

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Poetry and Clarity

SIR:—Do I wrongly imagine that there was a connection between Mr. Ralph W. Holmes's letter in the issue of July 26 and the publication on the opposite page of Katherine Garrison Chapin's excellent poem, "For a British Flyer"?

This poem possesses the very virtues of form and clarity which were lacking in the poem criticized so plaintively by Mr. Holmes, "Slow Movement (1941)". Although these two poets saw eye-to-eye in their choice of subject and even, to a degree, in their choice of verse form, there is an amazing difference in their artistic productions. One poem is, by dint of adroitly omitted punctuation and capitalization and negligence in grammatical construction, the work of an obscurantist. The other poem, while equally modern in spirit, is conventional in its grammar, and makes sense even to chuckleheads like Mr. Holmes and me.

ANNE K. BEHRENS.

Washington, D. C.

W. D. Howells and Clarity

SIR:—Your readers—especially young poets of the obscurist school—may be interested in the following letter which turned up among my papers. W. D. Howells, the writer, was then at the height of his importance as Editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*; John Vance Cheney evidently just beginning his career.

Editorial Office of
The Atlantic Monthly
Cambridge, Mass.

Bethlehem, Pa.
March 27, 1875

My Dear Sir:

Your letters have followed me on a little vacation I'm taking.

I didn't understand *Hilda* [?—this word not very clearly written]* very well, but I liked it a good deal; I am sorry that I neither comprehend nor like these poems. Why need you, who are obviously a poet, take to conundrums in this way?

Very truly yours,
W. D. Howells

Mr. Cheney.

*This comment inside the brackets is mine, of course; not part of the letter.

FOREST H. COOKE.

Information, Please

SIR:—Could one of your readers provide me some information on the origin of this little ditty:

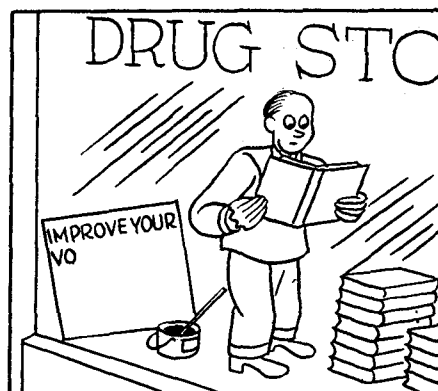
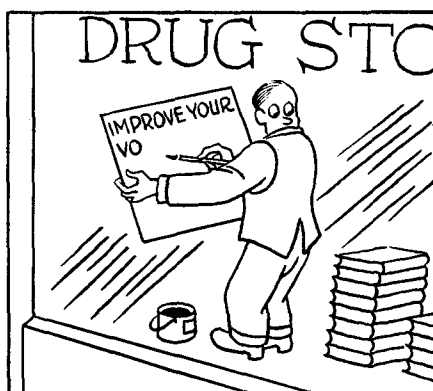
"Something attempted, something done
Has earned a night's repose."

STANLEY SAFIAN.

99 Florida Street,
Long Beach, N. Y.

"O. K."

SIR:—Anent your controversy on the origins of "O.K." I wonder whether the historians are acquainted with the fact that the Finnish word for "correct" is "oikea." All explanations of "O.K." are circuitous; this one is al-



most a direct hit and not out of the question, I claim, when one considers the fact that the first Finns settled in America three hundred years ago.

EDITH WIRT.

Cleveland, Ohio

Collins vs. Dickens

SIR:—I enclose answers to Your Literary I.Q. of July 19, which are 100 per cent correct, and I regret to say that your printed answers are not. The first name of Captain Cuttle was Edward, not Daniel. I gave Jane Murdstone instead of Edward; either is correct. So credit is due me for this perfection, as I was practically born with a book of Dickens in each hand.

LOUISE S. WATERBURY.

Camden, Maine

The Pagopago Puzzle

SIR:—It is with increasing astonishment that I have read the correspondence regarding Somerset Maugham's "Miss Thompson." The whole point has been missed by your critics, who are evidently strong in literature but weak in geography. The awful truth is this: Pagopago is not an island! I thought it was on Samoa, but I find that Samoa is not an island either, but a group of islands. However, Samoa was a good guess because even the encyclopedia says that R.L.S. is buried on Samoa, whereas his tomb is actually on Upolu, one of the Western Samoan Islands. But to return to Pagopago. It is, according to the Columbia Encyclopedia, "town and harbor on Tutuila isl., American Samoa, ceded to the United

States as a naval and coaling station in 1872."

Of course the Columbia Encyclopedia is not infallible for it spells Trelawny's name *ey, but it hardly seems possible that it could create an island. . . .

ELIZABETH BAUMGARTEN.

Moha, British Columbia

SIR:—That Pagopago is not an island is definitely news to me. Probably what made me think it was one is this excerpt from Newman Levy's "Theatre Guyed":

On the isle of Pago Pago, land of palm trees, rice and sago,
Where the Chinaman and Dago dwell with natives dusky hued,
Lived a dissolute and shady, bold adventuress named Sadie,
Sadie Thompson was the lady, and the life she lived was lewd.

While we're on the subject, I'd like to put on record the fact that while the story when first published was entitled "Miss Thompson," it is now known as "Rain." It is so listed in the Firkins Index to Short Stories. The Doubleday-Doran 1934 edition of "The Trembling of a Leaf" lists the story as "Rain." So does the Pocketbook of Short Stories. And so does the Sun Dial Press 1941 edition of "The Favorite Short Stories of Somerset Maugham." And in the preface to that edition Mr. Maugham himself refers to the story as "Rain."

HOWARD COLLINS.

Monroe, Mich.

So. American Junket

SALUD! A SOUTH AMERICAN JOURNAL. By Margaret Culkin Banning. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1941. 372 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by KATHERINE RODELL

MRS. BANNING and her daughter made a six-week trip to South America in January and February of this year, and Mrs. Banning has written a diary of their journey. They went down the West coast and up the East, stopping at most of the capital cities, meeting most of the U. S. Ambassadors, most of the heads of big American businesses, and a handful of South Americans. Mrs. Banning states the purpose of her trip thus: "I wanted to find out what I could about political conditions, and . . . to find out something of the status of women."

Mrs. Banning scoffs at the idea that "in so short a time you can't really learn anything or have anything true to report." She is right, of course. She knows now what travel over the important routes in South America is like; what kind of accommodations you get in the best hotels in the various capitals; what kind of people stroll along the Calle Florida in Buenos Aires.

She knows, too, what the people she met think about South American and international politics. That these people were largely members of the U. S. diplomatic, naval, and military missions gives their observations a far more limited value than Mrs. Banning indicates. Thus, when she says of such a group in Peru: "These people are all pro-Ally," it is hardly news, for the members of the U. S. foreign service must of course support the Administration's foreign policy. But in noting this fact, Mrs. Banning gives the impression that *everyone* in Peru is solidly behind President Roosevelt. I hope they are; but I doubt that Mrs. Banning is qualified to say so.

It is not so much that Mrs. Banning's comments on politics, economics, and social conditions are false as that they are incomplete; the picture she paints lacks both depth and perspective. For example, in her chapter on the Catholic Church, she does not once point out that in most South American countries, Church and State are not separated. She does not seem to see the connection between the Church's hold over education and the appalling amount of illiteracy; she does not appear to realize what the Church's support of Hitler's Spanish puppet, Francisco Franco, means in terms of Nazi propaganda and politi-



Variety's "Sime"

cal penetration. Mrs. Banning seems unaware that there is a land problem in South America, and that the question of infant mortality is inextricably tied up with the fact that three-fourths of the people on the South American continent are mere agricultural serfs. And while she romanticizes the "sense of not quite belonging" which characterizes the various colonies of U. S. citizens in the South American capitals, she does not appreciate that such unwillingness or inability to enter into South American life gives the lie to our State Department's rhetoric about American cultural unity.

There are a few real howlers, which more time and study—or even more travel—might have saved Mrs. Banning. She didn't go to Bolivia or Paraguay or Uruguay—which may explain why she twice speaks of the war between Bolivia and Uruguay when she means the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay. And Haya de la Torre, the Peruvian of Spanish descent who heads the Apra political party, is spoken of as "the radical Indian of Chile." Suppose a South American, writing of the United States, had referred to John L. Lewis as a Texan Negro!

I sincerely hope that Mrs. Banning's book may inspire some of her readers to visit South America themselves—which would be all to the good. But I cannot help hoping too that, for the sake of better inter-American understanding, those readers will leave her book both physically and mentally behind, and perhaps stay a little longer and dig a little deeper than did Mrs. Banning in the course of her six-week junket.

"Sime" Biog So-So

LORD BROADWAY: Variety's "Sime"—The Man Who Made The Gay White Way Gayer. By Dayton Stoddart. New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc. 385 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by LOUIS GREENFIELD

THE lads and lassies in and around the Broadway jungle and the sun-kissed macadam at Hollywood and Vine, are going to cough up many a laugh, jerk a tear, here and there, over Dayton Stoddart's so-so biog. of "Sime," *Variety's* founder, adviser, and father-confessor to the big and little Hams that cluttered up the entertainment arena when Cecil B. DeMille thought a bathtub was something an honest guy would use on Saturday night.

The opening act of the tome gives out with Sime sewing buttons in *Pere Silverman's* factory in Syracuse and the migration of the family to New York where the old gent caromed into the money-lending biz with son Sime handling the ledgers and taking in the variety shows and the honky-tonks on his off time. It's a pretty, homey picture of wholesome family life. When Sime grew up and married the red-head from Syracuse, Hattie Freeman, he propositioned *Pere Silverman* to take him in as a partner or else. Sime got the "or else" signal and with a two and one-half Grand stake, borrowed from Hattie's alderman father, the first issue of *Variety* blew into the wintry dawn of Broadway on Dec. 16, 1905.

From there on comes *beaucoup* fun. The battle for the actors, the terrific catch-as-catch can with the potent Albee interests. Elusive Sime eluding the sheriff. But the rag came out each week and what is more began to grip the imagination of the boys and girls in the show biz.

When success and big dough crowned the efforts of the founder, Stoddart gives you a rollicking picture of Sime with a fistful of lettuce, making the rounds of bistros and always insisting on lifting the tab. For Sime was a powerful liver. He drank and ate heavily. He was a strong, vigorous gent. He was kind and faithful. The type-writer pounders who got the sheet out for him revered and loved him. For he was their kind of "right" guy.

There's lots of Broadway and theatrical history between the adventures and exploits of Sime that makes the tome, as a whole, a fairly amusing job. The Mazda and Kleig light folks should go for it.

And what is more say a little prayer for the guy who helped make the heavy sugar and their top billing possible.