

Letters to the Editor: *Michigan and Mr. Ford;
Prosperity in Ancient Rome*

Michigan Is Beautiful

SIR:—By getting rid of the blinders that he betrays in his article of June 10 in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Mr. Ford Madox Ford would be able to see that Michigan is beautiful and that he is inconsistent.

If there is no more merit to the works of the geniuses by implication of whom he writes than to his comment that "Michigan is the homeliest of all the states," it is not difficult to understand why the unknowns he is plugging fail to find publishers.

I would like to know how much of Michigan Mr. Ford has seen. Has he traveled through the fruit belt southwest of Olivet, the Tyrone hills, the Irish hills, along the Lake Michigan shore line, or in the Copper country?

I also would like to know what good Mr. Ford thinks it would accomplish to publish books that stuck in the retailer's shop, there to be classified as "completely unsaleable" and placed in storerooms or on the 25-cent table.

Mr. Ford has irked me to such an extent that I think I will send clippings to him of all my book reviews. Perhaps on reading them he would write an article saying that it is a shame I am not reviewing for your magazine or *The New York Times*.

COLIN J. McDONALD.

The Flint Journal
Flint, Mich.

(By "homely," Mr. Ford no doubt meant "homelike," without the American connotation of "ugly."—Ed.)

First Book Televised

SIR:—In your issue of June 10, P. E. G. Quercus refers to W. S. Hall's "Eyes on America" as "so far as we know the first book ever televised," the event having taken place on May 8, sponsored by the British Broadcasting Company. So far as I know, the first book ever televised was "The Greatest Show on Earth" (Doubleday, Doran), by Sidney Senzer. I did a television review of this book, the illustrations and the reviewer appearing on the screen, at the N.B.C. studios. The date was May 3, 1938.

ERNEST BOYD.

New York City.

The Roman Frontier

SIR:—In reviewing "The New Deal in Old Rome" in the *S. R. L.* for May 27th, Elmer Davis stated that

Roman prosperity vanished with the disappearance of the open frontier . . . collapse was postponed so long as there was new country to be opened and developed. Once the frontier was gone, the problem . . . had to be faced, . . . how to distribute the products of industry and



"I want something boring for a guest room."

agriculture in a society more than two thirds of whose members were ill clothed, ill housed, and ill fed.

Mr. Davis has repeatedly proved himself a competent and trustworthy witness and interpreter as to ancient or classic Rome. Almost never have I had to dissent from preceding utterances of his in this field. It is with diffidence that I do so now. But his remarks about "the open frontier," "new country" and "frontier gone" perplex me. If I rightly understand his meaning and drift, it looks to me as if there were a false analogy and an unreal parallel under those quoted phrases.

Has the reviewer had the receding and now vanished frontier in the United States and Canada in mind? (Possibly Argentina, Australia, and South Africa should be included.) If so, and if I understand his statements aright, it should seem as if the modern instance had been misapplied to the ancient happening. The modern frontier was originated and pushed forward by continuing overflows of civilization from Europe and European settlements in the Americas into noncivilized, sparsely peopled regions. (These don't include Central America, Mexico, and Peru.) The Roman frontier was originated and maintained by armies, not by mass-migrations of civilians, and went into countries—Britannia, Gallia, Germania, and Iberia, to say nothing of northern Africa, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Arabia—where considerable civilizations already existed or where wonderful ones had existed for millenniums. According to my knowledge of Roman history and civilization, which is not inconsiderable, the Roman frontier was not an eco-

conomic area and influence to any material degree, contributing significantly to the prosperity of Rome, but mainly a military means for conducting the Roman government's foreign policies. If my view of these matters be correct, the disappearance of the open frontier was not the cause of the vanishing of Rome's prosperity.

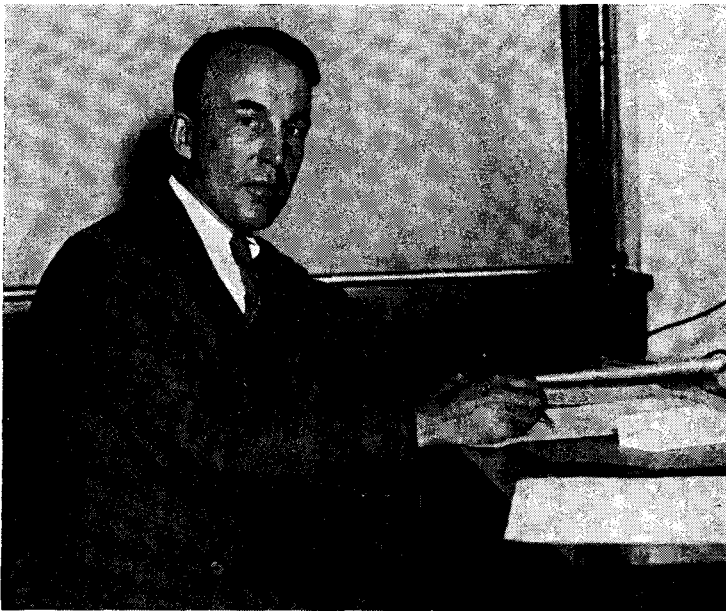
FREDERIC PERRY NOBLE.
Spokane, Wash.

Mr. Davis Replies

SIR:—The analogy is imperfect, as are all analogies between ancient and modern conditions; but by no means invalid. The Roman frontier was indeed created and maintained by armies; but in Gaul, Britain, Spain, the Balkan countries, and northern Africa (beyond the highly civilized coastal fringe) Roman conquest was followed by immigration, higher standards of living, and the gradual replacement of the old village or tribal culture by the much higher urban civilization of the Mediterranean. The new countries were not such an economic influence as they would be today because the difficulties of land transport made the shipment of goods manufactured in the older areas expensive; but as demand and purchasing power increased, new industries sprang up in the provinces themselves. And every newly opened frontier was an opportunity for ambitious young men who didn't see much ahead of them in their home towns in Italy (or Greece, or Africa) but knew that they could go west, or north, or south and grow up with the country.

ELMER DAVIS.

New York City.



Price Studios

Archibald MacLeish at his *Fortune* desk

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

BY JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

A YEAR AGO Yale University picked Bernard Knollenberg, a gusty, vehement New York tax lawyer, to head the Yale Library; and Mr. Knollenberg promptly chose James T. Babb, a New Haven stockbroker, to act as his assistant. Professional librarians gnashed their teeth; but Knollenberg and Babb, who are both first-rate functioners as well as lovers of Beautiful Letters, have lived down the initial criticism. People who make considerable use of the Yale Library tell me that all is now serene along the Quinnipiack save in the late afternoons, when Knollenberg frightens the porch-sitters at the sedate Lawn Club with his animalistic cries and Bounding-Basque acrobatics on the tennis court.

The Yale plum, however, was a private plum; the professional librarians might grouse, but it was, after all, Yale's own business if it chose to pick an amateur who had nothing to recommend him but his energy, executive capacity, and sheer joy in living (since books are supposed to grow out of life there are worse qualities than gusto in a librarian.) But with President Roosevelt's naming of Archibald MacLeish as the new librarian of Congress, the professional librarians evidently feel they have a right this time to squawk publicly.

With the professional librarians' right to their opinions no one can have the slightest quarrel. But their objections to MacLeish—that he is a poet, that he has had no library experience, that he is, presumably, not an executive—are all based on a fundamental misapprehension of the vital and sheerly able MacLeishian character. Like Mr. Knollenberg at Yale, Arch MacLeish has double the energy that can be contained in an eight-hour working day; and any job he takes is

bound to benefit from the surplusage. And, again like Mr. Knollenberg, MacLeish is just as much a natural-born executive as Bob Hutchins of the University of Chicago. He has the ability to function as a leader of men, whether as a field artillery captain in the World War, or as the director of a research team engaged in mastering the structure of the Japanese economy for *Fortune* Magazine. Great corporations know that a good executive can, after a suitable period of immersion, master any job from the administrative standpoint; and they are rightly more concerned with the quality of character of an executive vice president than they are with his technical knowledge. The only relevant question about MacLeish is the one the professional librarians failed to ask: what experience as a functioner has he had in the past, and how well has he stood up under the experience?

The popular notion of a poet is that he must by some inexorable law be a dreamer, unable to cope with practical matters. When people say "poet," they think of Whitman loafing on an East River ferry, or of Baudelaire with his purple sins, or of Jeffers in his tower, or of Edna Millay in a Christopher Street attic, or of Carl Sandburg in a free-and-easy newspaper city room. They are willing to admit that poets can be fighters, for Rupert Brooke and Allan Seeger went off to the World War with a vim. But as for common business efficiency and the time-clock virtues, these are never associated with the ability to command a difficult internal rhyme scheme. Yet Archie MacLeish is far more business-like and disciplined than most business men of my acquaintance. The son of Andrew MacLeish, a tough old Scotsman who was one of Chicago's great merchants and civic pioneers,

Archie combines the stubborn downrightness, the methodical approach, and the gnarled quality of his father's people with a charm that is still boyish at forty-seven. To look at him (or at his wife, Ada, a very gracious person) you would never guess that he has a son, Kenneth, who is already married and in graduate school. The son is an aviator, which frightens both father and mother. But it is characteristic that they have never tried to keep him from the cockpit of a plane.

Poets, who can be very jealous people, sometimes hold it against MacLeish that he has never been a technical innovator on the order of T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound. The objection has always seemed pettifogging to me; after all, Shakespeare did not invent blank verse, he merely transformed a comparatively stiff medium into something that is gloriously flexible. Similarly with MacLeish: he took the esoteric metrics of Pound and Eliot and turned them into something that has freedom and carrying-power. "Conquistador," which won the Pulitzer Prize for MacLeish in 1933, has always seemed to me a peak in modern poetry. To prepare for the writing of "Conquistador" MacLeish first covered by packmule every foot of Cortez's triumphant march from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Archie MacLeish is always thorough in just that way.

Indeed, his life has had a planned, purposive quality from the beginning. But Arch MacLeish has not planned in any narrow way; there is nothing of Poor Richard in him, for he has always made the copy-book virtues into his slave, not his master. At Yale, in the World War decade, he cultivated a range of activity that had been unknown to undergraduates in the earlier twentieth century period of New Haven's "muscular Christian-