

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Mr. DeVoto and Mr. Lewis

SIR: Why do you print such childish, pot-calling abuse as Sinclair Lewis's assault on Bernard DeVoto? By listing his piece as a feature rather than a book review, perhaps you dodge some responsibility; nevertheless, you ought to have more respect for the memory of one of our whilom Olympians than to let him give himself away like that!

Never mind questions of fairness, of consistency—they are obvious to anybody, although I can't help pointing out one beautiful contradiction. In one paragraph Mr. Edmund Wilson is commended as a "serious" critic, much too sensible and majestic to notice Mr. DeVoto (a plain untruth, incidentally); six paragraphs later he has become a "talmudist," a "Bunny" to match Mr. DeVoto's "Benny," a corrupter of young college teachers, a writer of pomposities, and a "mincing messiah."

What is necessary to challenge is Mr. Lewis's simple-minded sophistry in trying to hold DeVoto to account for activity in another sphere. What on earth has John August's drugstore fiction got to do with Bernard DeVoto's criticism? Well, exactly what Mr. Lewis's excursions into the theatre, and a lot of his own magazine pieces have to do with his great novels, which is nothing at all. Does Mr. Lewis judge the economics of Stephen Leacock by "Behind the Beyond," the statesmanship of Lord Tweedsmuir by "Mr. Standfast," or the mathematics of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson by "Alice?" Does Mr. Lewis reject himself as a serious novelist, a worthy Nozel Prize winner, and a social and political liberal because he has contributed to popular magazines? Nobody else does.

ROBESON BAILEY.

Northampton, Mass.

SIR: With chuckling expectations I awaited Red Lewis's letter to DeVoto, only to be driven with disgust to the use of vile and profane exclamations. When Red opened with his puerile personality on DeVoto's name, I snorted, What the hell! And when I found the same theme running throughout his letter, I ejaculated words unprintable. Why, oh why, did Red do this?

I'm ashamed to confess it, but the only parts of Red's letter I can recall are these personal slurs on DeVoto's name, on his pen-name, and Red's calling him frog-face. Oh yes, I do recall one more item: Red's being "reasonably polite" to DeVoto the first time they met. That was indeed nice of Red. But it wasn't nice of him to expose their private conversation. Red hasn't seen DeVoto for a coon's-age. Gosh, how I'd love to be an in-



"Do you think it will help me to hold my cook?"

terested spectator at their next meeting.

I am almost constrained to believe that Red resorted to personalities with malice of forethought: I suspect that he thought this would be the only part of his letter worth remembering.

J. C. EDWARDS.

St. Louis, Mo.

SIR: I see that most of your correspondents who criticized Sinclair Lewis for his violent attack on Bernard DeVoto apparently missed the point and the beauty of Mr. Lewis's whole argument. Lewis was actually doing a magnificent piece of satirical criticism, using as his point of departure DeVoto's own scorn for the "uninstructed gentleness" that seems to be dominating too much present writing. Mr. DeVoto furthermore advocated the return to critical respectability of words such as "Fool" and "Liar." All Mr. Lewis did was to fill Mr. DeVoto's order. It was unfortunate for Mr. DeVoto that the fulfillment should have come through so soon and on his own book. I can agree with Mr. DeVoto's argument against the writers of the twenties, but he comes close to destroying it by overstating his case and banging away so stupidly and so futilely against Van Wyck Brooks.

HAROLD BENSON.

Chicago, Ill.

## Mr. Gelber and Dr. Lin

SIR: Mr. Lin Yutang's "Between Tears and Laughter" has had a large circulation and his opinions have excited controversy. As Mr. Lin Yutang appears to offer proof by exact page references for his indictment of other

writers, I should be grateful if you would permit me through your columns to warn readers that even when he attempts to document his charges he is often inaccurate.

My book "Peace by Power" incurs his wrath and furnishes him with the title of a chapter. But the passages he cites are either wrongly quoted or so ripped out of their context that they seriously alter my meaning. Since Mr. Lin Yutang's methods of debate are of some public and international importance, I would like to invite comparison between my views as he purports to give them and as they are actually published in "Peace by Power."

The Canadian edition of Mr. Lin Yutang's work attributes to me the following confused statement: "In reality the war is one for power—for power of the Democracies before it is a power for democracy itself."

What I wrote about the war and democracy was this (Page 68): "In reality the war is one for power—for power by the democracies before it is a war for democracy itself."

Mr. Lin Yutang argues that I am "for" Versailles. My contention about Versailles is as follows (Page 55): "If the case against the 1919 settlement had not been propagated with such assiduity, we would give it more credit for having delivered multitudes from an alien yoke. But with concern over injustice towards Germany still widespread, those she has trampled under foot get even now less than the sympathy to which they are entitled. There must, it is claimed, be no new Versailles. In some respects, particularly the economic, that may be so; but in other respects it is not. The settlement of 1919 touched many peoples and involved many factors, some good,

some bad, not just one. No new Versailles? No new Versailles for whom?"

Mr. Lin Yutang asserts, with all the evidence against him, that I want the future of humanity to belong to what he—but not I—calls the "Anglo-Saxon powers." Pages 124-128 of "Peace by Power," which cover this point, say no such thing. What I did say was that "no exclusive hegemony of the English-speaking peoples is contemplated; what they do must be in the company of men of goodwill everywhere." (Page 128)

Those pages were written, I might add, at a stage in the conflict when Russia's survival was problematical. Recognition of her vast role may, nevertheless, be found there and elsewhere throughout the book. The Appendix was included explicitly to lay stress on the significance of Russia's part not only as I had seen it long before the war, but as it has already turned out for the post-war world.

On the vexed topic of imperialism, Mr. Lin Yutang resorts to a garbled passage in order to present me in what he deems a sinister light. He quotes me as saying that, while an Italian imperialism would be execrable, the reinforcement of American imperialism will be acclaimed by all level-headed, free men everywhere! The reader might not suspect that I had also expressed myself in that connection about German and British imperialism or that from the sentence on American imperialism certain vital terms are deleted.

When read in full, my remarks ("Peace by Power"—Page 140) are, I think, not unreasonable: "If German imperialism is finally victorious that will be horrible; if the imperialism triumphs which bred the concept of the British Commonwealth of Nations mankind may breathe easily once again. A victory for Italian imperialism would have been execrable; the reinforcement of that American imperialism which, since the turn of the century, has rendered the United States ever more capable of defending the Western Hemisphere will be acclaimed by level-headed, free men everywhere." The words and phrases in italics are the ones Mr. Lin Yutang omits. By ignoring the first sentence in the foregoing passage, Mr. Lin Yutang conveys an incomplete impression of my views; by tampering with the second sentence he conveys an impression of my views which is gravely distorted.

Would Mr. Lin Yutang have preferred our war against Japan to have been fought without the United States having developed the Panama Canal or held Hawaii and Alaska, or does he believe that the general war might have been waged more successfully if she had not occupied Puerto Rica or had not leased the defensive bases from Britain in 1940?

From the grim experience of two global wars, Mr. Lin Yutang draws the curious lesson that a free world would be safer if the British Empire

were weakened or destroyed. At heart he presumably feels the same way about the colonial possessions and strategic effectiveness of the United States. Yet without strong friends and allies what hope is there for his native China, what chance for carrying out the great decisions of the Cairo Conference?

Mr. Lin Yutang is, however, at liberty to interpret the facts as he pleases. What he may not do is misrepresent the facts upon which his interpretation is founded.

LIONEL GELBER.

Toronto, Ont.

SIR: Thank you for allowing me to read the correspondence by Mr. Lionel Gelber on the so-called "misrepresentation" of his views in my "Between Tears and Laughter."

I have not wrongly quoted his passages, nor are they "so ripped out of their context that they seriously alter" his "meaning." I have devoted only one paragraph to a summary of his views in his own words, and the quotes I give are typical of the thesis and contention of his book. There are necessarily omissions in such a compressed summary; but if I were to quote his passages more fully, I am afraid the effect would be still more damaging among readers who do not agree that this war is only a war for power.

Mr. Gelber is able to point out only one unintentional verbal inaccuracy, due to my copying in longhand, involving a preposition. I still do not see how the meaning of the sentence is perceptibly changed. "In reality the war is one for power—for power of [instead of *by*] the democracies before it is power for democracy itself": this is his own version. Where I left out a qualifying clause about American Imperialism, whose reinforcement, he says, "will be acclaimed by level headed, free men everywhere,"



I did indicate the omission by a series of dots. Now what is the context of that statement about reinforcement of American imperialism which he in his sincere belief has every right to acclaim? "But," so runs the context, "among the paradoxes of debate upon this war, few have been more odd than the tacit assumption of friend and foe alike that to call it a struggle between rival imperialisms was to belittle the Allied cause. Yet, as with the conflict of 1914-18, that is a perfectly accurate description. For there is nothing irremediably sinister in modern imperialism unless you make it so. It all depends on whose imperialism you are talking about. . . ." (pp. 139-140) Then follow those two sentences containing the comparison of German and British imperialism and of Italian and American imperialism. In the next paragraph, he then makes the very lucid statement, "Much more refreshing is it to agree with Mr. Lindbergh that this war's prize is the balance of power." (p. 141). I am therefore representing Mr. Gelber's views fairly when I say that he regards it as "a perfectly accurate description" of this war to call it "a struggle between rival imperialisms." The omitted qualifying clause does not deny this standpoint, but only gives the reason for his belief why American imperialism should be reinforced.

Mr. Gelber's thesis that this is a war for power is perfectly clear; this main thesis in his book is repeated again and again, including his defense of Versailles and his profound regret that the *status quo* was "villified." Mr. Gelber has the right to his belief, and there is no reason why he should disclaim it now. He should hold on to it, unless he has changed his mind. I objected to his cynical thinking about our war aims, and tried to show in my book that this intellectual cynicism will inevitably lead us to a third World War. But he says in the very first chapter of his book, "Let us be perfectly frank with ourselves. There is nothing cynical in a plain recognition that this is also a war for power . . . none but the frivolous can wonder what the war is about." (p. 10) I am wondering what the war is about, but I am not frivolous, I am deeply concerned.

LIN YUTANG.

New York, N. Y.

### Mr. Rascoe on "The Razor's Edge"

SIR: That was a splendid review by Harrison Smith of W. Somerset Maugham's "The Razor's Edge," except for a forgivable lack of knowledge of the whole body of Mr. Maugham's work. Mr. Smith confesses he has not read "Liza of Lambeth." If he had, he would not have written: "It would be impossible, one presumes, to startle him with any manifestation of human behavior . . . provided that . . . the drama was among the middle or upper classes. . . . Granted that the lower classes, social



revolution, the brotherhood of man was not his business. . . ."

This sort of thing, I know, is the fashion to say about Maugham among superficial book reviewers who are still suffering from hang-overs from the heyday of the Popular Front. Because of certain popular short stories of Maugham's which appeared in Mr. Hearst's *Cosmopolitan* and dealt with characters in the upper, or governing, classes of Great Britain, it became the thing to say that Mr. Maugham is only a confectioner and a snob. Actually Mr. Maugham has made "the brotherhood of man" more his business than any other British novelist of his time.

"Liza of Lambeth" should have indicated to Mr. Smith, by its title, that it is about a girl in the slums of London. Just how this novel was treated by the book reviewers of the time is indicated by this passage from Mr. Maugham's second novel, "The Making of a Saint"; in an introduction allegedly by one Giulio Brandolini (who is, of course, Mr. Maugham himself):

"I have a friend who lately wrote a story of the London poor, and his critics were properly disgusted because his characters dropped their aitches, and often used bad language, and did not behave as elegantly as might be expected from the example they were continually receiving from their betters."

Since his days as a hospital interne in Lambeth, where Mr. Maugham lived and got his material for "Liza," a novel berated by the reviewers because it was not about "a better class" of people, Mr. Maugham has been interested in depicting people, not "classes," and his range has been from scoundrels to saints, guttersnipes to depraved members of nobility. He has never been interested in furthering the cause of some ephemeral set of opportunists or in parroting their catchphrases.

BURTON RASCOE.

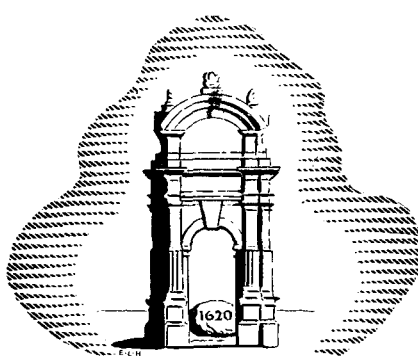
New York, N. Y.

[Mr. Maugham's "Liza of Lambeth" was a first novel and was written forty-seven years ago. Since then the author's heart seems to have moved from the lower to the upper brackets of society.—HARRISON SMITH.]

### "Buttons" Smith Finds a Link

SIR: The publication of Catherine Drinker Bowen's "Yankee From Olympus" provides new ground for speculation as to the putative relationship between the Holmes family in America and Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street, London.

The late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle knew both the great jurist and the great detective, of course; and he had, incidentally, a far greater regard and affection for the former than for the latter. The significant link in the chain, however, is not this common third-person acquaintanceship; it is, rather, the fact that the respective subjects of Miss Bowen's and Dr. Watson's writings were both related ancestrally to the talented Vernet fam-



ily of France, and hence, collaterally, to each other. Mr. Rolfe Boswell is now engaged in tracing this relationship in its finer details, and perhaps Miss Bowen could be induced to lend her aid to the research.

The genetic influence from the source in question is manifest in the capacities and characteristics of the Holmes family to a remarkable degree, and the English and American branches show many common traits. Certainly if there was ever an autocrat of the breakfast table, it was Sherlock Holmes!

EDGAR W. SMITH.

New York City, N. Y.

### Pretty Librarians

SIR: A librarian proposes that pretty girls be utilized more in libraries than was the alleged case in olden days. Chicago libraries have quite a line of young chicks working but there is quite an added feature necessary to library work. That should be library workers who can talk all day long to their public about books. In a long career as library goer I have come across only one girl who ever volunteered to say a word about a book on her own accord. I would say this privilege should be allowed librarians and it should be considered one of their rights—to discuss books with customers—if customers are willing. Thus we will have book talk in America.

CARL PETERSON.

### "Factale"

SIR: On the "Letters to the Editor" page of *SRL*, April 1, Frances Whiting requested suggestions for a new word that would describe a book that is at once factual, colorful, and dramatic, yet which utilizes fiction techniques. How would "factale" do?

MRS. ELINOR K. EVANS.  
U. S. Army Librarian,  
Camp Blanding, Florida.

### Touchy Subjects and the Movies

SIR: Mr. Tiffany Thayer should have addressed his letter, as he so coyly suggests, to Mr. Rice and not used the *SRL* as a trumpet to blast forth his ignorance. Incidentally, none of the gentlemen in question know much about the movies! This list will be self evident:

"The Ten Commandments," "The Jazz Singer," "The Cohens and The Kellys," "Disraeli," "They Won't For-

get," "The Dreyfus Case," "Imitation of Life," "Green Pastures," "Life Boat," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Gone with the Wind," "Major Barbara," "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," "Grapes of Wrath," "The Ox-Bow Incident," "Fury," "Winterset," "The Magic Bullet," "Birth of a Baby," "Is Your Daughter Safe," "V. D.," "Where Are Your Children," "Street Scene," "Boystown," "The Great McGinty," "Citizen Kane," "John Doe," "Confessions of a Nazi Spy," "Mission to Moscow" and "Blockade."

If this list proves anything, I hope it proves that the "Hollywood Moguls" do not exclude certain topics from the screen because of "children, adolescent minds, the local priest, banker, or mayor."

MRS. REGINA LESSER.

Bexley, Ohio.

### The Documentary Touch

SIR: A. W. Diller's littlewillieism, *SRL*, April 22nd. With all due respect, "Little Willie" is a butter-in, in that one which Mr. Diller begins, with "Little Willie's dead, etc., etc." In the original Max Adeler (Charles Heber Clark, 1847-1915) version it starts: "Little Alexander's dead, etc., etc." It also should be, the final line: "With his Uncle Jerry," not "beside." Old Max's stuff, a lot of it, makes good reading, yet, and conducive to bellylaughs a-plenty.

ROBERT HAMMOND MURRAY.

Harrisburg, Penn.

### Spoonerisms

SIR: I am enjoying greatly the current contributions of "spoonerisms," which is not to imply that the more substantial items in the *Review* are without appeal. In connection with the former, however, I am moved to acquaint you with the annual predicament of a former English professor of mine as a result of having announced, one year, that "Next week we will begin a comparative study of Sheats and Kelley."

It is indeed a treat to receive the *Review* in this most isolated of places, and a joy to the heart of this former teacher and student—a stimulant to memories of golden hours past and a kindler of strong hope in the challenge to achievement in the time ahead.

FRANLIN A. DOTY.

Camp Gordon Johnston, Fla.

### Kipling was Sure

SIR: The "sumac-sugar" story is apparently a hardy perennial, but it's a great mistake for Trade Winds to pin the medal on Shaw when there are so many of my generation still alive who remember distinctly that it was Rudyard Kipling who leaned across the table, when a young woman made pronouncement of the uniqueness of pronunciation of the two words, and blandly asked "are you sure?"

C. H. BUNTING.

Madison, Wis.

## The story behind a great American novel!

The most spectacularly successful novel and one of the most highly praised books of the year was written in her middle years by a woman who had never before attempted full-length fiction. This startling fact becomes easy to understand when one knows something about Lillian Smith and her lifelong activities.

Miss Smith is the daughter of a well known, deeply respected Southern family. Many of her earliest and dearest memories are of the free companionship she shared with Negro children, memories clouded by the bitter knowledge that this happy friendship couldn't continue. Unlike most Southerners, she determined to learn why a division between the races had been forced upon her and, understanding the reasons, she resolved to do something about it.

She did. Through the medium of her own voice and pen; from lecture platforms; in countless living rooms; in the pages of many publications and, finally, in those of her own magazine, *South Today*, she has fought to give reality to the simple anthropological fact—to the basic American doctrine—that all men are created equal as human beings. In *Strange Fruit* this reality is given creative, artistic expression. It is clear to any intelligent reader that this remarkable novel could not have

been contrived or manufactured, but had to grow as a major experience of its writer's lifetime.

Because Miss Smith knows how much of the South's racial problems are inherent in the relationships between white and white, much of her books deals with the conflicts among and within the families of "white town." To many readers, for instance, the situation involving Tracy Dean, his sister and his mother, is as important and revealing as that other situation which arises when Tracy meets Nonnie and picks his perilous way across the tracks into "colored town."

That this book should have been so enthusiastically received throughout America has been deeply gratifying to its author and its publisher. Especially rewarding has been the enthusiasm of the South for the work of one who is warmly respected there.

To show how the American people, as a whole, reacts to a true work of art, we give you these sales figures in the belief that all of literate America may take pride in them: almost 20,000 copies were sold before publication; 6,000 were sold in the first week; 7,000 the second week; 17,000 the third week; 19,000 the fourth week; 18,000 the fifth week; 18,000 the sixth week; 22,000 the seventh week, and 19,000 the eighth week. 225,000 copies are now in print and more have been ordered. \$2.75

by **Lillian Smith**

# STRANGE FRUIT

Reynal & Hitchcock  
New York



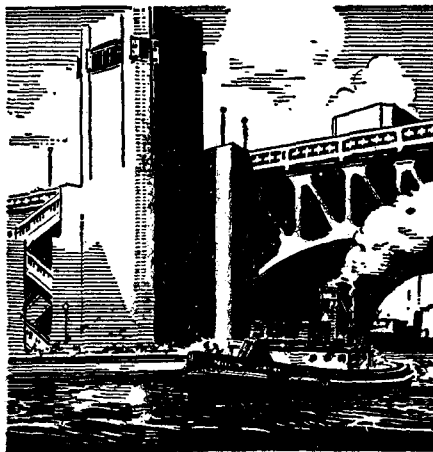
## CHICAGO INTERLUDE

**THE ALMOST-SIMULTANEOUS** publication of five new books by young writers from Chicago and thereabouts suddenly jolted that city's critics into a realization that a new day indeed had dawned in Midwestern literary history; that the necessity of dwelling on garbled memories of antics of the Hechts, Floyd Dells, Covicis, and Harriet Monroes of a quarter of a century ago was gone, glory be, forever. One of the five new books—Clare Jaynes's "These Are the Times"—was a Random House publication, and I journeyed to Chicago to attend the launching ceremonies. When the folks out that way decide to honor a native son or daughter, there's nothing halfway about the effort. I won't recover for weeks.

Railroad travel between New York and Chicago, of course, is not what it used to be. Trains are overcrowded, late, and stripped of de-luxe equipment. The New York Central, however, seems to have made it a point of honor to maintain one train, its Twentieth Century Limited, on a pre-war scale of magnificence. It takes seventeen hours now instead of sixteen, but the added hour makes the ride only smoother and more comfortable. The beautiful new sleepers, diners, observation and club cars designed by Henry Dreyfuss are preserved intact; the service is pluperfect; they even have steak on the menus. Extra sections have been abandoned for the most part, and the Century is sold out therefore weeks in advance, but I'm sure it's good for the morale of the public—and the entire Central personnel—to keep this one famous train up to par. Sprawling happily in the observation car as we glided up the Hudson Valley, I thought of the Englishman who dined at the Savoy in London and demanded a three-inch-thick sirloin, smothered in mushrooms, bernaise sauce, and fried onions. The waiter listened patiently and commented, "Are you ordering, sir, or reminiscing?"

**IT IS IMPOSSIBLE** to be in Chicago for more than an hour without becoming involved in a violent discussion about McCormick's *Tribune* and Marshall Field's *Sun*. This was particularly true in my case, since I had ventured to compare their literary sections in Trade Winds a few months ago. Several booksellers had saved *Tribune* reviews to prove to me that

some of the Colonel's blind prejudices and distorted reporting *had* seeped over into *Tribune* book reviews. Undoubtedly, in the two years that elapsed since I was in Chicago last, the *Sun* has improved immeasurably in every department; the *Tribune* is more biased, unreliable, and subversive than ever. Its coverage of the Sedition Trial in Washington is angled in such a way that the Government seems to be the defendant, and deserves about thirty years at least. Its affection for the crackpots actually on trial is understandable enough; they sound as though they had been weaned on an exclusive diet of McCormick editorials. A Chicago wag suggested that the Colonel ought to rename the *Tribune* Tower "Hyde-from-Roosevelt Park." The Field forces didn't help his digestion any when they erected a sign directly opposite the *Tribune* entrance trumpeting "Read the TRUTH in *The Chicago Sun*." Latest official circulation figures (as of September, 1943) show the *Tribune* second in the entire country with a daily average of 940,751. Hearst's *Herald-American* is seventh with 471,866; the *Chicago News* is ninth with 412,148; the *Chicago Times* is tenth with 399,054; *The Sun*, though still in its swaddling clothes, has climbed to nineteenth place with 291,564. Everybody knows that if the *Tribune* is really to be knocked off its perch, *The Sun* will have to do it. The size of these circulation figures emphasizes the importance of the Chicago press in the national scheme; a rich, densely populated, and pivotal area of a thousand square miles is influenced by its policies; one Colonel McCormick can do more damage to



—Drawing by Timmons, from "The Chicago," by Harry Hansen.

future relations with our English and Russian allies than the whole lot of twopenny nonentities now on trial in Washington.

Whether or not the *Chicago Tribune* literary department agrees with the owner's politics I cannot say. By tacit consent, we stuck resolutely to literary topics while we were together. I can vouch for the fact that they are first-rate company and jolly dinner companions. That includes Fanny Butcher, Kenneth Horan, Vincent Starrett, Charles Collins, Claudia Cassidy, Felix Tomei, and, above all, Fred Babcock, who correlates their efforts and is doing an outstanding job. On the wall facing Fred's desk are a score of photographs. I presumed that they were authors until I saw their underpinnings. Then I recognized Betty Grable, Ginger Rogers, Lana Turner, Dietrich, Lamarr, and other literary greats. Fred says they help him contemplate novels, but I think he's making a typographical error.

**I HAD HOPED** to meet the fabulous McCormick in person, but he was off on a lecture tour. Besides, I might never have been able to run the gauntlet of guards who bar the way to his sanctum. A private elevator is reserved for his personal use alone. One day, they tell me, the Rhode Island legislature passed a bill that displeased him. Out into the *Tribune* lobby he strode, and snipped one star from the American flag that waved there. At a picnic for *Tribune* employes, a truck drove up and circled the field. A ramp was moved up to the rear door, and down it rode the Colonel on a black stallion. He spoke a few precious words to the awed assemblage without dismounting, and then rode back into the truck, which disappeared in a cloud of gold dust. Colonel McCormick wrote a memorable letter to a subscriber in 1942, in which he claimed credit for introducing the ROTC into schools, and persuading the Army to take up machine guns, automatic rifles, and general mechanization. He declared he was the first officer to advocate an alliance with Canada, fortification of Guam, and a two-ocean Navy. He also told the Administration "that airplanes could destroy battleships," "got the Marines out of Shanghai," but couldn't quite "get the Army out of the Philippines." What a man! Carl Sandburg read this extraordinary document and murmured, "And on the seventh day He rested."

**THE SUN'S** literary section has kept pace with the rest of the paper; it is now a permanent and essential fixture of the Midwestern literary scene. Its colorful editor, A. C. Sectorsky,