

## Job for the Irregulars

SIR: For some time I have been puzzled about the precise relationship between Conan Doyle's seven brilliant chapters entitled "The Scowrrers" in "The Valley of Fear" and the historical facts about the murderous Mollie Maguires of the Pennsylvania coal fields during the eighteen-seventies. That there is a close relationship has long been evident to me, and doubtless to many other Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts.

In comparing the "coffin notices" sent to mine bosses by Doyle's Scowrrers with the historically genuine Mollie Maguire coffin notices now in the possession of Haverford College, I realize that the identity is complete. In the exhibition of Sherlockiana just concluded in the Haverford College Library, one of the most offensive and threatening of these Mollie Maguire coffin notices was on display. Looking further into the matter, through a reliable but second-hand source, I note that Doyle's dramatic account of the Scowrrers is not fiction, but rather an historical narrative of how the Mollie Maguires actually terrorized and dominated the anthracite coal fields for more than a decade and were finally brought to the gallows in large numbers by a Pinkerton detective.

Point by point the two stories coincide: the Mollies are the Scowrrers, each local murder group claiming membership in a large and respectable national brotherhood; Commissioner Dormer becomes Councillor McGinty, each a local boss and owner of a saloon; the Pinkerton Irish detective who calls himself "McKenna" and joins the Mollies to bring them to justice becomes, in Doyle's version, "McMurdo"—likewise an Irish detective of the same age and from the Pinkerton agency. Each detective hero has a Pinkerton assistant backed by a large force of police who, in each case, carry Winchester rifles and come to the rescue in emergencies. Each detective has his hand suddenly forced by premature intelligence of his identity, given to the murder gang, but in each case he is successful in bringing nearly a dozen of them to the gallows and in breaking up the organization.

The problem that I propose to Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts is this: From what source, or sources, did Doyle get his historical information about the Mollie Maguires, which he used almost without change in his seven chapters entitled "The Scowrrers"? Not being a maker of Sherlockiana puzzles, but rather one who has neither time nor intelligence enough to solve the problem which he has himself propounded, I timidly suggest avoiding three clues which I believe to be false:

1. I do not think that examination of Doyle's criminological library will reveal any important document dealing with the Mollies.



"Well, at least we won't have to sit through any more of those damned receptions."

2. I do not believe that the ponderous volume, "The Molly Maguires and the Detectives," by Allan Pinkerton, 1877, was the source of Doyle's "Valley of Fear."

3. Nor do I think that Doyle ever read through the other 1877 book entitled "The Molly Maguires," by F. P. Dewees.

If anybody can suggest a satisfactory answer to this problem in connection with our Haverford College exhibition of Sherlockiana, will he kindly send in his solution and address it to—

EDWARD D. SNYDER,  
The Haverford College Library,  
Haverford, Pa.

## Newspaper Editorials

SIR: Apropos of "What's Wrong with Newspaper Editorials?" allow me:

Close on two thousand daily newspapers are published in North America.

These two thousand daily papers all without exception, as far as I know, run editorials daily.

These two thousand daily papers are all hard-boiled business enterprises.

Does anybody imagine that all of two thousand hard-boiled business enterprises would voluntarily waste paper and money in daily editorials just for fun?

No—they publish editorials daily because they know that daily editorials pay.

In other words, the public wants newspaper editorials.

If there's a lot wrong with newspaper editorials, the general public

has evidently not found it out.

I suggest, then, that there can't be much wrong with newspaper editorials, although occasionally some don't seem to be winners.

May I commend the facts to the attention of amateur cognoscenti and pundits outside newspaper offices?

It is quite true that a proportion of newspaper editorials are not winners. It is also true that a proportion of human beings are not winners. Would this latter fact justify much attention to the query "What's wrong with human beings?"

A NEWSPAPER PUBLISHER.  
Ottawa, Canada.

## Botticelli's Madonna

SIR: Divergence in interpretations of Botticelli's Madonna grows rapidly. Recently you printed a letter in which I called attention to the fact that Wyndham Lewis, in "Ronsard," declared, citing Huysman, that Botticelli frankly acknowledged that his Virgins were Venuses and vice versa; and that Joseph D. Bennett, in "Baudelaire," stated that Botticelli's Venuses were not made of flesh, but of gold, steel, light, and diamonds.

Now Lionello Venturi in his "Painting and Painters," just published, declares: "If you think of what Venus meant to the pagan world . . . you will be aware that Venus was for Botticelli no longer a goddess, but a fallen angel."

Desperately we ask: What will be the next appraisal of Botticelli and his Venus?

BERNARD SOBEL.  
New York, N. Y.

**HOW MUCH** of the story of Adria Langley's new book, "A Lion Is in the Streets" is a product of the author's imagination, and how much is based on actual United States history is a question that will be argued at great length in months to come. The publishers, and Jimmy Cagney's Film Corporation, which has bought the screen rights for the modest sum of a quarter of a million dollars, insist that the book is "pure fiction." Skeptics, I suspect, will murmur, "Huey."

The important thing, however, is that this melodramatic, occasionally too lurid, exposé of a native demagogue will open the eyes of thousands of people to the ease with which a silver-tongued and conscienceless rascal still can cheat his way to power and wealth in America. Miss Langley's literary style is about on a level with Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind." One character, in fact—Jules Bolduc—strongly suggests the Ashley Wilkes of the Mitchell novel. Somebody should have blue-pencilled about a dozen of the intimate and interminable love scenes in which Hank Martin "nuzzles and nibbles" his wife's neck and ears for pages on end. You can at least count on the unprincipled Hank for one thing: he never nuzzles without nibbling at the same time!

The first printing of "A Lion Is in the Streets," scheduled for publication on Monday, is in the neighborhood of one hundred thousand copies. They'll disappear in jig-time. This is the best and most ruthless portrait to date of an American heel. Mrs. Langley has done some newspaper work previously, but this is her first novel, written in her spare time while working as a riveter in a Santa Monica defense plant. A virtual literary novice has succeeded brilliantly in a job that threw John Dos Passos, one of America's great novelists, when he essayed it in "Number One!" . . .

**SAXE COMMINS**, engaged in editing a one-volume anthology of the best writings of Washington Irving for the Modern Library, came across one essay entitled "Literary Life" that might have been written yesterday instead of well over a hundred years ago. I quote:

"The literary world," my friend Buckthorne told me, "is made up of little confederacies, each looking upon its own members as the lights of the universe; and considering all others as mere transient veterans, doomed soon to fall and be forgotten, while its own luminaries are to shine steadily on to immortality."

"And pray," said I, "how is a man to get a peep into those confederacies you speak of? I presume an intercourse with authors is a kind of intellectual exchange, where one must bring his commodities to barter, and always give a *quid pro quo*."

"Pooh, pooh! How you mistake," said Buckthorne, smiling. "You must never think to become popular among wits by shining. They go into society to shine themselves, not to admire the brilliancy of others. I once thought as you do, and never went into literary society without studying my part beforehand; the consequence was, that I soon got the name of an intolerable proser, and should in a little while have been completely excommunicated, had I not changed my plan of operations. No, sir, no character succeeds so well among wits as that of a good listener; or if ever you are eloquent, let it be when tête-à-tête with an author and then in praise of his own works, or, what is nearly as acceptable, in disparagement of the works of his contemporaries. If ever he speaks favorably of the productions of a particular friend, dissent boldly from him; pronounce his friend to be a blockhead; never fear his being vexed. Much as people speak of the irritability of authors, I never found one to take offense at such contradictions. No, no, sir, authors are particularly candid in admitting the faults of their friends." . . .

The first half of this new Irving volume will contain copious selections from all his shorter works; the second half "Knickerbocker's History of New

York," complete and unabridged. The editors of the Modern Library expect it to be one of the most popular volumes in the entire series. . . .

**IT PROBABLY** wasn't fair to go straight from the subtle and polished wit of Washington Irving to a book of present-day radio humor. Jack Gaver and Dave Stanley have assembled in "There's Laughter in the Air" a collection of radio scripts culled from all the leading comics in that department. They have done their job beautifully. The biographical notes are informative and lively. The scripts are printed without deletions or asides of any description. Here in black and white is the evidence of the appalling hogwash that passes for humor on the radio today. The scripts for Fred Allen and Duffy's Tavern are genuinely funny; the ones for Bob Hope, Milton Berle, Jimmy Durante, Jack Benny, and Phil Baker at least are tailored expertly to fit their special talents. The material, supposedly tops, that represents Amos'n Andy, Colonel Stoopnagle, The Great Gildersleeve, Ed Wynn, and a half dozen other top-liners, however, is almost unbelievable. Any serious student of radio will have to add this book to his library. It brings into sharp focus three facts:

One: the top comics in radio are a hundred times better than their material; what this stuff would sound like in the hands of run-of-the-mill performers is shocking to contemplate.

Two: the ludicrous censorship and taboos with which radio chains and advertising magnates have voluntarily saddled themselves have stifled virtually any hope for originality and spon-



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"So it's a mirage, so what?"