

CORRESPONDENCE

Frank H. Simonds and Pomerania

SIR: In a recent issue of the New Republic Frank H. Simonds protests against doing a flagrant injustice to 755,000 Poles in Pomerania. He quotes from the Polish census of 1921 to prove that there are 755,000 Poles in Pomerania! In 1900 there were in West Prussia 1,000,000 inhabitants speaking German as their mother tongue, while about 500,000 spoke Polish, Masurian, etc., as their mother tongues, indicating that the German speaking population was two to one of the non-German speaking population.

"Why should the New Republic," he says, "protest vehemently against the transfer of 300,000 German-speaking Tyrolese in the Upper Adige to Italy, oppose with the last earnestness the transfer of 750,000 Germans in the Saar to France, and then advocate the surrender of 755,000 Poles to Germany? Agreeing absolutely as I do with the New Republic's attitude in the two former questions I find myself puzzled in the last."

I find myself puzzled, too, very much puzzled. Can Mr. Simonds refer us to a single line in his voluminous writings where he protests, of course not "vehemently," but even mildly, against the transfer of 300,000 German-speaking Tyrolese to Italy or the transfer of 750,000 Germans in the Saar to France? I do remember an article in which Mr. Simonds not only does not protest against the transfer of 750,000 Germans in the Saar to France, but defends such transfer on the ground that the Saar was taken from France by Prussia in 1815!

"Again," says Mr. Simonds, "we must recall the circumstances under which Prussia acquired Pomerania in the first place; it was of course, by virtue of the odious First Partition of Frederick the Great, one of the most cynical and evil transactions in history and the precedent for much greater evils in the succeeding years. Historically, ethnologically and by the will of the people concerned Pomerania belongs to Poland." Ye giants, gods and infant fishes! Surely Mr. Simonds knows that Pomerania proper has not belonged to Poland since the Dark Ages. Pomerellen (sometimes called Pomerania parva), taken by Polen in 1470, was acquired by Prussia in the First Partition. Every right-thinking person will agree that that partition was odious, about as odious as some of the territorial provisions of the Versailles Treaty, except that the partition was perhaps more frank and honest in its disregard for justice than the blatant hypocrisy perpetrated at Versailles.

"By the will of the people." Can Mr. Simonds tell us when this will of the people was expressed? Even in the shadow of Polish and French bayonets the people in Upper Silesia voted two to one for belonging to Germany and in every instance on the eastern front in former German territory, where the people were allowed to express their will as a bloc, they decided for Germany—a curious commentary on German oppression.

But supposing that Pomerellen and even all of West Prussia should "on historic and ethnologic grounds" belong to Poland, should not then Alsace belong to Germany on equally good "historic and ethnologic grounds?" Thus says the Encyclopædia Britannica (1910, Vol. I, p. 755): "In the fifth century came other Germanic tribes, the Alemanni and then the Franks, who drove the Alemanni into the south. Since that period the population in the main has been Teutonic, and the French conquests of the seventeenth century, while modifying this element, still left it predominant. The people continued to use a German dialect, as their native tongue, though the educated classes also spoke French." But such is the mind of the propagandist that what is good logic and good sense and "good historic and ethnologic grounds" in one case is not admitted to be so in a similar case.

Again says Mr. Simonds: "I need not recall to the mind of the editors of the New Republic the record of German persecution of the Polish population of the east during the whole period of the nineteenth century and continued not only down to the World War, but since the making of peace." With the first statement we all agree, all except German propagandists. That there have been persecutions of Polish minorities in Germany since the war is probably true, but if so, the Poles and French have it in their power to stop such persecutions. But has Mr. Simonds heard of persecutions and oppressions of German minorities by Poland, attested to by neutral observers and protested against by Germany not once but often? But of course the only persecutions to be tolerated are French and Polish persecutions, at least so thinks Mr. Simonds.

AMANDUS JOHNSON.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Capital Punishment

SIR: Those of your readers who live in or near New York will be interested to learn of a debate Sunday afternoon, October 26th, at Manhattan Opera House, between Clarence Darrow and Judge Alfred J. Talley, of the New York Court of General Sessions. Its subject will be, Resolved: That capital punishment is a wise public policy. Mr. Darrow will uphold the negative and Judge Talley will argue the affirmative. Mr. Louis Marshall will preside, and it is hoped to have Warden Lewis E. Lawes, of Sing Sing, who has witnessed over one hundred executions, as temporary chairman.

New York, N. Y.

SYMON GOULD.

Men, Dogs and Newspapers

SIR: I am shocked to see that you permit Chester T. Crowell (August 27) to repeat a certain silly saying as though it were, or ever had been, sense: "If a dog bites a man, it isn't news, if a man bites a dog, it's big news." Mr. Crowell, like every other intelligent newspaper man, knows that Charles A. Dana cannot have given it as a rule of the craft to a cub reporter. It must have been invented by an enemy downtown, for after all Dana was a great editor.

There are hardly any imaginable circumstances in which a man's biting a dog could be news. But if a dog were to bite Mr. John W. Davis or Babe Ruth or Lillian Gish or even any mayor or his debutante daughter, it would be among the biggest news. Whenever I hear a journalist foolishly coming out with this particular piece of rubbish I know he has never given a thought to his job.

London.

S. K. RATCLIFFE.

Mr. Preserved Smith's Erasmus

SIR: Are reviewers to be held to the same standards of accuracy which they demand of authors whose works they review? If so, may I beg a little of your space to comment on Professor E. K. Rand's notice of two recent works on Erasmus, a notice which appeared in your issue of October 1? Recognizing the article as an able one, I am even more grateful for the just criticism by which I have learned something than I am for the praise which the reviewer has thought fit to bestow on some portion of my efforts. But fairness to the readers of the New Republic impels me to point out that zeal for the honor of the classics has driven Professor Rand into certain misconceptions of my attitude, and that the Nemesis dogging the footsteps of those who with too great assurance point out the faults of others, has entangled him in an extraordinary number of misstatements. He is wrong in attributing the English translation of Huizinga to P. S. Allen; it is by F. Hopman. He is wrong in calling me "Preserved H. Smith"; my name is Preserved Smith. If, like him, I reckoned every misprint as "a gross error, besmirching the page and mangling the text," I might point to such a slip on page 9, line 14 from the bottom. He states that there are fourteen errors "in punctuation or the form of words" in my edition of Erasmus's poems; but Dr. P. S. Allen, whose authority in these matters is superior to Professor Rand's, having compared my edition with the original manuscript, has not found fourteen errors, nor anything like that number. Professor Rand finds fault with my translation of "cithara" as "guitar"; but not only is "guitar" given in Harpers' Latin Dictionary as the translation of "cithara," but the two words are but variations of the same Greek noun. Professor Rand cavils at my statement that "few works of high merit had been produced in any European vernacular" before 1500; and indignantly asks whether high merit may not be predicated of the Song of Roland, the Romance of the Rose, and the works of Dante, Chaucer, Boccaccio and Petrarch. Dense as is my ignorance of the Middle Ages, I had heard of, and even read, these books before, and I had attributed high merit to them; and therefore I did not write that no works of high merit had been produced before 1500, but that only a few had been produced. Other statements of the reviewer are open to contradiction; but to sustain my opinion against his would take more space than you would allow. I merely wish to caution the reader that a patronizing attitude towards other scholars is not a guarantee of a critic's infallibility.

PRESERVED SMITH.

Cornell University.

Subversive Miss Alcott

IT is a humorous reflection that Louisa M. Alcott did not like girls. When her publishers asked her to write a book for girls she complied reluctantly, with more of an eye to the price than the pleasure, though of course she did not slight her duty to be a wholesome influence. "I plod away, though I don't like this sort of thing. I never liked girls or knew many," she wrote. Whereupon *Little Women* became a best seller before it was a week off the press, and a classic before its second half was written. When the second half did come out, and it appeared that Jo had turned down Laurie, and that the minx Amy had caught him on the rebound, there was such great excitement that several young persons are said to have gone to bed with a fever. Miss Alcott feared at one time that her book contained too much "loving," but this the young folks denied, and even their elders did not feel called upon to disapprove. "No mother fears," wrote a feminine critic, "that Miss Alcott's books will brush the bloom of modesty from the faces of her young men or maidens,"—an assertion anyone will support who has read Professor Bhaer's proposal to Jo under the umbrella, or Laurie's to Amy in the rowboat.

"How well we pull together, don't we?" said Amy.

"So well, that I wish we might always pull in the same boat. Will you, Amy?" very tenderly.

"Yes, Laurie!" very low.

"Then they both stopped rowing, and unconsciously added a pretty little tableau of human love and happiness to the dissolving views reflected in the lake."

Now there is a young girl—I might almost say a young woman—of thirteen among my acquaintance, who is not by any means old-fashioned. She dances whatever is latest and talks the fashionable divorce and likes to get sermons over the radio because they sound so silly. Yet I found her once sunk in a chair, her long legs bridging the gap to a table, with an ancient battered *Little Women* in her lap.

"I read it every year," she said.

There you are. Miss Alcott didn't like girls, but she wrote a book that was immediately read—laughed and cried over is the proper way of saying it, I believe—by every little girl in America. Our insurgent age has discarded nineteenth century New England with a great fanfare, yet here is our hopeful youth addicted to the double distilled essence of New England, to the very thing we were at such great pains to get rid of for their sakes. The fact is that *Little Women* and *Little Men*, those late classics, are classics still. "They touch," Miss Cheney says, "the universal heart deeply." And so it would appear, for here are Little, Brown and Company bringing out a brand new edition.*

The question is Why? Why do people republish these books? Why do small girls with the freedom of Sheik fiction and the films read them? Take *Little Women*. The characters are perfectly categorical—each patterned on a simple formula like this: Mr. March, father, philosopher and friend; Mrs. March, Mother and All That Stands For; Meg, fastidious womanliness; Amy, a perfect little lady; Beth, angel in the house. Even Jo is not the person to cut much ice with the current 'teens. At least you'd not think so. She is a tom-boy according to her lights:

"We are a pretty jolly set, as Jo would say," said Meg.

"Jo does use such slangwords!" observed Amy . . .

Jo immediately sat up, put her hands in her pockets and began to whistle,"—not such a tomboy as would take the breath of a first-team forward. And look at Meg married to her steadfast John and safely on the shelf,—the sort of shelf on which young wives and mothers may consent to be laid, safe from the restless fret and fever of the world . . . and learning, as Meg learned, that a woman's happiest kingdom is her home, her highest honor the art of ruling it,"—a fine popular doctrine for the age of equality and economic independence.

The so-called plot holds few apparent thrills for a generation raised on Fairbanks. Miss Alcott herself admitted it was not "sensational," and at that she exaggerated. Except for the uncomplicated chronicle of their loves and marriages the Marches have really nothing to offer in the way of plot at all. The structure of the book is largely segmental, each chapter a neatly rounded episode, loaded with its lesson, and capped with repentance and tears and a few words of comfort from Mrs. March.

And yet—and yet: one does have to admit that these impossible Marches are real people. The children who get so absorbed in them are not wrong in finding them alive and true. The only wonder is that any child raised this side of 1900 has been able to put up with the things they do and the things they say, these all too real people. Of course the Marches *were* real people. Except for the trussing up of episodes and the simplification of character which passes for Miss Alcott's art, she has merely reported her own family. The searching of consciences and amateur theatricals and domestic trials which went on in the March family all happened to the Alcotts. It is not the people in the book who are unreal, but the people who lived. The Alcotts flourished on transcendental truth. But the truth of their day, the simple faith of our fathers, we have seen thinned and worn, until it has become the bandwagon drool and pulpit hypocrisy of ours. Can this be what our modern small daughters like?

The sort of thing that used to be said was that Miss Alcott's books have been a greater force for good among the girls and boys of this country than any other one etc., etc. Then rose a Modern—from New England, too—who cried out that Miss Alcott's books have done incalculable harm in all the nurseries of the land by implanting in young minds a false and priggish picture. I think Miss Alcott, with her conscientious little morals, turned over in her grave at that point. But I confess that that statment holds the best explanation I can see of why little girls still read here books. They are bad for them of course. Could any but pernicious influence hold such a fascination for so long? The fact is that little girls have a natural depraved taste for moralizing. They like to see virtue rewarded and evil punished. They like good resolutions. They like tears and quarrels and loving reconciliations. They believe in the ultimate triumph of good, in moral justice, and honeymoons in Valarosa. And Miss Alcott panders to these passions!

Let modern mothers bob their hair and talk the neo-psychic talk. Let children spell by drawing rabbits; let them study the city water works. Yet it will not avail. For unless we take to censorship to protect them against the subversions of the past, little girls will read *Little Women* still.

ELIZABETH VINCENT.

* *Little Women*; *Little Men*, by Louisa M. Alcott, in the Beacon Hill Bookshelf series. \$2.00 each volume.