

DINNER FOR TWELVE PLEASE, JAMES!



JAMES AGATE in one of his innumerable *Ego* books selects his ideal dinner party. I haven't the book handy, but I remember being disgusted that he selected men only. Surely even if he finds women dull, he must admit that they are ornamental? And the male is so vain that he performs best for a female audience. So I am not going to repeat his mistake.

Neither am I going to be lured into accepting the dull merely because they are great. It's easy to turn down most of the soldiers and half the statesmen. Their ego would be even more objectionable than Agate's. Alexander or Napoleon or Hitler might be all right by themselves; together they would be insufferable. I couldn't afford to waste an invitation on Jack Dempsey or

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the long chain of desolate islands that stretch down the Chilean coast, and was lost. Some of the crew got ashore. My acquaintance grabbed the ship's cat and his copy of Homer and stuck them inside his shirt. I don't know what happened to the cat, but Homer saved a nasty situation. The island was cold and miserable. It rained nearly all the time, and it took the castaways a week to make a fire by friction. For the weeks they were there, until they were picked up by a Chilean Government steamer (as the *Hinemoa* used to rescue castaways on our southern islands), they had absolutely nothing to eat but mussels. Tempers frayed and rows started. The German sailor had the bright idea of reading Homer to the party. This he did every day, and the peace was kept. It saved their lives, he said.

No, if you do contemplate really being marooned, put one book aside, and not a big one at that. It would be difficult to swim ashore with an omnibus volume in your shirt. And cultivate your memory. On a voyage from England to Ireland, Macaulay amused himself by repeating from memory the whole of *Paradise Lost*.

—A.M.

Strangler Lewis merely to keep order. All the men would have to be grown up.

Similarly with the philosophers. Unlike Agate I would bear in mind what I had got them together for. I wouldn't invite Karl Marx to dine with Cleopatra because I know very well that they wouldn't appreciate each other; and since it's my party, Karl would have to go. A dinner isn't the place for sermons or any sort of high-minded monologue. I'd leave Kant and Nietzsche and all the rest of them where they belong—closed up on the book-shelf.

And with a regretful eye on Richard Burton, Wilde, Dr. Johnson, Nansen and Walter Raleigh; with a question-mark against Socrates, Li-Po and Charles Laughton; with a sigh for Helen of Troy, my wife, and Madame du Barry, my invitations go out to the following (I have arranged them round a not-too-big circular table, so that I can catch the cross-chat):

<i>Pompadour</i>	<i>Bob Hope</i>	<i>Queen Victoria</i>
<i>Shakespeare</i>		<i>Groucho Marx</i>
<i>Greta Garbo</i>		<i>Cleopatra</i>
<i>Host</i>		<i>Voltaire</i>
<i>Nell Gwynn</i>	<i>Catherine the Great</i>	
	<i>G. B. Shaw</i>	

I leave it to readers to scratch up the menu, the wine-list, and the musical background. I'm off to swot up my Swedish.

—ANTON VOGT

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