

Letters to the Editor: *Book Reports from Some SRL Readers*

Earlier "Citadel"

SIR:—While "The Citadel," by Dr. Cronin, is on the lips of novel readers, may I call your attention to another "Citadel," written by Samuel Merwin, and published by the Century Co. in 1912?

To my amusement I find at various points therein the following declarations of a young Congressman.

"I do not see, Mr. Chairman, why we should hesitate to admit that this pretense of sacred mystery that is today woven about the Constitution is just bald hocus pocus. The Constitution is, of course, an interesting and in some respects a remarkable document. But really, Mr. Chairman, to expect us to believe that any document drawn up as a compromise by a body of men representing the property interests of a few sea-coast colonies—colonies which existed in political, industrial, and social conditions basically different from the conditions obtaining today—to expect us to believe that any such document must be accepted today as the political, industrial, and social law and gospel is to expect us to believe a good deal.

"And under our system and in order to learn what Congress meant by a certain word or phrase, we go—where? Back to Congress? Not at all. We take it to an entirely different body—to a group of individuals, lawyers all, products of the Rent, Profit, and Interest system of Civilization—to the body that has become so mighty and august that we may not even venture to criticize it without finding ourselves under the ban of a sort of lèse majesté—the most despotically powerful group of individuals in the civilized world today—the Supreme Court of the United States!"

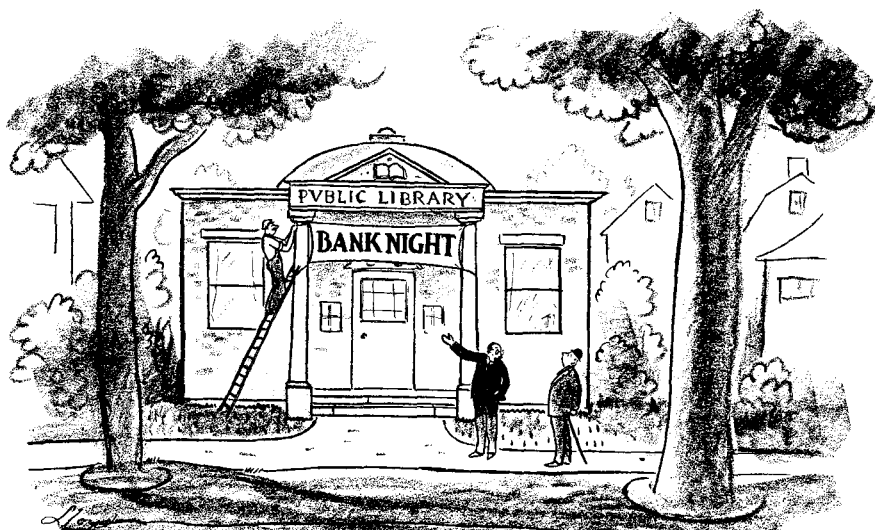
WELLESLEY DAVIS.

New Haven, Conn.

Closing a Long Controversy

SIR:—Ever since I can remember, people anxious to advertise their Culture have been making lists of 10 books to be taken when wrecked on a desert island. In every instance that I can recall, the selection was on a neurotic basis. The latest illustration is furnished by three western college professors, each of whom starts off dutifully with "The Bible and Shakespeare." In the first place, if they are the men they ought to be, they would know the Bible and Shakespeare so well that it would be needless to encumber their luggage with the volumes. In the second place, what possible benefit could a castaway derive from these old stand-bys? Perhaps a man feels virtuous to think that the rescue party will discover him dead on the beach, the Bible clasped in one hand and Shakespeare in the other. Anyway, he'll be dead. Any list of the best 10 books for a castaway must, if it is made up realistically, be about as follows:

1. A book on camping and woodcraft.
2. A book on building and managing small boats.
3. The best atlas possible.



"WELL, WE MUST BUILD UP CIRCULATION SOMEHOW."

4. A popular book on astronomy.
5. A treatise on human anatomy.
6. A treatise on human physiology.
7. A popular handbook on medicine and hygiene.
8. A book on gardening and horticulture.
9. J. C. Willis's "Manual and dictionary of flowering plants and ferns" (for identification of useful flora).
10. The Columbia Encyclopedia.

PAUL POPENOE.

Institute of Family Relations
Los Angeles, Cal.

"On Gilbert Head"

SIR:—I have read "On Gilbert Head," by Elizabeth Etnier, and I feel it is worthier of praise and mention than any other recent book.

The jacket declares that "On Gilbert Head" is "a book of 'unpremeditated charm.'" Mrs. Etnier has given us more than the charm of Maine as it really is, more than a true picture of Maine natives, more than a book portraying the life of a young couple. She has given us a book which leaves a deep feeling and has a perhaps unintentional meaning. I agree with whoever wrote the jacket that Mrs. Etnier is in love with life—I say that it is that that gives one the strong feeling about the book.

And I believe that it is her love for life that is also the meaning of the book. It teaches us how one woman made her life into a paradise easily—because she loved it.

N. C.

New York City.

"The Anointed" and San Francisco

SIR:—I enjoyed "The Anointed." I think it is a unique book, a little masterpiece. But has any reviewer pointed out that, wherever Mr. Davis has been, he has never been in the San Francisco Public Library? Or if he has, he has completely forgotten it. His description of its appear-

ance and methods could not be more inaccurate. This is a trifle, and yet in a book like "The Anointed" it is not a trifle; for, like "On Borrowed Time," the book depends for its impact on the reader on the close attention to realistic detail which gives verisimilitude to the fantastic.

MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD.

San Francisco, Cal.

SIR:—I read "The Anointed" because it was praised rather extravagantly by Lewis Gannett and came away with the feeling of *The New Yorker's* that it was a "vaguely crazy story about a seaman," etc.

So you see it's a question of reading the right review first.

M. F.

"Claude"

SIR:—For many years, in fact, I believe since its beginning, I have been an enthusiastic subscriber to the *S. R. L.*

There have been many temptations but this is the first time I have yielded to the impulse to voice an opinion and I regret my première is a protest. But I feel so strongly that your review Sept. 4th of "Claude" by Geneviève Fauconnier was a disservice to your patrons that I am emboldened to speak.

Had I not read the book, before seeing your review, I would most certainly have crossed it off my list and thus missed a volume of quiet but unusual beauty.

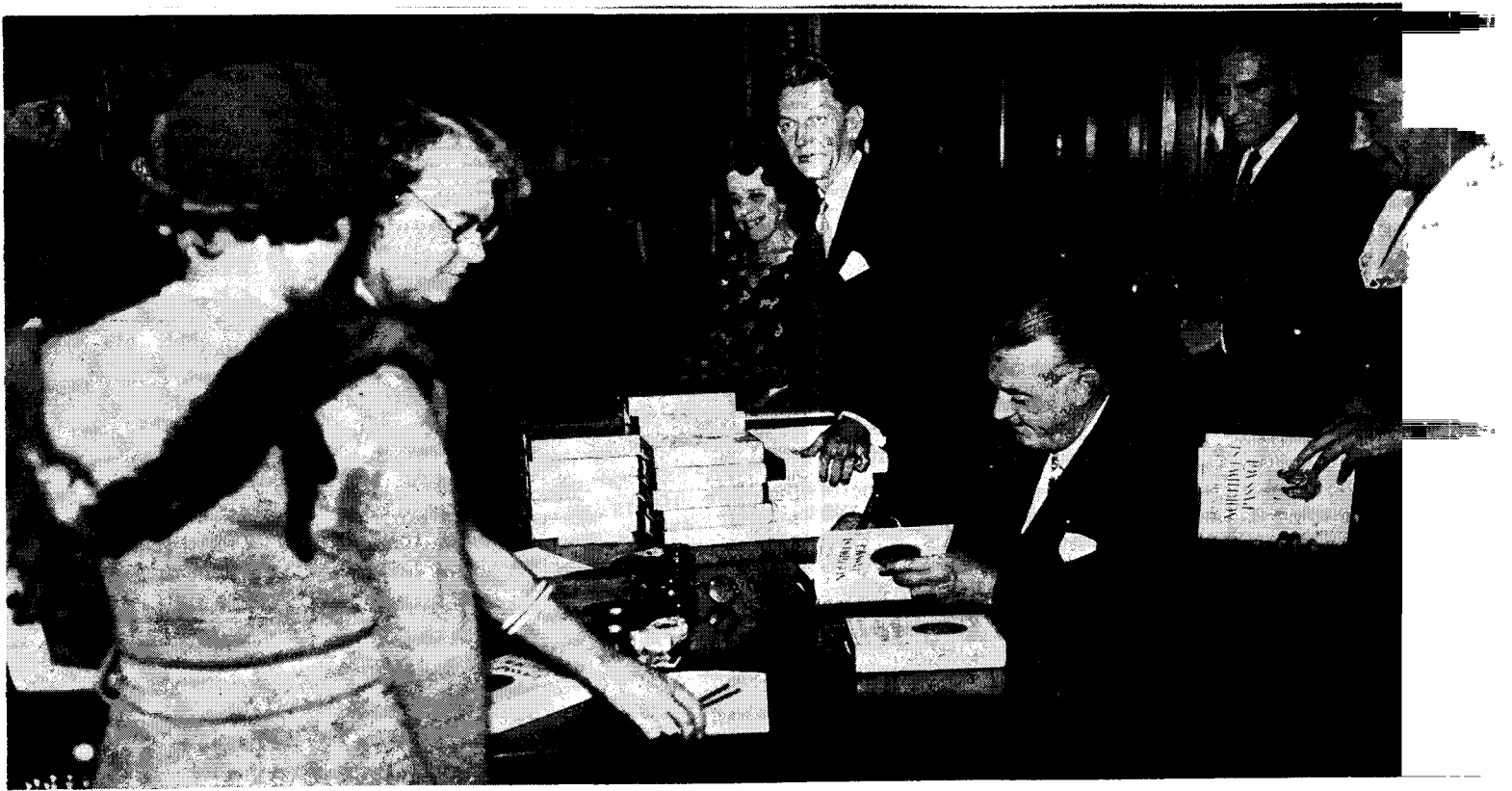
I feel there must be many like myself, who would read "Claude" as a restrained but clear exposition of the inner workings of a sensitive, courageous and highly aware adult mind. It somehow seemed quite logical that one who would "condemn with faint praise" this book would also refer to Lauren Ford as "he"—perhaps the last was a printer's slip—but I'm inclined gravely to doubt it!

For the most part,

Yours gratefully,

ALICE J. AYLING.

Washington, Conn.



Kenneth Roberts (seated, above) autographs copies of "Northwest Passage" at Brentano's, New York City. . . . Below, Ivan T. Sanderson, British naturalist, explorer, author and illustrator of "Animal Treasure," with his drawing of a three-horned chameleon (habitat West Africa).



Another African explorer, Attilio Gatti (above), who wrote "Great Mother Forest," looks at the view from his Park Ave. penthouse through a native mask. . . . Below, H. P. Smolka, who reported a Soviet colonial experiment in "40,000 against the Arctic," in New York en route to Mexico.



International reporters: left, Eugene Lyons, author of "Assignment in Utopia" (see page 11) with U. P. correspondent Mary Knight below, Henry Landau corrects proofs of "The Enemy Within," on wartime sabotage in the U. S. (News pictures by Robert Disraeli)



Paradise Lost

ASSIGNMENT IN UTOPIA. By Eugene Lyons. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by VERA MICHELES DEAN

AMONG the many perplexities which beset every student of international affairs in this age of regimented thought and skillfully staged propaganda is the problem of presenting facts without fear or favor. Every writer and lecturer of integrity daily faces the temptation of compromising with his principles in order to flatter or conciliate his audience, his friends or, most important of all, his employers. This is particularly true of newspaper correspondents assigned to the distracting task of covering events in dictatorship countries, where criticism is synonymous with treason, and reporting unpalatable truths becomes a cause for expulsion. The correspondent's predicament is particularly serious in the Soviet Union, which until recently has been the Mecca of intellectuals in search of Utopia and sophisticated travelers in quest of new sensations. In the maelstrom of conflicting misinformation, he is hard put to it to keep his balance.

Eugene Lyons, for six years Moscow correspondent of the United Press, had to cope with these various problems, and his book is an absorbing—though overwritten—record of his Russian Odyssey, which ended with his recall in 1934. His early career followed a pattern familiar to American journalists of radical convictions. He covered an I.W.W. trial in Oklahoma, worked for the defense of Sacco and Vanzetti, wrote a book about that world-shaking case, became interested in communism. When he took the UP assignment, it was in the hope of using his position to create in this country sentiment favorable to the Soviet Union.

Like many other foreigners Lyons at first mistook the glamorous quality of an unfamiliar land, the charm of temperamental Russians, and the beauty of the Russian theatre for essential features of the Soviet system. Once he had settled down to the routine of Moscow life, he discovered that this brave new world was composed, after all, of human beings, fallible at best, and at worst ruthless and brutal in ways shocking to Western concepts of social justice. His close-ups of Soviet demonstration trials, the liquidation of the kulaks, the violent suppression of all liberties, the arbitrary reversal of policies which constantly threw the country out of gear, led him to question the value of economic progress achieved at the cost of so much sacrifice in human lives. Most powerful of all was the impression made on him by the famine of 1933 — sedulously concealed from the world by a conspiracy of silence on the part of foreign correspondents — when the government penalized passive resistance to collectivization by allowing mil-

lions of peasants to die of starvation. Some correspondents — notably Walter Duranty — made the best of a tragic situation, learned to write noncommittal and often disingenuous dispatches. But Lyons found no solace in cynicism. Like William Henry Chamberlin, who has already recorded his experiences in "Russia's Iron Age," Lyons began to realize the viciousness inherent in the theory that the end justifies the means—a theory as useful to fascism as to communism. He came to the conclusion that "movements for economic change are worthless, even dangerous, as soon as they throw off respect for life, for liberty, for justice," and that "any philosophy of human progress which does not rest uncompromisingly on respect for life, no matter how honest its original intentions, becomes brutalized and defeats its own professed purposes." He has not lost faith in socialism, but believes that economic security alone does not justify the material and spiritual sacrifices imposed on the Russian people by an arbitrary dictatorship. To argue, as some critics may be expected to do, that Mr. Lyons speaks here out of personal bitterness and disillusion, is not to answer the fundamental question he raises: whether any system which sets out to achieve social justice by first exterminating all neutrals, dissidents, and opponents, does not run the danger of defeating the very ends ultimately intended to justify its means.

A biographical note about Eugene Lyons appears on page 40.

Prayer of a Country Gentleman

By ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE

I ASK Thee, Lord, Thy kind release
From Thy rich gift of rustic peace.
I am unworthy of the Grace
That showers about me in this place.
O Lord, upon some calmer soul
Confer this bounty of Thy dole!

Contemn me, Lord! contemn me wholly
As one unwise, unsound, unworthy—
A creature who could never know Thee,
A man Thou madest too unearthy.

I wander homesick in Thy woods;
I fear Thy mountain-solitudes;
Thy beasts that on each other prey
Haunt me with anguish night and day;
I shun Thy great and gracious lawns;
Nor do Thy sunsets and Thy dawns
Rouse me to silent ecstasies,
Nor Thy cloud-castles, nor Thy trees.

Dismiss me from Thy sunlit skies,
From larks that with the morning rise;
Absolve me from the whippoorwills;
Forbid me Thy green stately hills:
Inflict on me, in my unworth,
Complete divorcement from the earth;
And hurl me, Lord, in Thy stern pity,
Back to the horrors of the city.

No Escape

SUCH COUNSELS YOU GAVE TO ME.
By Robinson Jeffers. New York: Random House. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

ROBINSON JEFFERS is a poet whose utterance is so definite in its premises and so downright in its conclusions that the reader is compelled to take sides and appraise him not as a poet, but as a preacher, a force, an influence. Since his themes are, for the most part, tortured, and his conclusions are (from the human standpoint) almost negative, if not nihilistic, the number of Jeffers's readers will be limited to the hard few. These few thousand will treasure every statement in his latest volume, a volume that is packed with the strange combination—or is it a contradiction?—of revery and violence which has marked all the author's volumes since "Tamar" and "Roan Stallion."

In essence, the philosophy of "Such Counsels You Gave to Me" is not so much a statement as an annotated restatement. Jeffers says what he has said again and again: humanity is debased; its civilization is degenerate; its increasingly huge centers are hideous; its machines are unholy; it is not fit to inhabit this once-clean earth. Love cheats the flesh, bewilders the mind, and betrays the spirit. Even death is dubious and no sure release, since annihilation is impossible in a universe where there is "no cave of peace, no night of quietness, no escape but change."

Death and the futile wish for escape are the main theme of the new volume; the poet's contempt for the average man and his reverence for abstract truth are the subsidiary motifs. In one poem he acknowledges, for the first time, his mission:

... To be truth-bound, the neutral
Detested by all the dreaming factions,
is my errand here.

The title poem is, like so many of Jeffers's longer poems, an adaptation of an old tale. But where most of the others were modernizations of myths and legends, this is an expansion of a ballad, the well known "Edward, Edward." The sixty pages are as emotional as they are modern, as passionate as they are perverse, as original in utterance as they are familiar in subject. Once again Jeffers employs an unhappy family relationship to evoke a sense of personal tragedy against a background of universal terror. The twenty-two other poems are less imposing, but they are scarcely less interesting. The shorter quasi-lyrics celebrate strength, the consolation of transient beauty, the solidity of sea-granite, and the will to endure against the horrors of new ways to give pain, new slaveries. Such elements do not make pretty verses, but they make impressive monoliths of poetry.