I know many of you, and I know many of you are writers. Many of you are male writers:

> *"Can a writer—presumably a male—justify the continuance of work in his own field rather than active service in one of the armed forces?"*

That is a question that comes up in the mind of many writers these days. I wonder whether any of you would comment on that?

*Mr. Stout:* I cannot conceive of any reason why you couldn't substitute for the word "writer" the word "druggist" or "bus conductor" or "bank president" or anything else; it means precisely the same. I don't think they are any different from writers.

*Chairman Fadiman:* In other words, can he justify the continuance of work in his own field?

*Mr. Stout:* Not if he is qualified for military duty as to age, and so forth. I don't think so.

*Mr. Knight:* Well, unfortunately, you are not either a druggist or a cowboy, or anything else, but if you are a writer you have a certain limit in that scope. I think the catch in the question is, what do you mean by his "own field," "continuance in his own field"? What is the field of a writer in wartime, or in any time? The field of a writer in peacetime is to turn his attention, as best he may, upon the problems of the world he is living in, face them and, with supposedly superior observation, be able to bring to light the truth concerning them.

Now we are as concerned in war as Charles Dickens was with bad prisons and child institutions of his day.

The job of a writer—what is it? I think I see the job clearly. Most wars are not like the last wars; they fool us because they are almost like them, but there is one little different thing somewhere, one bit of syncopation not in the last war.

In this war there are new arms, planes, guns and different weapons and tanks, and then the fourth weapon, propaganda. That weapon of propaganda has destroyed some countries. We will win the war by making more and better airplanes, tanks and guns, and developing techniques and by propaganda, the secret weapon of our own, which is merely that of the truth. Who is going to pursue the truth? Mostly all of the writers. When a writer writes propaganda, he is turning his ability as best he may to serve his country. If his country says that the best thing he can do is to dig a ditch, then he must do that.

In Britain, every man who can write is given something to do. Wells is part of a Planning Committee for the Peace that is to come. Two authors I know are in the Ministry of Food. Many are in the Ministry of Information. I think before this war is ended here, no man who has facility and power

with words will be left who is not using that facility and that power to win this war. [*Applause*]

*Mr. Stout:* Mr. Fadiman's construction of what I said, through my own clumsiness, doubtless, misrepresented what I had in mind a little while ago when I said that a writer cannot justify not going to the battle line. No, I think any man can.

If a fellow is twenty-eight years of age, physically and mentally competent and capable of going into the army and fighting, and if it is decided by people who ought to know that he will do better service in this war as the head of a chemical plant, because he is peculiarly qualified for it, or anything else, or in whatever category he may be in, then of course he cannot, he should not, go to the army, but should give that better service in some other way.

One of the best known radio commentators in the country is crazy to go to the navy for a year now, and thousands of people are telling him he is doing a much better job for his country where he is. And, thank heavens, so far we have kept him there.

*Chairman Fadiman:* I think that is true of a small minority, but I cannot accept your high opinion of writers in general, Mr. Knight. I am a writer in a small way myself, so I assure you I have no bias here. I don't think writers are very useful as writers in a war; not a bit. I don't think writers, except a few, are valuable as propagandists. I think most writers are terrible propagandists. They are interested in themselves; they write things out of their own guts, and that is why they write the sort of things you read. And most of them cannot make the tremendous transfer to thinking on a broad, mass scale that propaganda requires.

Now, some can, Eric, of course some can; but not writers in general. As a class, it seems to me, they are no more useful as writers than plumbers are as plumbers. There are a few, of course, that are very useful, but I think they are just as apt to get a good propagandist out of an advertising agency, for instance, as out of the ranks of writers.

I don't know much about this, but it seems to me that about 99 per cent of writers, when the draft call comes, should go to war. That is about all there is.

*Mr. Stout:* In one sense, I violently and passionately disagree with you, and I need mention only one instance. In Steve Benet's recent sketch, "They Burned the Books." Steve is a writer, and a marvellous one. No advertising man in the world could have written that. And, after all, because they are not all Steve Benets, you cannot put them all, all the writers, into the army and expect Steve Benet to carry the whole burden.

*Chairman Fadiman:* I don't think there are enough Stephen Benets. There are some, by golly, and I think they ought to be made to do as much work as possible, and swell work. But most writers write to earn a living. There is nothing mysterious about that.

*Mr. Stout:* Some day I am going to write a book, and it is going to be at least a best seller, a recital of the things Mr. Fadiman has said about writers in the last three months.

*Mr. Knight:* Here is a little different point of view. If a writer serves in the army, is he actually fulfilling his function? I don't know. Half his time he is writing and explaining about life, and the other half he is getting in a corner by himself and thinking over some philosophy of what life is:

*Chairman Fadiman:* Most writers never do that at all, Eric. You should read the Saturday Evening Post. [*Laughter*]

*Mr. Knight:* I'm sorry I have an article in the next Saturday Evening Post.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Besides, you have to make an exception for the Benets and the Knights. I am against this enshrining of a writer as a special type of individual, a guy who fits one word to another a little more cleverly than another, who should not be put in the armed forces.

*Mr. Kieran:* I think you are kind of mixed up. Mr. Benet is not a Class 1-A, I believe, in age, and possibly a few other reasons, but I think that the young fellows in 1-A—writers or college professors—should go. I knew a great many writers in the last war. I knew them in France. I like to think that Sergeant Joyce Kilmer was a writer. [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* Sergeant Kilmer went to war and didn't claim because he was a poet he should continue his work, work in his own field.

*Mr. Kieran:* That is the point I was trying to make in my own way; all the writers I met in France were soldiers. [*Applause*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* Good discussion, isn't it? [*Laughter*]

*Mr. Knight:* The main thing is, going back over the list I mentioned in the last war, I think none of the books was written by a man who was a writer before the war. I don't think Hemingway or Cummings or Sassoon or Graves or Lang had ever written a line. They became writers not because they were writers who had to go to war; they became writers because they went to war and wrote about it. Possibly it will be the same with this war. Anyhow, you have a good crop of writers coming up in ten years.

*Chairman Fadiman:* And bad ones.

*Mr. Knight:* Pessimist!

*Chairman Fadiman:* Are you tired of that question? Here is an interesting question publishers have been asking themselves lately:

*"Should the government enter the publishing field with technical books on war and civilian defense?"*

Now, if the government becomes a publisher of books, these books will presumably be sold at prices much lower than a publisher can afford to place on them. Do you think the government should become a publisher of books both on war and civilian defense?

*Mr. Knight:* I say they will. If you wait long enough and your wood pulp gets scarcer, and they sink more boats and you can't bring the paper pulp from the North, your paper is going to get scarcer and you are going to have rationing of paper to publish your books, and your government will inevitably go into the publishing business itself. I think it will depend on whether the war goes on long enough and whether enough ships get sunk. I don't see any great harm will come out of it.

*Mr. Stout:* What have they done in England?

*Mr. Knight:* There is a terrific change. It does not matter what the things are in life, they must contribute to the war effort in England. If they want anybody to start saving shoe laces, or anything else, immediately a book comes out, a film goes out, and you have 40,000,000 people immediately responding to the internal propaganda. After all, about 90 per cent of the propaganda is for internal consumption, and only 10 per cent outside, you know. But you can get books free.

*Mr. Stout:* Is the Government itself publishing itself?

*Mr. Knight:* Oh, yes; terrifically, and they are the best pamphlets, with the best photographs, the best illustrated. The best account I know of the whole Battle of Britain, of the air

force, and all that, is a Government publication, and I think the cost is four cents or it is free. You have cook books, recipe books, books on how to use American Lend-Lease food, and the Government is getting them all out.

*Chairman Fadiman:* How do publishers like that, Eric?

*Mr. Knight:* The publishers have all pooled together. They have been forced into a consolidation. The moment they had their distribution house destroyed about ten publishers had to get together and form a new distributing house. They have had to pool their resources tremendously. It is a consolidation. Well, in England, nothing gets in the way of the war, and everything is utilized to win the war. Books are an important way of influencing public opinion, and as long as they are, they will be used by the Government.

I don't think that means the Government is going to start a publishing business, but it certainly is in that field now for the purpose of winning the war.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Are there further comments on that problem, gentlemen?

*Colonel Greene:* I think the Government is already in the technical publishing business. I wish I had the figures. I'll bet it is 50,000,000 books of a technical type issued by the Government Printing Office in the last twenty years. Also, the law says that any time the Government needs a book written by anybody, it can take that book and print it without violation of copyrights. That law has been on the statutes, I think, since before the first World War.

*Chairman Fadiman:* A book already published by a commercial house—has it ever done that? That is quite interesting.

*Colonel Greene:* I am not sure it has. If it has, it is a mild policy, and it has followed a policy of not doing that if it can substitute. But there are, I think, 350 technical publications in the Army alone.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Major de Seversky, how would you like a little lobbying in the Government Printing Office and get your book printed by the Government?

*Major de Seversky:* I haven't had that experience, but I had that same experience with my inventions. [*Laughter*] If the Government likes your invention very much, it certainly can take it. I think it has a right to take it, and I think it has a right to take books, too.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Of course. I suppose those who do not agree with the thesis of your book think that is an invention, too? [*Laughter*]

*Mr. Stout:* There's an idea for you, Kip: You might get all writers abolished by getting the Government to publish all books and give them away. [*Laughter*]

*Chairman Fadiman:* You have me all wrong. I am not against writers—except as a class. [*Laughter*] I have a great admiration for writers; I live off them. But I think, as most reviewers, I believe, who have had to spend years doing what I do, think, (a) there is too much writing being done, (b) that not enough of it is any good, and (c) that because Writer A is good, and whether good or bad, it does not qualify all writers to be placed in a special category, any more than it does clergymen. I think of them just as I would clergymen, for example. I think they are O. K. I may be wrong. Now, whenever I am asked by anybody what I do, I say I am a "hack," because that is what I am, and that is what 99 per cent of the writers writing in this country are, and the sooner they get wise to it, the better.

This is really all in connection with the war. I did not mean to impose my prejudices upon you.

*Mr. Knight:* Mr. Chairman, I agree with you thoroughly. My——

*Chairman Fadiman:* Stop there. [*Laughter*]

*Mr. Knight:* My point in saying the writer has a duty in wartime is merely this, that everyone in wartime should use his capability to the best total effort. Good Lord, if a writer could make tanks, it might be a good job if we all could, but we can't. Some of us can. Some of us can carry a rifle, some of us can't. Good Lord, I wish my hair were gray as John Kieran's. But there is a lot of propaganda in this war, and most of it is gotten up by writing men. I think it is very important that they should do a good job. You say 10 per cent? Well, all right, get the 10 per cent to do the propaganda. Let them use their efforts to get this war over with as fast as possible.

*Chairman Fadiman:* Of course, we do have a lot of writers in the Propaganda Division now, many of them very good writers. A good many of those get fired not long after they become members of the Propaganda Service.

In connection with propaganda and words, and that sort of thing, I wonder if any of you have any ideas about internal propaganda and how it is being handled at the moment—any ideas, or grouches, or complaints? Do you think that internal propaganda is being handled to everybody's satisfaction at the moment? Writers are back of it.

*Mr. Stout:* I doubt if there is a single individual in the United States who is satisfied with the way propaganda is being handled, one way or the other. Do you mean the way the Government information agencies are doing it, or in general?

*Chairman Fadiman:* In general.

*Mr. Stout:* Of course, a lot of people feel that the Government should not censor the radio, and then they learn to their astonishment and dismay that the Government has its own radio programs—like the one "This Is War"—and so far is it back from the Government censoring the radio, that the radio people censor the Government; they delete things from the Government's program, which is something like man biting dog. Well, that is one kind of dissatisfaction.

Another kind of dissatisfaction comes from the discussion as to whether or not propaganda or information, words put out by the Government information agencies, should be completely affirmative, or should in any respect be negative. That is, whether anything they say about conditions in this country should merely tell that this or that thing happened, and should never criticize any American for anything he has said or done.

That is one big controversy which is not at all settled as yet, and it will have to be settled before this war is over.

Another problem, of course, is that of the newspapers. There you have a little special problem. Newspapers will not criticize radio, and radio will not criticize newspapers. Well, maybe that is as it should be, but anyway, you have thousands of questions connected with internal propaganda, and I do not think that any one of them has yet been resolved to the satisfaction of anybody.

*Chairman Fadiman:* All right. Are there any other problems, or any other questions to be discussed tonight? I don't want to keep this patient audience past its bedtime.

I would like to say I know I express the feelings of all of you when we thank The New York Times for giving us the possibility of this evening. [*Applause*]

[*The meeting adjourned at ten-fifty o'clock.*]