

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bibliography Fantastic

SIR:—In your August 17 issue, Mr. Frederick B. Shroyer asks information concerning fantastic stories dealing with time-travel, voyages to other planets, weird creatures, et cetera.

Present-day American writers divide these types of stories into two general classes, pure fantasy, and science-fiction. The latter type is a fictionalized extrapolation of modern science knowledge into future possibilities. Interplanetary voyages come under this classification usually, since present science knowledge makes clear understanding of how it may possibly be accomplished. With the atomic power of U-235 available, the rocket principle for drive, and a slight development of the present stratoliners for hull, Mars is definitely attainable.

Edgar Rice Burroughs "John Carter" Martian books, on the other hand, rate as pure fantasy. No attempt at extrapolation of known science was made; "John Carter" simply went into a coma on Earth and woke up on Mars.

Incidentally, can any reader of the *SRL* think of any of Jules Verne's highly imaginative concepts that has not been either (a) realized in full and surpassed, or (b) considered and discarded as completely possible, but paralleled by better methods? Verne's passenger-carrying bullet round the Moon is about the only one left that hasn't been surpassed by fact. In view of the imminence of atomic power from U-235, it probably will be shortly. And atomic power was a thing too wild for Verne to conceive!

JOHN W. CAMPBELL, JR.
Editor,
Astounding Science Fiction.

New York.

SIR:—If Frederick B. Shroyer, your correspondent of August 17, is really interested in a bibliography of fantastic romances of all countries, I suggest that he consult the Chinese literature in this field. Let him start with the *Hsi Yu Chi* (Wylie*: *Notes*, 202), *Feng Shen Yen I* (Wylie: *Notes*, 204) and *Ching Hua Yuan* (Ou Itai,* 102).

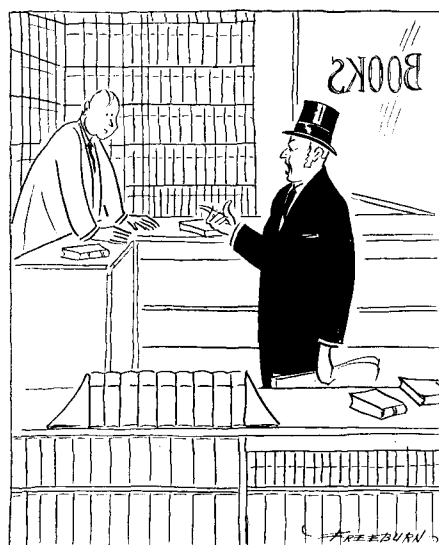
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*i.e. Wylie, Alexander, notes on Chinese literature, ed. of 1922. On Itai, Le Roman Chinois, Paris 1933. Of also Edwards, E. D., Chinese Prose literature, 2 vols. London, 1937-8.

Defining Definitions

SIR:—In what otherwise would have been a fine article on history and the historical novel (*SRL*, August 24), Mr.



"Send me the complete works of Shakespeare, Goethe, and De Voto—also something to read."

Tourtellot is guilty of several careless allegations concerning history and its writing.

Trying to define his terms simply, the author does harm to himself and to history when he says: "The former (history) is the product of analytical, deliberate minds; the latter of creative, venturesome ones." No self-respecting historian, whether writing for the public or for other historians, will accept that definition. What the author sets up as differences are basic to both. History not written by creative, venturesome minds is not worthy of the name. Standards for the writing of history change as in other fields of writing.

His statement that "the pages of history are animated only by the great, the leaders" would be correct if the perfect tense of the verb had been used. Any history that does not treat of the mass-mind, of great social upheavals, or of social and cultural conditions in general cannot do justice to the "leaders."

But Mr. Tourtellot commits his greatest error in his simplest statement (which error he later enlarges upon): "History records; the historical novel recreates." A record is nothing more than a chronicle; and a chronicle is not history. At best, it is the handmaiden of history. Let me submit, therefore, a more complete definition of history evolved by a frequent contributor to these pages, Allan Nevins. In his "Gateway to History," Mr. Nevins defines history as an "integrated narrative or description of past events or facts written in a spirit of critical inquiry for the whole truth."

HRANT AKMAKJIAN.
Jersey City, N. J.

SRL Phenomena

SIR:—Coming back to my unread copies of the *SRL* after a summer vacation away from them, I am struck by two phenomena: (a) that you contemplate changing the format of the review, and (b) that you published Mortimer Adler's "How to Mark a Book."

As for the first, speaking as a charter subscriber, I long to see the review revert to something of its original appearance—larger, with white paper, three or four columns to the page, and without the cheap news-stand bid through a red cover. Further, I long for more thoroughgoing reviews, and more reviews of weightier books. You can afford to appeal to intelligence. There are enough informed people in the country to appreciate reviews of more of the scholarly works than you are now printing. As I browse in my files, I am saddened by the appalling amount of space the *SRL* has devoted to reviews of books (usually fiction) which died almost before the reviews saw print.

As for Mortimer Adler, and his "How to" mission in the world, may I be permitted to inquire where but in America could any periodical, aimed at the minds of mature readers, publish such a primer for the subliterate? Any reader who could benefit by Adler's elementary instructions would hardly be reading the *SRL* (or am I too optimistic?).

On the other hand, Granville Hicks's "The Fighting Decade" and the entire Poetry Number (August 10) were high spots in my summer's reading. Mark Van Doren's "Poetry and Subject Matter" is, in my opinion, one of the finest things written on modern poetry in a long, long time. I congratulate you on presenting so thoughtful and skilfully phrased a paper.

CHARLES FREDERICK HARROLD.
Ypsilanti, Mich.

"The Beloved Returns"

SIR:—Would you be kind enough to bring to the attention of your readers the following facts about my review of Thomas Mann's "The Beloved Returns," which appeared in your issue of August 24? They are:

1) That on page 5, column 2, line 20, the phrase should run "set against it (the standard of the normal man) the great artist is found wanting and a vagabond."

2) That on page 13, column 3, line 32, "part" should have been "past."

3) That on page 17, column 2, line 25, "direct" should have read "cerebral;" and that in line 28 "perhaps" should have read "equally."

PAUL ROSENFELD.
New York City.

"If It Prove Fair Weather"

I. AS THE REVIEWER SEES IT

By George Dangerfield

IN "If It Prove Fair Weather"* Isabel Paterson wants to tell a love story which shall demonstrate not "a conflict between the lovers and the world" but "the way two special people felt about each other, and how it made them behave to *each other*." If the two people in question were two fragments of ectoplasm, this demonstration might be possible; otherwise I don't see how it can be done. The world pushes its way into this love story, as it does into every other. For example, if James Nathaniel Wishart, a publisher with an unloved wife and a strong sense of decorum, had not been so afraid of what the world would do to him, he might have become Emily Cruger's lover. You can put it another way and say that Wishart was afraid of taking any responsibility for his emotions; but in Wishart's case, it was really the world that got him down.

If the author has not managed to achieve the impossible, she has, at any rate, achieved the probable. A woman trapped by her love for a man who wants to have his cake and eat it, is not an uncommon phenomenon; but it is difficult to project into fiction; and it has been set forth here with a great deal of skill and a good deal of malice. In her attempt to exclude the world—that is to say, those social or economic

*IF IT PROVE FAIR WEATHER. By Isabel Paterson. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1940. 306 pp. \$2.50.

II. AS THE AUTHOR SEES IT

By Isabel Paterson

WHAT this country needs is a good stiff course in ethics and moral theology. Why I think so is because I have written a novel—"If It Prove Fair Weather." To understand the question fully you might have to read the book; but that does not worry me. The main point is, those who have done so, with advance copies, are almost unanimously severe on the man in the story (his name is Wishart). It is a love story. Especially the men readers seem to feel—well, I don't know what. He makes them mad. There is an unmistakable implication that they would have behaved far otherwise, in his position. Possibly so; and it may be my fault that they don't seem to notice there was no way for him to behave well. He had only a choice of behaving badly in different ways. What

considerations which generally play their part in love stories—the author relies chiefly upon conversation and the interplay of thought. While it is hard to understand, from these conversations, these unspoken thoughts, just in what resides Emily's sense of companionship with Wishart, they do show us how a woman feels toward such a type of man. Emily, it is true, is not—from a male reader's point of view at any rate—a particularly cosy character. Her conversations with her friend Christine on the subject of the absent Wishart, while brief and indirect, are singularly feline. Figuratively speaking, the man's back is one gaping scratch.

Emily is sometimes tender towards Wishart, often sorry for herself; and the novel would be a crepuscular affair if it were not constantly illuminated by the sparks that fly from her mind. Sometimes these sparks are rather facetious than witty, some do not seem to be exactly spontaneous; but the total effect is lively enough. In its way, "If It Prove Fair Weather" is a psychological Fourth of July, a celebration of the verbal Independence of Woman. It is also an ambitious book; it appears to be a highly successful revelation of certain aspects of a woman's mind; and though it will make most men uncomfortable and unhappy, that no doubt is what its author intended. How women will take it, this reviewer does not pretend to guess.

I mean is that life is like that. Many of the most admired moral examples really will not stand close and logical examination. It is so in the nature of things. Human beings are inevitably in an appalling predicament between their emotions and their obligations; the two elements are not even conveniently distinct, but inextricably snarled in a cat's-cradle. And the more you try to untangle it the worse it becomes.

I admit, of course, that Wishart is not wholly admirable. He is a man. He is an upright citizen, with a business and a family; and he becomes interested in a woman not his wife. This is ethically reprehensible, if you allow any ethical standards whatever. I speak seriously. What is more, you've got to have ethics. (At present, some countries are saying that you don't



Isabel Paterson's book will make most men uncomfortable.

have to, but the results are not entirely satisfactory). Then ethics apparently tell you that you must, if necessary, be completely insensible, incapable of being interested or of wanting personal satisfactions. That is a very hard saying, surely. Shade it a bit, and say rather that it is your duty to repress and restrain such feelings if they go beyond the boundaries of previously established obligation. That sounds very lofty; but it may still be at the expense of another person, or even two other persons. It is not so nice to be the recipient of duty either.

This is extremely obvious, and twenty years ago was thought to be a complete answer. It was then affirmed to be a higher duty to discard the inconvenient obligations and go ahead on the new path. Now one may see what comes of that. A trail of wreckage. It doesn't work even as well as sticking to the old line.

But let us imagine duty as the constant lodestar from the beginning. All of us have favorite characters in history; one of mine is Sir Thomas More. He took and held a straight course. Deeply religious, with a strong intellect and character, and scholarly tastes, as a young man he thought of entering a monastic order. But as he was also robust and of an affectionate nature, he feared he had not the authentic vocation, and decided it was better to be a good layman than a sinful cleric. So he married and was a faithful and kind husband and father, all his days. He married twice. The first time, he was undecided between two sisters. His personal preference was for the younger and prettier of the two; one may assume he was in love with her. But out of sheer altruism, he felt it would be invidious to

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