

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Subscription Stimulant

SIR: I was just about to let my subscription lapse because I thought the reviews were always too favorable. I have just seen D. Anderson's review of my novel, "Summer on the Water" [SRL May 29]. Will you please forward the enclosed check for a year's renewal to the proper office?

DAVID WESTHEIMER.

Houston, Tex.

Behaving Like Animals

SIR: I do not know where Estelle Aubrey Brown obtained her erroneous information [SRL June 5], and I hate to disillusion her, but the fact is that dogs do practise sexual excesses and perversion. And, if the lady will inquire further, if she is not too disillusioned to do so, she will discover that placid cattle and other animals do likewise.

AUGUST DERLETH.

Sauk City, Wis.

Where Is Truth?

SIR: Joseph A. Brandt [SRL June 5] tells us that research and scholarship are not the same, that research is never more than a tool, and that the A-bomb represents its major output.

Apparently in Mr. Brandt's view, writing ability is the highest virtue to which man may aspire. Writers are the brahmin caste of humanity, he would have us believe. He is quite convinced that scholarship does not presuppose writing ability. But, by the same token, writing ability does not presuppose scholarship, nor honesty nor decency nor even sanity.

Perhaps the public prefers what flows from the radio spigot to that from books. At any rate, radio, movies, newspapers, and magazines do screen out crude sexual doings, horrors, and profanity to some extent, while book publishers in their own blurbs and advertisements try to assure the public that they will find sex life adequately described in the plainest of details in their books, with a full quota of excitement and horrors.

Mr. Brandt exclaims that the people "want leadership in truth and certainty." Where are truth and certainty to be found—"in the far-ranging limits of the human spirit where the quality to be sought is not exacting," as Mr. Brandt seems to advocate, or in the humble research laboratories?

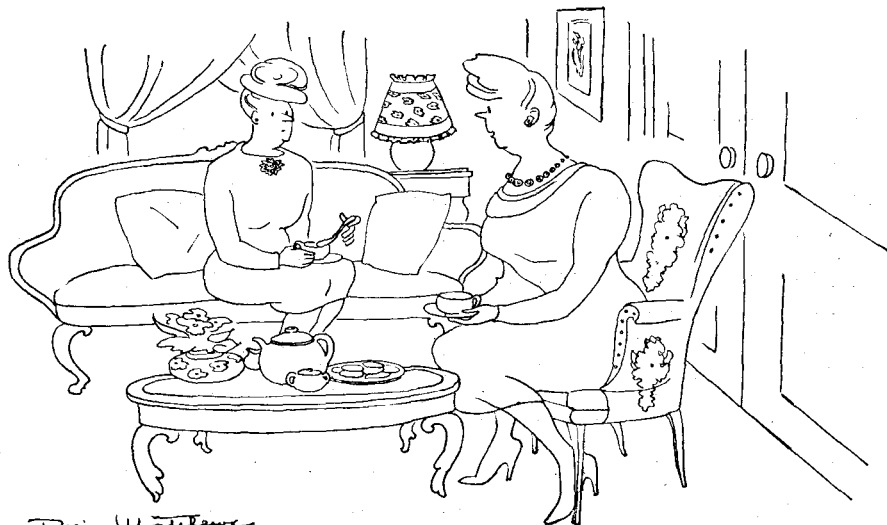
E. V. WILCOX.

Washington, D. C.

The Constant Gap

SIR: In reviewing "Ferment in Education" [SRL June 5], Henry D. Gideonse states that "the gap between Hutchins's and Conant's views has narrowed with the years." Not so.

"No two educators were ever farther apart," says Professor Oliver Martin. (In "Two Educators: Hutchins and Conant," Human Affairs Pamphlet, No. 29, Apr. 1948, Henry Regnery Co. Oliver Martin received his Ph.D. from Harvard. He is professor of philosophy at Ohio University, Athens, O.) "That James B. Conant, president of Harvard, should elevate moral nihilism and anti-intel-



Don Wattlew

"Charles is so mad at Russia he won't even eat borsht."

lectualism into a principle is a tragedy. . . . That few educators speak out against it is alarming. . . . That the head of the University of Chicago, Robert M. Hutchins, should be unequivocal in his condemnation of it is a cause for rejoicing. . . .

"These two men more than any others represent the two sides of the war going on today in higher education. . . . It is a war in which there can be no compromise. . . . And sooner or later the non-academic citizen as well as the innocent faculty member may be forced to take his stand. . . ."

FERD SAKS.

Chicago, Ill.

Free for All

SIR: The SRL's reviewers take each new book apart, Its readers then *their failing notes*, itself an art Reviewers then their views review, and parry each assault The editors impartial are, and noone's all at fault.

EMILIE M. KUSSIN.

New York, N. Y.

IRRC SOS

SIR: For fifteen years the International Rescue and Relief Committee has aided democratic anti-Fascists in Europe. Through its efforts such men as Franz Werfel, Hans Habe, Marc Chagall were saved and enabled to carry on the fight and make their great contributions to art.

Today IRRC is still doing that job —of rescuing and providing relief for thousands of proven democrats: impoverished members of the anti-Nazi resistance movement; former concentration camp internees; democratic Spanish Republicans, and the orphaned children of the anti-totalitarian undergrounds.

SRL readers who would like to help such friends of freedom can do so by supporting IRRC and by sending their cast-off clothing, half-worn-out shoes and blankets, *right now*, to the IRRC

Warehouse, 130 Orchard Street, New York City 2.

SHERA STRUNSKY,
Executive Secretary.

New York, N. Y.

"Judge" Hull

SIR: In view of Henry F. Pringle's customary accuracy as a biographer, it is surprising to find in his review of "The Memoirs of Cordell Hull" [SRL May 22] a glaring error. He writes that Mr. Hull "had been a Federal judge." Mr. Hull was never a Federal judge; he was a Tennessee State judge (circuit judge) for three years. This is why his Tennessee friends call him "Judge" Hull.

WALTER P. ARMSTRONG.

Memphis, Tenn.

Significant Signatures

SIR: The man's name fascinates me! Can it be real, or did he just make it up for the occasion,—the estimable writer of that interesting epistle to the SRL [May 15].

Those canny connivers,
The League of Survivors,
Ring tocsin to each needy sleeper.
Do all their officials
Have perfect initials
Like General Sec. T(he) G(rim) Reaper?

WIN ECKHARDT.

Clayton, Mo.

Descriptions of Childbirth

SIR: I have a study of the methods used in modern-day childbirth under-way, and since my emphasis is on the subjective effect of the new methods on modern women, I am interested in literary descriptions of childbirth.

Can any of your readers refer me to scenes in modern or classical literature describing childbirth either from the point of view of the observer, or even better, from the point of view of the mother concerned?

ROSALIND BACON HALL.

Chapel Rd., Madison, O.

Seeing Things

"THE SHORN LAMBS"

AMONG the tantalizing "ifs" of literature is what Charles Lamb might have been like as man and writer if, in a fit of madness, his sister Mary had not slain their mother when he was only twenty-one. The "gentle Elia" the world loves was the product of ungentle and terrible events. He was the stepchild of a calamity as bloody as any to be found in the most bloodstained Elizabethan dramas of which Lamb was later to become a champion. To a tragic extent Lamb's life, hence Elia's character, was carved out for him by the case knife which poor, deluded Mary drove straight and deep into their mother's heart.

Surely never in the strange annals of authorship has the world gained so much in pleasure or an innocent man lost more in freedom than in the instance of the catastrophe which resulted in Lamb's becoming the most beloved bachelor of letters literature has produced.

When he quit his desk at the East India House on the afternoon of September 22, 1796, and started to walk home through the London he loved, Lamb was not without his worries. His sister Mary, ten years his senior, had already shown symptoms of insanity. Not for the first time, either. As a person who had himself been confined the previous year for six weeks in a madhouse at Hoxton, these symptoms may have had a special meaning for him. In any case, Mary's condition was sufficiently disturbing to have sent Lamb, on his way to work that very morning, in search of a doctor who was not to be found. Aware though he was of the gathering clouds, Lamb could not have been prepared for the violence of the storm which had broken out in the house where he lived with his old father, his invalid mother, his sister, and his Aunt Hetty.

The sight he beheld when he opened the door was of tabloid gruesomeness. Above the bustle of Little Queen Street, he may have heard the cries of his father and the shrieks of Mary and her assistant as he approached his home. If he had not, the landlord's presence was in itself a warning. Certainly his eyes must have disbelieved the nightmare of reality which confronted them. The room, in which the table was laid for dinner, was in a

turmoil. Charles's aged aunt was unconscious on the floor, "to all appearance like one dying." His senile father was bleeding from a wound in his forehead. His mother was dead in a chair, stabbed to the heart by Mary who was standing over her with the case knife still in her hand. Lamb arrived only in time to snatch the knife from her grasp.

What had provoked this scene no one knows. Perhaps, as a professional seamstress, Mary had been overworking, and the stress of a dependent household had become too great for her. Perhaps the final straw had been the additional cares which had come her way because of the leg injury recently suffered by her brother John, her elder by a year and a half. Perhaps, as moderns have hinted, an ugly, long-suppressed animosity between her and her mother had at last erupted. In any event, Mary had had an altercation with the young woman who, in her mantua-making, was her helper. Mary had reached for the knives and forks on the table, throwing them at this frightened girl in the hope of driving her from the house. It was one of the forks thus thrown which had struck her father. Her mother might have been spared had she not attempted to intercede in the apprentice's behalf.

"I date from the day of horrors," wrote Lamb to Coleridge soon after the disaster. Although by this he meant merely to place in time events described in his letter, he unwittingly summarized the rest of his adult life. To these sensational occurrences which cost him dearly, we owe, in part at

least, the writer we cherish as one of the least sensational of authors. For the next thirty-eight years Lamb lived a gallant and, on the whole, a cheerful prisoner to the happenings of that fatal afternoon. In no sense of the word a tragic hero, he emerged as the hero of a tragedy. We pity him the more because he was without self-pity.

There are people, luckless mortals, who by the injustices of circumstances or because of a certain granite in their characters are doomed to be caryatids for the suffering of others. Charles Lamb was one of these. He could have fallen back on the law and allowed his sister to be committed to a public insane asylum. He could have walked out on Mary. In other words, he could have done what his older brother John did and wanted him to do.

YET even when John washed his hands of the whole problem, Lamb was able to rise, "not without tenderness," to his brother's defense. He knew John to be "little disposed . . . at any time to take care of old age and infirmities." Charles went so far as to persuade himself that John, "with his bad leg, had an exemption from such duties." He was well aware that John would make speeches about the money needed to maintain Mary in a private institution. But Charles and John, though brothers, were made of very different stuff. Young and poor as he was, Charles faced the fact without complaining that "the whole weight of the family" had been thrown upon him. From the outset he was determined, regardless of the sacrifices, that Mary should not go into a public asylum.

Nor did she. Instead, he assumed full responsibility for her. More than that, he devoted his life to her. Because of this utter devotion his own life was altered inescapably. Had it not been for Mary, age would not have fallen so suddenly and engulfingly upon him. Without her, we might be able to imagine Lamb as a young man rather than always picturing him as a smoky and eccentric old fellow, settled in both his habits and his singleness, whose youth had come to an abrupt end with his childhood. Without Mary, Charles's dream children might have been real. The "fair Alice W—n," she of the light yellow hair and the pale blue eyes for whom he claimed to have pined away seven of his "goldenest years," might have been the "passionate . . . love-adventure" he once described her as being instead of a reference, true or fanciful, which biographers have been unable to track down. He might

