

## Between Abstract And Zmurthy

By Sigsbee Miller

It is generally agreed by statisticians (those Rooseveltian creatures who were left out in the cold when the alphabet protested) that the Holy Writ, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *In His Steps* provide for the bulk of the world's literary consumption. (Note: This latter word is not to be construed as synonymous with digestion; regard for the eyes of the world makes men do strange things.) With these three opera of the virtue-will-triumph school safely disposed of, the statisticians merrily carry world literature from *Canterbury Tales* through Shakespeare and the Tom Swift epics in wholesale regimentation according to popularity. Somehow, it seems a pity that the dictionary never seems to be included in the annals of the best-sellers.

"For the dictionary is one of the few indispensable parts of world literature; in fact, the superlative here would hardly seem out of order." This we tell ourselves when we get a particular hankering for that exquisite satisfaction that comes with the knowledge that one is Cultured. We repeat it to ourselves, and even listen sometimes, and some extremists make it a point to have the maid give the family Webster a thorough dusting twice a month for realistic effect. So it can readily be seen that the dictionary is something of institution in the American household, comparable to the best efforts of the Messrs. Sears and Roebuck.

Its uses are varied; its usefulness depends on the approach. There is, of course, the widely-known case of the woman who wondered aloud at the large following of the dictionary. She had, with admirable fairness, attempted on several occasions a perusal of Mr. Webster, but had never, she complained, been able to "get the hang of the story." Obviously, this is the wrong

approach, although exponents of surrealism in literature may find a fascinating plot hidden between *abstract* and *zmurthy* and sundry diacritical marks. But if one approaches the dictionary in a spirit of seeking information . . . For instance, if one were doubtful as to the exact meaning of the word "dictionary," he could consult his dictionary. Under the heading "d" he would find the word defined as "lexicon." There would still be room for doubt, however, and he would turn to the *Is* where he would obtain clarification in the definition of "lexicon" as . . . "dictionary." Perhaps he might have more success if he adhered more exclusively to getting the meaning of a word without attempting to break it down into words of such an infantile calibre that they would bear certain witness to ignorance bordering upon illiteracy in the speaker. It is commonly known that the dictionary's purpose is to teach plain diction, or speech that the ordinarily educated layman can understand. With this in mind, let him seek the meaning of—well, "Osmund" will serve the purpose. It is a nice, unfamiliar word which should be an invaluable addition to anyone's vocabulary. Ah, here, in true Websterian simplicity, is its definition as ". . . a genus of ferns having pinnate or bipinnate circinate fronds and bearing sporangia . . ."

At all events, the fact that a dictionary is an invaluable aid in pronunciation cannot be disputed. At the bottom of each page are simple, common words like "ice," "unite," and "orb" which have much more to do with such sticklers as "lagniappe," "myrmecology," and "therodynamic" than a casual glance would reveal. For these little words are really cleverly disguised keys to the pronunciation of the sticklers. They are marked with certain symbols that carry certain common sounds. The

Pictured above are the newly elected members of the Mars Hill community. Front row: Hilda Mayo, Nell Hunter, Genie Johnson, Mary Stone, Evelyn Stone, and the author.