

## Are Women People?

SIR: I have a bone to pick with Alvin Johnson. Doesn't he think that women are human beings? His otherwise excellent article on "Education in an Atomic Age" is marred by several allusions to "women and children" as belonging together in one group set apart from the "male men" who, apparently, are the only prime movers in the advance of civilization.

Whatever children may be, it is a little too late a day to dispose of half the world's adult population with a contemptuous compliment. Women are not "the flowers of hope through the unending succession of the generations." They are mature, responsible humans, with just as much concern and just as urgent duties as men can have in the problems arising from the conquering of atomic force.

MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD.

San Francisco, Calif.

## Tolstoy and Translations

SIR: A remark in the editorial, "New Words for Old Books" [SRL, Aug. 25], prompted me to look into my editions of Tolstoy.

After noting that Constance Garnett had "translated eighteen novels of Turgenev, fifteen of Dostoevsky's books, and all of Chekov's," you said: "Why Mrs. Garnett kept her hands off Tolstoy is not known whether because of another writer's prior claim or her dislike of Tolstoy's radical ideas."

My edition of "Anna Karenina" is the two-volume set put out by Random House in 1939, with an introductory essay by Thomas Mann and illustrations by Philip Reisman—and "translated from the Russian by Constance Garnett."

The two editions of "War and Peace" that I now have are the Maude translation. However, I would swear that the Modern Library Giant edition that I left over in Germany was translated by Constance Garnett.

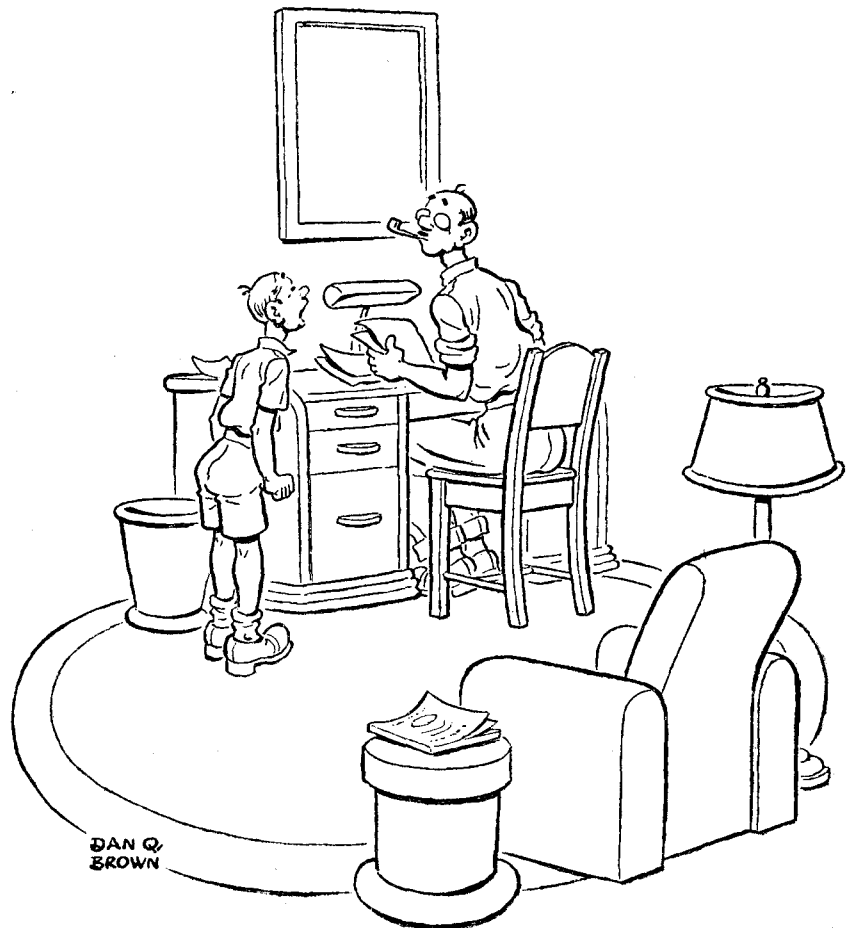
I agree with you that the Russian novelists need re-translating. While I was in England I was reading a recent Stalin Prize Novel by Alexei Tolstoy ("Road to Calvary" was the title, I believe). I was impressed by the fact that it was much more vigorously translated than any other Russian novel I had read. Unfortunately, I do not recall the translator's name.

(S/Sgt.) A. M. HILLMAN.

Levant, Maine.

## "Modern Man Is Obsolete"

SIR: For the last several weeks I have been delighted to read all the commendations of your "Modern Man Is Obsolete" editorial, but, yea gods, can't you writers do more than just agree that one world would be desirable? Dozens of expressions of



DAN Q. BROWN

"Dad, is the increase in my allowance retroactive?"

agreement and praise but not one word about future action! How come?

It seems to me that something can be done about this and that the most effective means would be through such a group as the SRL represents. Couldn't you organize or propose something such as a "Writers' Congress for World Government"? There must be writers all over the world who would like nothing better than to work for such a cause, especially now when the farce of London and all that has been fought for is becoming so painfully evident. When the writers have begun, the students, worldwide, should mobilize—then the professional groups and unions. But education must come first—how about it?

FRED BASSETTI.

Cambridge, Mass.

## Impressions from a Writers' Conference

SIR: At the Campus of Northwestern University you may stumble into an edifice, built in the style of the Tudor period, and in the next moment into a box-like, many-windowed modernistic house, into a stodgy red brick Romanesque building, and into one with lofty gables and spires. The same variety of styles could be found among the lectures that were given at the Campus, in the last week of

July, within the framework of the Midwestern Writers' Conference. Some of the educators, poets, writers, journalists, editors, literary agents, and publishers who addressed the crowd delivered strictly informative lectures, others made table-talks, witty and amusing, but altogether not very helpful, and a few even spoke facetiously and ironically about the art of writing, to the confusion and bewilderment of many neophytes among the listeners.

Frankly speaking, the audience seemed to me more interesting than the body of lecturers, though it included some nationally known figures. The majority of the disciples were women, young girls, middle-aged housewives, and old ladies—if the term "old" can be applied to people as enthusiastic and as responsive to the teaching as I found these ladies to be. Of the men, quite a few were in U. S. uniforms, and it speaks well for them—and of the soldierettes, too—that they spent their evenings listening to lectures on such subjects as "Practical Psychology for the Creative Writer" instead of "having a good time" at Chez Paree and other of Chicago's hot spots.

During the Conference I could not help comparing the wonderful opportunities given the aspiring writers in

this country with the lack of encouragement that I noticed in the Old World where I came from. If I remember right, there existed no classes in short-story writing, nor any drama work shops at Central European universities. Nor did any colleges or high schools publish any magazines edited and written exclusively by students. There was no institution giving us young ones an opportunity of learning the trade, and permitting the talented ones to break into print. Whenever the topic of the teaching of the art of writing was discussed, the professional writers would laugh it off, claiming that the faculty of writing was a heavenly gift; if a person had the divine spark, he did not have to be taught, and if he didn't, well, then it wasn't worth while bothering with him anyway. But while it is basically true that not ten or even twenty courses can make you a writer, if you have no talent whatsoever, it is equally true that clever guidance can help the newcomers avoid dangerous pitfalls, can help them save much time that they could use for expanding their experience and knowledge. We had to learn everything the hard way.

There was another phenomenon that struck me even more profoundly: after having heard a great deal about the "materialism" said to prevail in this country, I was amazed at the enormous number of people possessed with only one idea—the desire to write. I talked with numerous individuals who attended the Conference, and found that they had come from all walks of life. Many of them indulged in poetry, a branch of writing that is hardly lucrative, and even if only a small percentage of them will ever produce anything that comes close to a real poem, their appreciation of poetry, their earnest desire to produce something beautiful should not be dismissed easily.

Not far away from the campus is titanic Chicago, "half-naked, sweating, proud to be Pig Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation." More power to you brave men and women at Evanston who, in defiance of the war, turned the college into a little Athens where Calliope, Euterpe, and the other Muses were worshipped—at least during the fruitful four days of the Writers' Conference.

ALFRED WERNER.

Evanston, Illinois.

### "The Mind of the Negro"

SIR: I would like to be among the first to congratulate you on the publication of your splendid article, "The Mind of the Negro" [*SRL*, Sept. 8]. My copy came in the mail this a.m. and I read this fine piece of writing first of all.

It brought to mind something which occurred last summer and which I think may be of interest to you. My husband and I happened to read in the "Letters" column of one of our

large national magazines a letter from K. G. Price. Mr. Price gave a succinct and terrifying picture of the book famine existing in Negro schools all over Mississippi. He told how frequently the only way to have any books at all in a Negro school was for the parents, all of them poor, to contribute a few dollars with which to purchase cheap, paper-backed children's books. We were so moved by this letter that we sent a package of second-hand books and some issues of *PM*, *New York Times*, and *SRL* to Mr. Price. We thought that the latter would be of interest to the teachers.

Dr. P. H. Easom, of the Department of Education, wrote us a cordial note of thanks saying that, "You may rest assured that this gift is greatly appreciated and these books will be used in providing library facilities for Negro schools in Mississippi. Thank you so much for your thoughtfulness."

This seems to me a perfect example of what H. A. Overstreet means by "... environment can make a whale of a difference to the mind of any man, black or white."

JEAN MOCHARNIUK,

(Mrs. Nicholas Mocharniuk).

Woodstock, New York.

### Charades

SIR: In your issue of August 18 you print a copy of the very old Charade, beginning: "I sit on a rock while I'm raising the wind."

This charade has been known to three generations in my wife's family, and we have always supposed that the true answer is the word

WEATHER.

Weather may be thought of in terms of good and bad; and as equivalent to "air" also. It thus seems to fulfill all the requirements of the puzzle, unless it be the line, "And that was with Noah, all alone in the ark."

If this answer is correct, it dates the charade back to the time of William IV of England, since the "first" and the "last" letters of the word Weather are W (i.e., William) and R (i.e., Rex).

H. O. DuBois.

New York, N. Y.

### "Ourselves, Inc."

SIR: Are reviewers for the *SRL* now gifted with prophecy? In his review of Dr. Lee R. Ward's "Ourselves, Inc." [*SRL*, Sept. 8], Mr. Harold Fields speaks of "encyclicals and statements made by Popes Pius XI, XII, and XIII"! Or did a weary proof-reader merely overlook a "Leo" before XIII?

R. C. WILLIAMS, S.J.

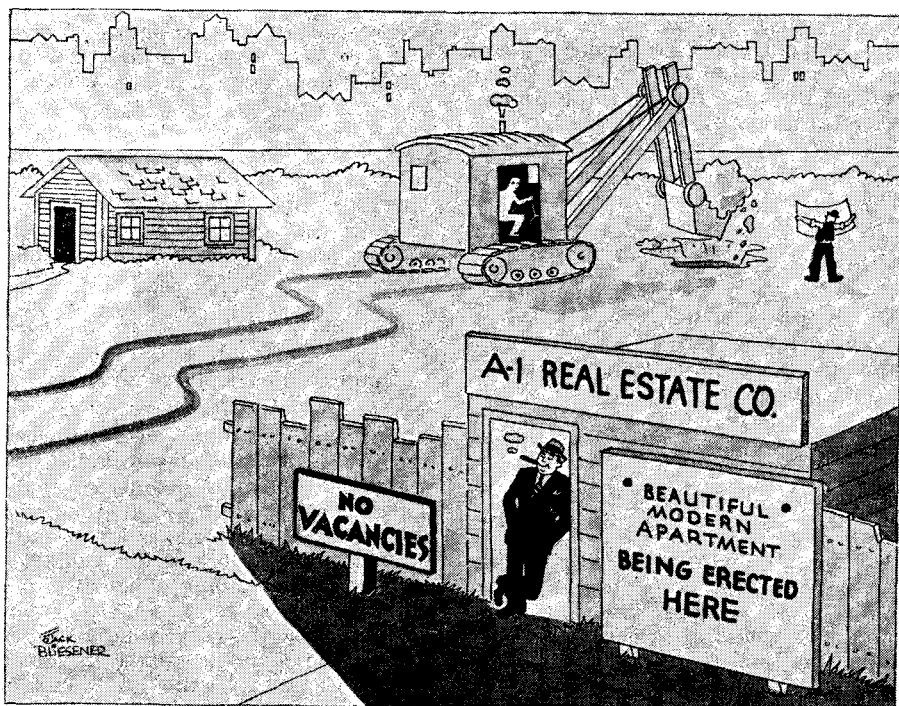
The Creighton University,  
Omaha 2, Nebraska.

### The Curse of Acknowledgments

SIR: Jacques Barzun refers (bitterly) [*SRL*, Sept. 22] "to the page marked 'Acknowledgments,' which is now found in almost all works except fiction and which lists the author's debt to publishers for quotations." Fiction, regrettable to say, isn't exempt either. The continuity of Anne Parrish's fine novel, "Poor Child," was badly damaged—for me at least—by the practice. Martin, the terrified boy-hero, as part of his program of propitiation, sometimes literally sings for his supper. But let him once start "Ireland must be —" and he is immediately throttled by an asterisk, while a footnote explains that he is giving tongue only by permission of Charms & Co., owner of the copyright. I think there are also some acknowledgments in Dan Wickenden's "The Wayfarers," though not so obtrusively placed.

EARLE F. WALBRIDGE.

New York, N. Y.





# Fable in Modern Dress

**THE PERFECT ROUND.** By Henry Morton Robinson. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1945. 280 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

**I**F the first virtue of the novelist is readability, whether for style or for story or for both, Mr. Robinson has achieved virtue. There are, I think, a good many things wrong with his plot, or at least with his handling of event and character, but it has the supreme quality of awakening in the reader the question: what happens next? "The Perfect Round" is sometimes symbolical, sometimes realistic, sometimes philosophic, and sometimes bald melodrama, but the inventiveness of the author never flags, his ability to lure the reader into the next chapter never tires. As narrative power is curiously weak in the modern novel, this distinction of Mr. Robinson's is a very real distinction, indeed.

But the story-telling art may run the gamut from "Lady Audley's Secret" to Homer. Mr. Robinson's style is one of the things that keeps his novel moving—oddly enough. I say "oddly enough" because one of the great qualities of this style is the Keatsian ability to load every rift with ore; and one would suppose that these sentences, in which words do the work of phrases, and phrases linger on the palate while the narrative moves past, would clog the motion of the fable by overloading it. Mr. Robinson has a devouring eye and ear. Nothing escapes him, not the smallest detail, the smallest bright pebble of an item, the smallest scraping sound. Take, for example, the following introduction of a character:

An unusual footfall, heavy-light, heavy-light, moved inside the cabin. A latch was fiddled with, and the door was flung open by a one-legged man with a wooden stump; so much did he look like John Silver, that O'Reilly almost expected him to have a steel hook instead of a hand. Actually the man was carrying a flapjack turned with one golden-brown pancake on it. The flapjack-maker stood unpromisingly silent in the doorway, a shaggy bison of a man with burned-out cinder eyes, unwarmed by curiosity or interest. He needed a haircut and a shave, also a bit of laundering about the shirt collar. O'Reilly noticed, however, that his hands were clean, the nails not unattended.

It is not O'Reilly who notices these things, it is the reader under the expert guidance of Mr. Robinson. Noth-

ing can be taken away from this picture; nothing needs to be added.

The fable of "The Perfect Round" concerns a returned veteran suffering from a bad case of Irish mysticism, who tramps the Hudson River valley until he comes upon an abandoned merry-go-round on somebody else's land. To repair this merry-go-round, to put it into perfect order seems to him the *summum bonum*; and when a lush and accommodating nymph moves down a nearby stream, proves to be a woodcarver, and falls into his extremely masculine arms, there seems to be no reason why the calliope cannot tootle and the wooden horses go round. But central New York is filled with complicated villainy having a lust for cockfighting; our hero almost falls into the clutches of a village lawyer of unparalleled duplicity and general wickedness; and as a result, he fights for life and death against a police dog and is clapped into a lousy jail. However, a dear little old maid falls heir to the estate on which the merry-go-round was illegally rebuilt, testifies before the grand jury, routs the henchmen of the dirty crook of a lawyer, and our hero and heroine, who have been having a grand time sleeping together without benefit of clergy, are at length united in lawful matrimony by a priest. At the end virtue is rewarded and vice is punished in the best manner of sentimental fiction.

So much the reader is entitled to know from the honest reviewer. The fact is that about a third of the plot is tripe. But it is honest tripe curi-



—SRL Drawing from life by Frances O'Brien Garfield.

Henry Morton Robinson "has a devouring eye and ear."

ously disguised, as if Mr. Robinson had fed on alternate doses of Koffka and Wilkie Collins. Spots in the latter half of the book suggest "The Woman in White" and "Armada," and I half expected Miss Gwilt to enter almost any chapter. And other spots are soaked with metaphysics.

But it doesn't especially matter. You read on. You are perpetually curious as to which of the many lives of Mr. Robinson is going to furnish the next section. And while one may have many lofty theories of the novel, there are two very sound theories that will forever be true: the story ought to be entrancing and the style ought to be literate. Mr. Robinson has both. I liked "The Perfect Round" in spite of some patent absurdities, I think most readers will also like it.

## Memory of Things Past

**INTERVAL IN CAROLINA.** By William Abrahams. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1945. 181 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

**I**T'S October down here in Carolina now and the tight emotional intervals between training and embarkation are gone forever. The Sergeant Wallace Youngs in the bars of the hotels have a chance to think about permanence again. But William Abrahams has put into moving prose the story of a good many more love affairs than this one of boys in uniform, somehow lost to the past and with the future of war making them more deeply sensitive to life around them. The Jeanies are in most cases still in Carolina. The moment of the meetings between Jeanie and the ser-

geant, however, was worth preserving. Mr. Abrahams has done it with warmth and poetry.

As a young poet in arms, Mr. Abrahams has written a sergeant's elegy about a girl he used to know and enriched it by other soldiers' memories of the good girls they met and left. They were memories both hard-boiled and sentimental. But they add up to poetry which may be a good deal sounder history of the soldier's story in this war than many dramatic tales of battles fought and landings made. "Interval in Carolina" is a sensitively remembered and beautifully written story of the war Mr. Abrahams and twelve million others fought when they were young. It possesses, as few war books do, the full sense of youth and love and war and the impermanence of them all.