

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An Old Slander Refuted

SIR:—M. Lincoln Schuster's "A Treasury of the World's Great Letters" is an uncommonly original and absorbing book. It is too bad, however, that on page 308 Mr. Schuster should give currency to an unauthenticated slander on Charles Dickens.

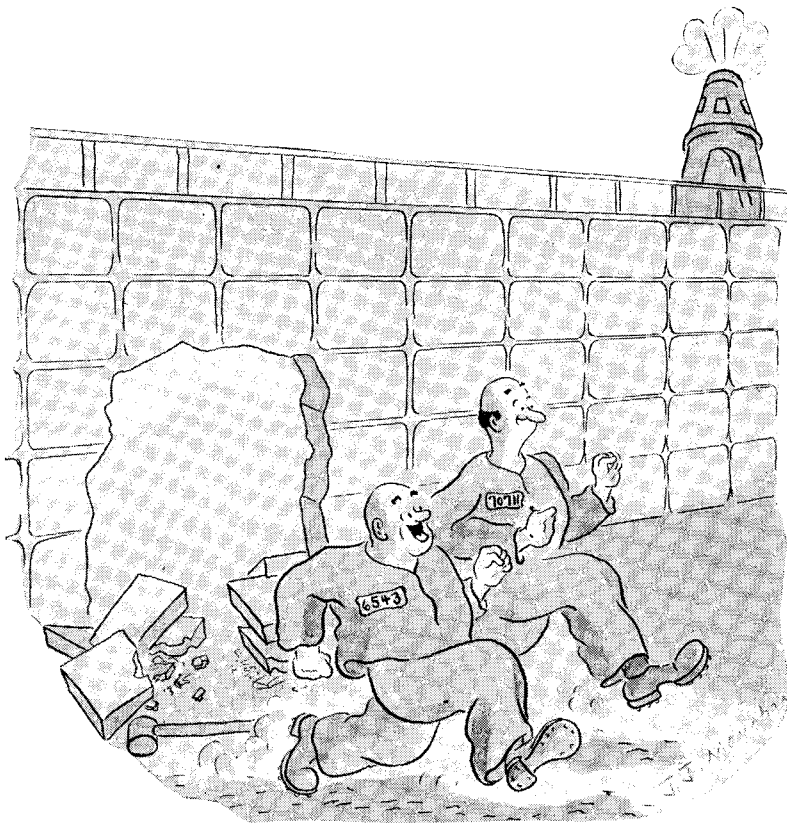
Nobody has ever believed that Ellen Ternan was the cause of Dickens's separation from his wife. The marriage had been unhappy for many years; indeed if I may be pardoned an Irishism, it was unhappy even before it began. It is true that at the time of the separation Mrs. Dickens was jealous of Ellen, with whom Dickens had appeared in private theatricals, but it is also true that Dickens declared, "Upon my soul and honor, there is not on this earth a more virtuous and spotless creature than that young lady. I knew her to be innocent and pure, and as good as my own dear daughters," and that he compelled those who had declared otherwise to eat their words.

The scandal to which the letter in Mr. Schuster's volumes unfortunately has given renewed currency was revived in 1935 by the late Thomas Wright, who published in his dotage a bad "Life" of Charles Dickens. In this book, Mr. Wright asserted that after Dickens's separation from his wife, Ellen Ternan became his mistress. For this amazing statement Mr. Wright cited nothing that could be called evidence. Canon William Benham, who died in 1910 and who could not therefore be called to the witness stand in 1935, told him, so he alleged, that Ellen Ternan had confessed the relationship to him!

There is only one word that could adequately describe all this, and that word is not printable. Mr. Wright's statement did not indeed deserve the careful and convincing refutation which that eminent Dickens authority, Mr. J. W. T. Ley, gave it at the time in "The Dickensian."

There the matter rested until in 1939 Dickens's daughter, Mrs. Kate Perugini, saw fit to spit posthumously on her father's grave. Mrs. Perugini, so the gossip goes, had herself once written the story of her father's delinquencies, but had destroyed the manuscript on the advice of Mr. Bernard Shaw. Dying, she entrusted this amiable task to her friend, Miss Gladys Storey, who promptly rushed into print with a book called "Dickens and Daughter," in which she manifested no more ability in weighing evidence than a kindergarten child, and of which it is hardly too much to say that it does not contain two consecutive coherent sentences.

When the break came between Mr. and Mrs. Dickens all the children ex-



"I got the idea from a line I read in a poem. 'Stone walls do not a prison make.'"

cept the eldest son remained with Dickens, and he went to his mother at Dickens's own request that he might care for her. In her prime, Mrs. Perugini herself, like all Dickens's other children, had nothing but the kindest and most admiring things to say about her father. It is certainly much easier to believe that in her old age Mrs. Perugini became irresponsible than it is to believe that the other nine children of Dickens were all cads and all the friends who have written of him shameless hypocrites.

I cannot, of course, "prove" that Dickens was never guilty of improper conduct with the woman whom he left £1000 in his will. That is not at all necessary. The burden of proof lies on the other side. Until such proof appears, what I wrote about Dickens's marital relations in "The Man Charles Dickens" (Houghton Mifflin, 1929) still stands. Nothing in the since published "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dickens, His Letters to Her" can contradict me. I may add however that I have been privileged to read the first draft of a book which Mr. Ley has written on the subject of Dickens's relations with his wife. If this idiotic war ever comes to an end and Mr. Ley is given the leisure to finish that study, I have no doubt it will close the subject.

EDWARD WAGENKNECHT.
University of Washington,
Seattle, Wash.

Information Wanted

SIR:—Additional material is desired to complete a biography of Captain Blanche Douglass Leathers, born in Tensas Parish, La., in 1860. She died in 1940. As the wife of Captain Bolling Leathers, she became famous in her own right; a licensed pilot, captain, and owner of the Mississippi river packet *Natchez* in the late 1890's.

I am interested in hearing from persons who have letters, documents, and personal recollections of biographical value, covering the lifetime period of this famous personage.

MRS. D. B. TURNBULL.
1914 Esplanade Avenue,
New Orleans, Louisiana.

Accidents Will Happen

SIR:—Your review of Henry Kyd Douglas's "I Rode with Stonewall" (*SRL*, December 28) states: "This author, who knew Jackson from Bull Run to the tragic end at Appomattox." Again: "Jackson sucking a lemon as he watches the fighting at Cold Harbor." Pretty good even for Jackson!

Stonewall died May 10, 1863 after being wounded at Chancellorsville. The surrender at Appomattox took place April 9, 1865. Cold Harbor was fought May 31-June 3, 1864, but maybe there were lemons at Gaines' Mill?

M. L. STAFFORD.
Guadalajara, Mexico.

Language Hierarchy

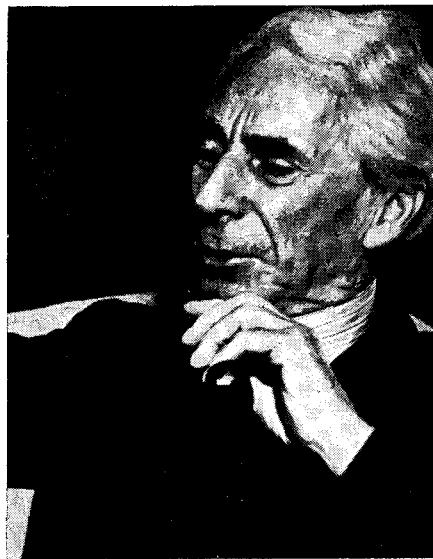
AN INQUIRY INTO MEANING AND TRUTH. By Bertrand Russell. New York: W. W. Norton. 1940. 438 pp., with index. \$3.75.

Reviewed by HUGH WALPOLE

THE authors of "The Meaning of Meaning" tell us that there are sixteen clearly separable meanings of "meaning." In this book, which represents the substance of his William James Lectures at Harvard last year, Bertrand Russell arranges the meanings of "meaning" as a hierarchy, beginning with the simplest form of meaning as interpreted by a person who confronts the object named—at which level meaning is simply a causal property of a noise acquired through the mechanism of conditioned reflexes. Mr. Russell anticipates two peculiar complications for his reader: firstly, that commonsensical or scientific persons find it hard to see how these problems about meaning and truth *are* problems at all, and secondly, that even when one has followed him through the twenty-five chapters of this book one will not have got very far. "The net result is to substitute articulate hesitation for inarticulate certainty." But such a result is well worth while, in such company.

After exploring in a general sort of way the nature of words and sentences, and the relation between sentences and experiences, Mr. Russell discusses the hierarchy of languages, agreeing with Tarski, Carnap, and the Logical Positivists in general that the arguments in favor of such a hierarchy are overwhelming. The lowest possible type of language is the primary—or object—language, consisting of words which can have meanings in isolation, such as the names of "things," as well as words like "run," "cat," "shout," and even "in," "above," "before," and other symbols of spatial relationships. But the primary language cannot use "or," "not," "true," "false," or any similar words which presuppose mental goings-on. Nor can we say "word" without getting into the secondary language, or "secondary language" without entering the tertiary, and so on infinitely. Of course, no word (or rather, no utterance of a word, for "words" themselves are incurably Platonic) can be moored to one level. "If some one says 'hark, hark, the lark,' you may listen, or you may say 'at heaven's gate sings'; in the former case, what you have heard belongs to the object-language, in the latter case not."

The book goes on to consider the double aspect of an assertion, which



Bertrand Russell

Disraeli

expresses a state of mind as well as indicating a fact, and to ask whether the logical categories of language correspond to elements in the non-linguistic world, and other such questions, which are epistemological rather than semasiological in scope. Mr. Russell concludes that a number of verbal statements are justified on the basis of a single experience, and that these statements belong to the biography of the observer, and bases a psychological account of the meanings of logical words on the assumption that language derives its capacity to indicate facts from its capacity to express states of mind. En route, Mr. Russell disagrees very wittily with the view of Neurath, Hempel, and others that the world of words is closed and self-contained. Lastly, the relation between truth and knowledge is examined, with the conclusion that truth is fundamental, and knowledge must be expressed in terms of truth. It is noteworthy that from the first chapters onward through the book the sliding-scale ambiguities of "knowing" are pointed out very specifically, while little is said of the complexities of "true" and "truth."

All this is far livelier than it sounds. The book is full of linguistic illustrations, which point and explain the distinctions the author makes between his various levels of language. "Or" is particularly favored. "The following conversation might occur between a medical logician and his wife. 'Has Mrs. So-and-So had her child?' 'Yes.' 'Is it a boy or a girl?' 'Yes.' The last answer, though logically impeccable, would be infuriating." Bertrand Russell has a knack for finding the unforgettable example which helps his reader to remember which argument is which in his quest after what is what.

Author, Author!

LUCIUS BEEBE, chronicler of snobish goings-on in New York and of railroads ("High Iron," "Highliners") piloted a Diesel engine through a tape which put into operation a fancy new railroad traffic tower for the Union Station in St. Louis. Instead of his usual get-up Mr. Beebe wore a white uniform. After the ceremonies he was given a silver cocktail set engraved with his new title, "Railroad Enthusiast No. I." In February the Enthusiast will direct the Train Time party at the Surf Club in Florida. For the occasion, Mr. Beebe will supervise the transformation of the club's main lounge into a terminal with tracks, gates, ticket booths, and a miniature railway big enough for the guests to ride on.

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IN BRIEF. Ben Hecht began on January 13th a regular column in *PM*, called "1001 Afternoons in Manhattan." It will run in the paper five days a week. One of Mr. Hecht's best known early books, written before he became a big-shot stage and screen writer, was called "1001 Nights in Chicago" . . . John Dos Passos ("U. S. A.") has called his new book, due this spring, "The Ground We Stand On." It is non-fiction, described by the author as "a definition of democracy in terms of the American past" . . . John Faulkner, younger brother of William Faulkner ("Sanctuary," "The Hamlet"), will have a novel, "Men Working," out this spring. It deals with Southern farmers who moved to town to work on WPA. Like his famous brother, Mr. Faulkner lives in Oxford, Mississippi . . . Peter Muir ("War without Music") has left by plane for Rio de Janeiro where he joins fifteen members of the American Field Service who will go to Capetown to serve in General de Gaulle's African campaign. Mr. Muir commanded an ambulance section during the Battle of France. He is a veteran at this work, having served in the ambulance corps during the first World War . . . William Pène du Bois ("The Great Guppy") left on January 10th for service in the U. S. Army. He had to rush through the illustrations for his new book, "The Flying Locomotive," his sixth juvenile. His first children's book was published in 1936 when Mr. Du Bois was nineteen. He is the son of the painter, Guy Pène du Bois ("Artists Say the Silliest Things"), cousin of the scene designer Raoul Pène du Bois . . . John P. Marquand ("The Late George Apley," "H. M. Pulham, Esq.") was the model for the famous novelist who is the murder victim in "Three Thumbs of a Ghost," by Timothy Fuller.