

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"Slow Movement"

SIR:—After reading Virginia Hamilton's "Slow Movement (1941)" in the issue of July 12 I feel I must be quite "dumb." The author's brow must be much higher than mine and in back of mine much must be missing which she has in back of hers. Some things missing in the verse seem to me to be a few periods, commas and capital letters, and I'm sure she intended them not to be where I should have placed them.

Ah well! I have had a strong suspicion for some time that I should give up trying to comprehend some of these modern versifiers and their modern verse. "Slow movement" above the ears is my trouble, no doubt,—1941 or any other year—and, in this case, it bogs down almost completely, but not quite. I seem to catch the drift but the snow is so tenuous I am unable to clearly discern it.

Not to be flippant, I am trying to deprecate what seems to be almost an *effort* in a few present day versifiers to make their thought as obscure and difficult to follow as possible. Can it be that there is an effort? And, if so, what can be the motive? I cannot imagine a justifiable one. You published a letter some time ago along this very line. I remember subscribing to every word of it and I'd like to see more discussion thereon. Virginia Hamilton, it seems to me, has something more or less good here, but spoiled it for most of us—or should I say for a few of us dim-wits? Please somebody tell me right out that I am a dim-wit and I shall feel better and try no more to appreciate what is beyond me.

RALPH W. HOLMES.

Winsted, Conn.

Hurray!

SIR:—For the second time in a year I have done the impossible. Yes, I made a perfect score on Howard Collins's Literary I. Q. in the July 5 issue. It gave my somewhat shattered self-respect quite a boost. Believe me, I needed it after the awful scores I made on the last two I. Q. tests.

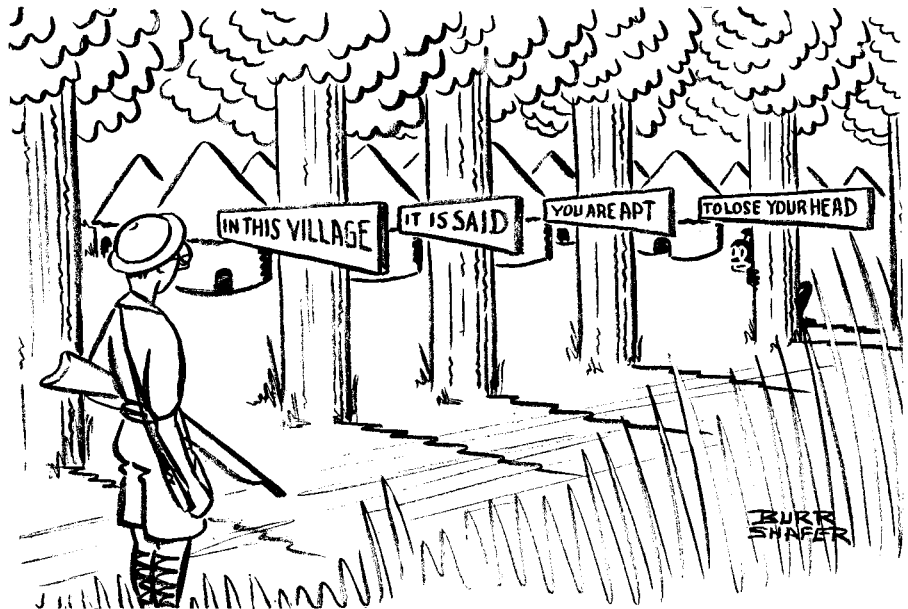
Both quizzes which I have hit for perfect scores have been about lines of poetry. Therefore, I am a strong advocate for more quizzes involving identification of poetry. But please don't run any more I. Q.'s involving play titles. They're one of my pet weaknesses.

RALPH E. PROUTY.

Columbus, Ohio

Playhouse-in-the-Hills

SIR:—The Cummington Press of Cummington, Massachusetts, a project



of the Playhouse-in-the-Hills, Inc., has just made its bow to the public with a collection of hitherto unedited, unpublished whaling letters, "Incident on the Bark Columbia," being the letters sent and received by Captain Samuel McCorkle and members of the crew of his whaler to the Captain's lifelong friend, Charles Henry Halsey of Southampton, Long Island. The letters cover the time between June, 1860 and October, 1862, some written "at sea" but most from the Island of St. Helena, with references to being at Catherine Island, in the La Plata River country, Berkley Sound and Falkland Island.

The Captain evidently owned a farm at Southampton, for the letters contain lively accounts of agricultural affairs—crops, animals, renting a much disputed parcel of land, and many matters which belonged to farm life of that day. Deaths, marriages and the health of relatives are dwelt on, and, of course, the Captain is loquacious concerning whales and the difficulty and excitement of being lucky with the irons and getting a good cargo.

The discovery of these whaling letters was made purely by accident when a descendant of Charles Henry Halsey was rummaging in an attic, recently, and they are printed, unedited and with the original spelling, punctuation and capitals.

The book of sixty-four pages is entirely handmade. The Polyphilus and Blado type has been entirely set by hand and the printing done by hand on a 100-year-old Washington press, on rag Georgian paper, using the black carbon ink, made only by C. S. Goodman of Berkley, California, using the wet method which results in the ink being more a part of the paper than something added to the top surface. The writer saw a quantity of paper being dampened between wet sheets of blotting paper and ready to go to

press. The purpose of the Press is to publish valuable unpublished material, no reprints, and already material for the second book is being considered.

STELLA N. NEAL.

Springfield, Mass.

Here or There

SIR:—Referring to Literary Quiz July 5, my copies of *Home Thoughts from Abroad* say

"Oh, to be in England now that April's there"

—one line instead of two, and *there* instead of *here*.

MARY O. POLLARD.

Middlebury, Vermont.

"Aux Cayes" to "O. K."

SIR:—Anent "The Evidence on "O. K." [SRL, July 19], my own research into the matter presents quite a case for an entirely different origin.

The best of all rums—a very important beverage in Colonial days—was Aux Cayes, from the French Islands, Martinique today.

When any Colonial planter sipped his rum and cheerfully murmured to his host—or guest—"Aux Cayes," it meant the symbol of goodness. The term was corrupted in the intervening years so that "Aux Cayes" or, more phonetically, *okay*, was the sign of anything good, or right—a go-ahead signal as it were.

ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN.

New York, N. Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE: More reader correspondence next week on "The Evidence on 'O. K.," by Allen Walker Read.

Inside a German Air-Base

I WAS A NAZI FLIER. By Gottfried Leske. Edited by Curt Reiss. New York: Dial Press. 1941 351 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by KURT HENRY

A GERMAN flight sergeant who bombed London, Coventry, and Birmingham kept a diary which was smuggled out of the country. Curt Reiss translated and edited this "bundle of loose sheets of paper" to give us "a real portrait of the unknown soldier, a soldier who in no sense is especially important, gifted or different from his fellow."

The book is hardly a shocking document, as Mr. Reiss thinks, but it is a unique inside-picture of life at a German air-base. It confirms what we know about the life, the ideas, and the feelings of the average Nazi pilot, and adds many details.

And still it is disturbing to read what this unintelligent young South German has to say after he had killed women and children, what he thinks about the "cowardly" English, the Italians—"the dear allies"—and the French girls, "who all have syphilis." He meets a Gestapo agent among his crew. He visits Paris and drinks champagne. He gets a furlough and sees his bride again, but he had thought it would be different—she seems not very happy and does not ask many questions. He has a love affair with a girl of the HvD (female helpers of the service who follow the army and help out with communications, the telephone, and telegraph). Then he hears that these girls are used by the High Command to solve the sex problem of the Nazi fliers. He shrugs his shoul-

—From "Say, Is This the U. S. A." Bourke-White

ders. It is not his business to criticize.

In December, 1940, eight months after Leske had started his diary, fire from the Flak makes the motors of his plane quit and he was in England, where he always wanted to go—a prisoner of war.

The most shocking thing one finds in this non-fiction book is the nebulous, blurred state of mind of this young soldier. War is hate, revenge, adventure to him. He never speculates about the new order of things to come. He is not fighting for any idea. He loves to follow orders even if they look stupid. His cruelty is illogical. He writes: "So they are civilians? Well, either it's war or it isn't." And: "You have got to shoot them all to pieces." But the enemy has no right to fight back. "It's a rotten, beastly business, shooting at defenseless (German) parachutists. Typically Dutch."

This young Leske uses all the bombastic and pompous slogans he reads in his army paper, although he can hardly write a single sensible sentence without adding a "May be," or "I mean." The Germans, he believes, are "unbeatable," and it is the most natural thing in the world for a soldier to want to die. This is the reason why the enemies will lose the war "which was started by them." He uses big words to convince himself that the life of a flier is more dangerous than that of all the others. "Sometimes I feel

like a knight of the old days riding to a tournament. . . . We, the infantry of the air."

His views about America are also echoes of Dr. Goebbels's tirades. "The news from our American correspondents is always amusing. It shows perfectly what happens in a country that's ruled by Mr. Rosenfeld according to democratic principles. What those people need is a Fuehrer."

One can not help noticing a bad taste in one's mouth after having finished this book. It is depressing and saddening. But it should be read. It will be difficult to educate this generation of stupid, arrogant, fearless killers. But there is some hope. Men of this calibre, naive, cruel, and poisoned by propaganda, are not much worse than some children. There are institutions everywhere for ill-natured, malignant children—they had them even in Germany before the times of the apocalypse.

There are thousands of Leskes in the Luftwaffe. Many of them, like Leske himself—who will be surprised when he hears about this book—are now in Canada. One should show them the country of "Mr. Rosenfeld" as it really is, some day, when there is no more Fuehrer of these fearless knights.

This reviewer heard many Nazi fliers talking from Berlin over the short wave radio about their experiences and their feelings. He believes this book is genuine, although the mysterious way it was brought to us might rouse some doubts.

The American Caravan

SAY, IS THIS THE U. S. A. By Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 1941. 182 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by BENJAMIN APPEL

HERE is the newest Erskine Caldwell-Margaret Bourke-White word-picture book. Well, what does the U. S. A., this vast land of copper, coal, wheat, corn, skyscrapers, shacks, autos, railroads, mean to Erskine Caldwell? He tells us on the very first page: "America today is the scene of a mighty drama, the like of which we have never before experienced." 177 pages and 86 photos later Margaret Bourke-White adds: "Our object was to give the impression and feel of America."

Between these two statements, bounded by them as the U. S. A. is bounded by the oceans, text and pictures confront us. In my opinion, the exploring collaborators have given us a good anecdotal impression of the hundred and thirty-five millions of Americans in these forty-eight states. Cald-

well's stripped, honest prose presents a series of anecdotes that range from feeble whimsy about a lion, "In and Out of Cedar Rapids," to powerful vignettes as tragic as the best of his short stories, such as "The Boy in the Blizzard," which deals with the plight of a Negro boy put off a Kansas train in zero Kansas weather. Caldwell's range is considerable despite such important thematic omissions as the United States of America of the very rich, or the United States of America of industrial unionism.

The photos buttress the anecdotes, adding the dynamic documentation of American faces and Americans in action. Six fine Kansas wheat pictures show a good deal of the epic of mechanized wheat. Three Nevada gambling pictures tell another significant story: and the South Carolina Negro jail pictures yet another. Yes, "America is the scene of a mighty drama," and some of its might and some of its drama has been caught by the writer and the photographer in this good collaboration.

The Saturday Review

