

it took nineteen tailors

He's the snappiest

dummy in the world, and a wooden

head doesn't bother him—

he lets Bergen do the talking.

--from a 1948 RADIO ALBUM

■ He'd be one of the best-dressed men in America—if only he were a man. But under the tie and tails, the monocle and the carnation you find tin and leather and upholsterers' hair. It's a shame—a kid like Charlie McCarthy you'd like to have alive. It all goes back to the birth of Edgar Bergen in 1903. There was a boy a few people felt like taking a swat at! He'd sit in his classroom and answer "present" for all the kids who were absent. Teachers thought they were losing their minds. At home, when his mother heard him shouting from inside the oven she nearly passed out. Bergen doesn't exactly throw his voice. He muffles it. He talks with his tongue through closed teeth and his lips scarcely move. At high school parties and dances, Bergen was very popular. Not with the girls—with the entertainment committees. But it paid. In fact, Bergen talked his way through college (Northwestern University). He used to buy his newspapers from a merry and cynical Irish newsboy whose face he couldn't forget. Bergen drew a sketch of the face, gave the sketch to Charles Mack, a Chicago wood-carver. And for \$35, McCarthy's red-topped head was born. That was over twenty years ago. In the beginning, Edgar didn't have much faith in radio. The stage, where people could see Charlie, was for him. But in 1936 he did a trial broadcast with Rudy Vallee, and you know the rest. The years have done Charlie good. He's in the chips. He has ten hats for his swelled head, a couple of full dress suits, a Sherlock Holmes outfit, a Foreign Legion outfit, a gypsy costume. The upkeep costs him \$1,000 a year, but he lets Edgar pay. And Edgar doesn't mind. In his will, he's even leaving \$10,000 for ventriloquists who'll take Charlie around to hospitals and orphanages. Not a bad deal for the McCarthy lad. He's no dummy!

