

It's Been Lovely, But—

Joe Owens

MANY'S THE DAY I have toted peppermint patties to a hostess, but this is the first time I have come bearing a brickbat. Before proceeding to bash the hand that feeds me, let me say hurriedly that if any hostesses, after reading this, want to come to my glass house, they are cordially invited and may bring their own stones. Without further dodging, I shall get on with this bread-and-brickbat affair.

First, on my "no thanks" list, is the hostess who wants to keep the party moving. If anything makes her nervous, it is to see a roomful of people divided into small, congenial groups talking contentedly. For example, suppose I am sitting in a corner with two other guests, discussing socialized medicine, John Lund's mustache, or the best way to kill dandelions. Our hostess approaches, "You naughty people, hiding off by yourselves. Come!" she says, using the imperative in its nastiest form. "You must talk to So-and-So and meet So-and-So." Usually I am the first she grabs and hustles away, because I am skinny enough to fit into any cramped niche. I am thrust on a brand-new group who resent having their discussion broken up, and all of us are reduced to such typical party witticisms as, "I like dogs. Do you like dogs?" or "Warm in here, isn't it?" or "Lovely party!"

I do not like to exercise my slow-moving wits in guessing games. I am even more suspicious of hostesses who introduce a new game with the happy cry, "The rules are simple. You can all learn as you go along." From sorrowful participation in these "simple" games, I have discovered that either the rules are so complex that they should be taken up only by The Institute of Advanced Study, or the hostess thinks of some new twists, just to keep us on our toes—twitching.

Another variation is the hostess who stews and fusses over refreshments. To have dinner at her house is an even more indigestible experience. Usually, she has been simmering since dawn, and looks it. Invariably this hostess plans a seven course meal and nags her guests as if they were two year old problem eaters: "But you must eat a third helping. I made it all for you, and it's so-o-o good."

Another form of anxiety I resent fiercely is turning a spotlight on my few food dislikes. It so happens that the three foods I loathe are oysters, parsnips, and cooked bananas. As no menu is composed

of these three items, I could manage very nicely if it weren't for the hostess who moans, "Oh, you aren't eating your oysters. If only I'd known. Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

It is worse to visit a hostess who worries about the dust under the guest room bureau (a fact I couldn't possibly check upon unless I wriggled around the floor on my stomach). According to her, the silver needs polishing, the curtains came back from the laundry chewed by chipmunks, the most interesting people she invited couldn't come, and she knows it is going to be so dull. About that time I am convinced I should have found something better to do.

Yet all these types seem harmless compared to the most recent menace: the hostess who invites me to take the television cure. This experience combines the fuzziest features of watching sixth grade amateur theatricals and opening one's eyes under water. The victim is ushered into a darkened room, often without food or drink, and forced to stare fixedly at a small, lighted screen that shows a series of flyspecks shrouded in mist. Occasionally, the mist clears, and that is even worse.

Meanwhile, the owners of the set pretend to identify each moving flyspeck by name or occupation: wrestler, actor, trained seal, and so on. They interrupt themselves with pretty protests of, "Oh, you should have been here last night. It was so much clearer then," or with fascinating technical explanations. By midnight, I have acquired a persecution complex and a full-fledged case of pink eye. Understand, I think television is the coming thing. But until television reaches a higher level of perfection—I'm frightfully sorry, darling, but something's come up unexpectedly, and I won't be able to make it.

The Meaning of Democracy

Shirley Stillwell

I

"MY DEAR, do you really think this is the gown I should choose? After all, I am expected to maintain a certain standard, and I trust you implicitly. The opening of the opera is one of the most important events of the season."

"But definitely, madam, this is an exclusive creation for you; it suits your particular style as no other gown could do."

"Very well, my dear. Now I must decide between the ermine stole and the mink cape. Since my last year's coat was mink, possibly the ermine would be the better choice. It is a bit more regal, don't you think?"