

CORRESPONDENCE

Word from France

[Note: The following letter, from a member of the American Ambulance in France, was forwarded to us by its recipient.—The Editors.]

I WAS much interested in one of the articles in The New Republic—The Night Train from Amiens. The writer has gained the same impression that I have. This is that there is going to be a tremendous revolution after this war, and that a better and a saner form of government will emerge than has yet been demonstrated. It will be nearest to Socialism. The common people through mingling with one another, with their allies, in the trenches, have discovered that they are as good as the next fellow. They will not be so easily exploited as they have been in the past. They realize that they have made and saved what they have now, and they should have a share in it. They have had the value of coöperation or better coöperative organization, strongly emphasized—nothing but that has stopped the Boche. They have seen the increased efficiency due to government ownership and control. I think they will be slow to let things swing back to their former status.

One reason why I wish to see representative delegates from all the Allied nations attend the conference at Stockholm is to give the German people a chance to express themselves. As it is we are unapproachable to the people as a whole. They have no means by which they could express a will if they had one. I think that if the pacifist element in Germany felt that there was a chance of finishing the war on a program which would not be too severe on the German people, it would strengthen them immeasurably in Germany and would probably force a change of government.

What are the main points holding us apart? First we are unwilling to deal with the militarist party, responsible for all this, now in power. Secondly there is much territory now controlled by the Central Empires upon which rests the dispute as to its final status.

Take the question of the militarist party. As long as we continue to wage war against Germany and allow the pacifist party no chance to express itself, we are practically holding the militarist party in power, because the others feel that as long as they are forced to wage war the militarists are the logical men to carry it out.

As for the question of territorial readjustment. The people as a whole are so sick of war, that I feel certain that the German people would not continue to fight just to hold Poland or Bosnia and Herzegovina under Prussian or Austrian rule. I know how the Poilu feels in that respect. Much as they desire to regain Alsace-Lorraine, I am certain they would not remain another winter in the trenches if that were the only question involved.

Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps the German people may not have sense enough to see how they're being duped. Perhaps the bayonet and the grenade alone will teach them. But I say: Give them a chance to express themselves. If, having the chance, they are able to make nothing out of it, the war must go ahead until they do see, or are exhausted. I don't want you to think that I'm weakening. I am speaking from the viewpoint of the French who have borne this hell for three long years. You can't understand it over there; you never will be able to—and, I tell you, no reasonable man could watch an attack as I did one night; could handle these torn up pieces of humanity, and not wish to stop it, if we can do so and still gain our ends. But if our

ends cannot be gained by other means than war, they must be gained by war, even if we must duplicate in the years to come all the sacrifices made in the three years that are past.

LONGSHAW K. PORRITT.

Somewhere in France.

Another Group of Vigilantes

SIR: In his letter headed One Group of Vigilantes, in your issue of August 25th, Padraic Colum barks up the wrong tree. The organization of writers called "The Vigilantes" is not that referred to in the newspaper article he quotes. Someone, in giving the newspaper reporters an idea of the style of organization desired to reduce the seditious quality of certain street speakers, used the word "vigilantes" and thus the error arose. "The Vigilantes" (the organization of writers) is a body of writers conducting their own newspaper syndicate and has so far confined itself to writing and distributing those writings. It is loyal in purpose and therefore obnoxious to disloyal agitators.

If Mr. Colum is a "sojourner" here and "on the fence" he should be more careful to make sure of his facts before attacking any Americans, whether intellectuals or unintellectuals, lest he be thought one of that group of pro-German Irish who are, to my mind, entirely anti-American at this moment. I have never heard of Mr. Padraic Colum complaining because Irish intellectuals united with the Sinn Fein, as they had a perfect right to do unless they did so to stir up sedition. That "intellectuals" should not combine to assist the nation of their birth, or for any reason, is a quaint, poetic fancy, but I have not heard that the members of The Vigilantes set up to be "intellectuals." We are writers. Our government is at war. We have established a mailing bureau to send out to the newspapers what we write, appointed a managing editor to suggest topics, and we confine ourselves to patriotic propaganda according to our lights.

I feel in my bones that if The Vigilantes happened to be a combination of "intellectuals" created to write for a free Ireland, or to spread insidious pro-German propaganda in America, you would not have had a peep from Mr. Colum.

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER.

Flushing, New York.

Restoration by Armies

SIR: As a poet in vision and an amateur in politics, therefore unaware doubtless of practical difficulties, I have long thought that a salutary peace might best be accompanied and secured by restoration direct rather than indirect, actual rather than virtual.

Lost life seems beyond repair, except as we repair ourselves. But since damaged property, urban or agricultural, can be more or less repaired, why should not the repairing be done by the very agents that have done the damage? Taxes for indemnities are a vague sort of reparation. But if armies which have pulled down should in the same places build up again under the strict supervision of those upon whom they have trespassed, would not human beings, guilty of obedience to militarism, be brought to a quicker realization of its fatuity and to a more thorough desire to liberate themselves from its oppression?

WITTER BYNNER.

New York City.

After the Play

ON the one occasion that I ever went trolling I got a magnificent bite. The fish must have been a big one, it drew the line so savagely. All the time I was pulling it in, with instructions pattering meaninglessly around me, I felt exultation over the living strenuousness that resisted me. My line seemed appallingly thin. My heart trembled along the length of it for fear it should snap. Soon the actual weight of the fish was coming out of the water, all I needed was one last yank. Then something happened. Either he jerked his head or slid sidewise or curled a lean satiric lip. At any rate the weight abruptly left the fish-line and I drew aboard a final yard of lax uneventful string. I never fished again.

At Mr. Henning Berger's play, *The Deluge*, I was reminded of my piscatorial experience, only on this occasion *The Deluge* was the fisherman and I was the fish. At the beginning the play baited and hooked me. For all the first act, struggle as I would, it drew relentlessly. There was a power in it that seemed invincible power. Then, at the crux, after the completed conquest, I mildly and easily disengaged myself from *The Deluge*, and sunk amiably away. The thing that hooked had no dramatic clinch in it. The hand that played the line had no final tact. There was a barb in the idea but not in its management. There was an arrest but a failure to get a conviction.

You have only to think of the Johnstown flood, the Titanic disaster, the Messina earthquake, or any other climax provided by a jocular Providence to understand the kind of incident that Mr. Berger selects for dramatization. What he calls *The Deluge* is an actual engulfing flood of water that swallows up a Mississippi town, and the thing he gives us is the envelopment in this sudden peril of one casual human group. There is no panorama of torn-up trees, happy children in floating apple-barrels, drowned dogs and shivering grandmothers retrieved by the Red Cross. The kaleidoscope of a Sunday newspaper deluge is not covered by Mr. Berger. There is only one setting in his play, a high-class basement saloon that looks like an office-building saloon, and the deluge is only heard in the incessant thunder and rain outside, and only beheld in its effect on the handful of men and the solitary woman who are marooned in the steel-shuttered basement. Yet without panorama or kaleidoscope, without any effort at extensive reporting, the play does succeed in its supreme attempt to bring catastrophe on the stage. If that were all that was required of a drama, the sensational environment, Mr. Berger might be recorded as hugely successful. With very slight resort to violence, depending almost altogether on the appeal made to the spectator's imagination by the words and gestures of the haplessly encircled, and the paralyzed ticker and the dumb telephone and the blind electric light, he creates that merciless tension which is as much a requisite for tragedy as a taut string for music. There is no failure on Mr. Berger's part to transmit the horror, the fear, the hallucination and the ecstasy of disaster. But having invoked the deluge, it remained for the dramatist to give significance to his characters in relation to it—significance not simply in the degree that the deluge did things to them but also as they did things, or failed to do things, to the deluge. Here it appeared to me that Mr. Berger had singularly little to say. If he had been writing for the Smart Set he could not have been more content with a reverse-sentimental formula.

This is another way of asserting that the main thing to

interest Mr. Berger in his drama was the intensity that an exterior agent could create for him, not the human material for which the intensity was created. A saloon was, indeed, an admirable corner in which to see a hold-up by Death. To make the average man stand and deliver his soul against the squalid background of secure self-indulgence showed a real perception of the fitness of things. But what kept one from going all the way with Mr. Berger was the discovery that his irony did not reach far behind this sort of bitter picturesqueness. When one scrutinized his people through the great baleful glare that magnified them, one saw a puppet saloon-keeper, servile and sentimental; a simple facile bar-tender; a trio of business men who rang the changes on grouchy failure, harried successfulness and shyster eloquence; two subservient wastrels, flotsam and jetsam; and a soulful prostitute. Experience sanctions the psychology of the play, the swift transition from the snarling self-absorption and brutal independence of their supposedly normal condition in an American business community to a sweetness and brotherliness in the face of death. But just as Mr. Berger was somewhat mechanical and crass in emphasizing the normal brutality of human conditions, so he was mechanical in representing his characters' change of heart. They flopped into beatitude rather informally, in spite of numerous amusing differentiations. And of course, when the tension was relieved, they entirely simply flopped out.

One of the worst impertinences in criticism is to suggest a "better" way in which a play could have been written. Although Shakespeare did doll up some dowdy old plays, plainly indicating the finer possibilities of impertinence, the average dramatist rightly resents the Shakespearean day-dreams of his critic. Still, stooping to impertinence for a moment, the chief need of *The Deluge* appears to one observer to be the development, the completion of some genuine situation by reason of the occurrence of the deluge. And by a genuine situation I do not mean anything like that which leads to the temporary reconciliation of the frantic business man with the girl he had once made love to. It may be the author's idea that it is crushingly candid to expose this sort of flimsiness, this easy coronation and dethronement of love. But there is nothing in the play as it stands that contrasts the goodness which is a mere herd lucubration in disaster with the goodness that has its source in personality. There is nothing to distinguish illusive brotherhood from the real thing. Without the existence of some condition or situation which the deluge so precipitates as to bring out these contrasts, the characters cannot be sufficiently dynamic; the absence of any such situation reduces the dramatist to flat character-sketching, clever of its kind but by no means serious or deep.

The emotional insignificance of *The Deluge* might seem less pronounced if Mr. Henry E. Dixey were not cast as the fantastic Irish lawyer. Mr. Dixey in a serious rôle is like a cork submarine. But considering the admirable performance of Mr. Robert McWade as the rough-neck and Miss Pauline Lord as the girl, the dramatist is not entitled to much rebate on account of his actors. What there is in the play, with the exception of Mr. Dixey, they handsomely get out of it. What they don't get out of it isn't securely there. There is a promise, at the commencement, of a quite marvelous excavation of human natures. The net result is almost a squib. The astringency of the dramatist's tone is healthy. He is pungent and direct. But the vigor implied by his manner is only present in the realization of the impending flood.

F. H.