

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Writing Down to Children

SIR:—This is a letter to the editor, something I rarely go in for. I thought Basil Davenport's article on the watering-down of juveniles (*SRL*, Nov. 16), a knockout, but I still wasn't going to write in and tell you so. But yesterday, at my dentist I met a fellow patient in the waiting-room, a child of five who was looking forward to her dentist visit because there was a FUNNY all about death-rays, plant men, and similar strong fodder. The child picked up the FUNNY and began to read where she had left off the week before. I got into conversation with the child's mother, who informed me she wouldn't keep FUNNIES at home. At home, her child read the usual juvenile stuff described by Davenport as "How the Little Locomotive Learned to Eat His Spinach" and that I describe as cheese-cake, to use a magazine term.

Of course, there is a personal angle to this letter as there is to all letters to editors. I have had personal experience with the cheese-cake psychology of juvenile editors. I once wrote a juvenile, testing it out on kids; a fantastic, satirical yarn about dog refugees banished from certain lands and arriving on these shores, and their adventures here, adventures that could not be illustrated with "handsome photographs." I am not a juvenile author. This was my first crack at it but like Davenport I was reared on juveniles with ideas. My nephews and nieces had been plaguing me for stories and I had been telling them all kinds of yarns about my dog, inventing them as I went along. I wrote this up. My agent at the time, one of the best agents in town, had a juvenile expert read the book. She approved of it. But the six or seven houses that saw the product were unanimous in rejecting it. It had satirical elements, one complained. A second declared, it isn't a regular juvenile since even adults could read it. Etc., etc. All I know is that kids have liked it, that the FUNNIES are read by millions of kids everywhere, that when elections and war are seriously discussed by youngsters everywhere, it is high time for the publishers of juveniles to brush the fog from their thinking processes, and to stop "the business of writing down to children" to use Davenport's sub-head. I don't believe in writing down for children, for adults, or for anybody. And therefore this letter.

BENJAMIN APPEL.

New York, N. Y.

SIR:—After Burton Rascoe's article, "What's Wrong with Publishers"—the most incompetent and misinformed piece of writing I have ever read in a reputable magazine—the editors certainly owed their readers something good and they gave it to



"Fortunately, my husband is ambidextrous."

them in Basil Davenport's article, "Water Babies—with Plain Water."

This article in a short space contains more sense about a child's mind and a child's reading than a score of pedantic reports of experts, psychologists, and other self-appointed guardians. Not so long ago, a children's book of ours by one of the most popular and ablest writers and illustrators in the field was criticized on the ground that it contained a picture of a "wicked stepmother." Wicked stepmothers apparently are out of fashion. Exit that fine malicious tribe who give such flavor to all folklore, fable and fairy tale.

THOMAS R. COWARD.

New York, N. Y.

Begins the Deluge

SIR:—As a critic of seventeen years standing, I should like to see you run an article on "What's Wrong With the Critics?" and you might follow that with one on What's Wrong With the Book-Buyers? and What's Wrong With the Book-Sellers?

This is merely a suggestion.

I fancy that the two articles you printed on authors and publishers did not please many readers; but still that sort of article nevertheless has its values and people read them—for better or for worse.

LLOYD ESHLEMAN.

New York, N. Y.

(Editor's Query: How many readers agree with Mr. Eshleman?)

"Newspapers and the Election"

SIR:—Mr. Cousins's editorial, "Newspapers and the Election," [November 16] makes quite a mystery of a mat-

ter which, it seems to me, is quite simple.

The newspapers were for Willkie because publishers recognized in him a better friend for big business, of which they are a part. Those with small incomes were for Roosevelt, because they recognized that he has been for them. For years the Republican party sugared the rich successfully; Roosevelt has taught the Democratic party how to honey the poor—and that they have a lot more votes.

CASS CULLIS.

The Bryan Democrat,
Bryan, Ohio.

SIR:—Your editorial on "Newspapers and the Election" was very interesting and gratifying; gratifying because it shows that the voters in the country read newspapers not for opinions but for such items as biased news, comics, sports and fashions.

What surprised me most is the comment that: "There has been nothing since the turn of the century to capture the national imagination as did William Allen White's editorial, 'What's the Matter with Kansas?'"

I believe that two other editorials have surpassed the one by White; they have also caught American imaginations in a web of pretty fancy. I refer to Francis P. Church's editorial "Is There a Santa Claus?" and Harold Anderson's "Lindbergh Flies Alone." Both appeared in the *New York Sun*. Church's classic was written a year after White's (in 1897) while Anderson's appeared in 1927, "after the turn of the century."

HAROLD U. RIBALOW.

New York, N. Y.

Man-Made Earthquake

THE REVOLUTION IS ON. By M. W. Fodor. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1940. 239 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM H. CHAMBERS

AMONG the many people who have seen France fall M. W. Fodor is one of the most experienced journalistic observers. And his story of the lightning sweep of the German armies across Belgium into France last May (the author was in Brussels when the Germans launched their drive) is full of vivid color and of observations of permanent interest and value.

The main cause of the German victory, as Mr. Fodor notes, was the mass exploitation of two non-German inventions, the tank and the airplane. Along with this went a typically German thorough mastery of the details of organization. As little as possible was left to chance. When good weather favored the onrush of the German mechanized divisions it was not a matter of good luck, but of expert advance surveys of the German meteorological service. When the Dutch thought they would hinder an invader by removing road signs in frontier regions the Germans simply had their officers memorize the maps of the regions in question.

Political infiltration and intrigue went hand in hand with military preparation; one German agent specialized in exchanging the soothing syrup of peace and goodwill with Dutch Buchmanites while at the same time carrying on fifth column activity among Nazi sympathizers. One might take issue with Mr. Fodor on one or two military points. It is very doubtful, in the light of the terrific disparity in modern equipment which existed between the French and German armies, whether France would have benefited by taking the offensive; the collapse would have only come about sooner. And the Maginot Line, in its original form, could not have been prolonged to the sea because the hills of Lorraine which favored the construction of those huge underground catacomb fortresses give way to flat and sandy country near the shore. A more justified criticism would have been that the French and British, after spending a good deal of time building up a reasonably strong defensive line near the Belgian frontier, left this line and rushed into Belgium, into a trap, as it proved, at the time of the invasion.

As the title suggests, the book is not merely a repetition of the well-worn story of France's collapse. It is an attempt to describe and analyze the world-wide sweep of revolution



M. W. Fodor was one of those who saw it happen in France.

which, as Mr. Fodor believes, has generally assumed the form of national socialism in the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, and Japan. The author

gives some valuable background material about the origins of fascism and national socialism and correctly sees the root of the present revolutionary era in world politics in the World War, with its terrific destruction of life and property and subsequent economic dislocations and psychological unsettlement.

He repeats one of his former predictions that Germany and the Soviet Union will clash at the Bosphorus. This seems likely to be put to a factual test soon; it is possible that Mr. Fodor, who is less familiar with the Soviet Union than with Germany and Italy, does not fully recognize the implications of the great technical inferiority of the Russian communist to the German fascist brand of the totalitarian state. In other words, Stalin, whatever may be his subjective wishes, is scarcely in an objective position to risk a war with Germany that could possibly be avoided.

The author ends with a message of qualified optimism for America:

"With goodwill, forethought, cleverness, and sagacity the revolution can still be converted into evolution on these shores. And in achieving this a great task awaits the youth of America."

Reading on the Run

THE NEWS AND HOW TO UNDERSTAND IT. By Quincy Howe. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1940. 250 pp., with index. \$2.

Reviewed by PAUL BIXLER

NOTABLY there is no talk in this book of that simian curiosity which once was supposed to pull man irresistibly toward the latest news. Today, in the midst of a second world war, the headlines scream, the very air you breathe is full of sound and fury, and if any man still has his curiosity, he must occasionally regret it. I am not sure that Quincy Howe has called the turn, however. He says that people read or listen to the news on three counts: for profit, for pleasure or stimulation, and for escape.

Possibly because it is the pleasure motif which seems to interest him most, there are passages which might more fittingly have been entitled "The News and How to Have Fun With It." He seems under constant dread that his words will be dull, and while this has stimulated him to burlesque a number of typical news columns and news broadcasts—an exercise which turns out to be informative as well as entertaining—elsewhere it compels him to perform too many rhetorical contortions.

The body of his book is filled with fascinating stuff about syndicates, columnists, news magazines, foreign correspondents, radio networks, and radio commentators. But one confusion is apparent almost everywhere; although the author repeatedly says that he is writing about international news, there is no notice of this in the title, and he constantly slips over into consideration of other aspects. Furthermore, his style is clipped and peripatetic, and his facts sometimes turn out to be incomplete or unsatisfactory. There are too many non sequiturs and too many half-reasoned conclusions. The Henry Luce who was unaware of the reactionary trend of *Time*, for example, is hardly the same Henry Luce pictured elsewhere as a "magazine genius." And to say that we know far less about what has really been happening in Europe since September, 1939, than we did during the corresponding period of the last war because of the technical excellence of communications seems too astounding not to be accompanied with an explanation.

This is no handbook for freshmen in journalism or even for sophomores. Yet it has value for any adult who is already somewhat acquainted with the news and its sources, who is skeptical, and who doesn't mind being sum-