

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unfair to Mr. Leavis

SIR: I recently read what seemed to me a rather too hostile review of F. R. Leavis's "Revaluation" in *The New York Times Book Review* and wrote to the editor (I don't think my letter ever appeared) pointing out certain errors of fact that the reviewer had permitted himself. Henry W. Wells's piece [SRL Feb. 7] is a different case. Mr. Wells is much more hostile, and I don't know that he is definitely mistaken about external facts. What is curious, though, is that he scorns Mr. Leavis's views as not new without mentioning that "Revaluation" itself is not new. It was published in England a dozen years ago, and consists chiefly of articles published before that in the quarterly review *Scrutiny*.

The fact that I think more highly of Mr. Leavis than Mr. Wells does may not be of interest. But, in all justice, it should be pointed out that Mr. Leavis is not getting very fair or knowledgeable reviews.

ERIC BENTLEY.

University of Minnesota,
Minneapolis, Minn.

Blurred Blurbs

SIR: May I enter my protest against the growing practice, on the part of publishers of whodunits, of filling the back inside flaps of book-jackets with analyses of other of their "mysteries," to the growing confusion of readers.

In my very busy and exciting life in the world of public relations, I find my only relaxation of an evening in the reading of a good murder or mystery story. I ought to know something of their value, I hope, since I did two anthologies of a sort with Boris Karloff and two more with Will Cuppy. I pick up a recently-published tome from the shelves of my bookseller, run through the blurbs on the jacket, and buy the book with the conviction that this looks like something to lull me to sleep that evening. Later that day, I open the volume, to find that the blurb I read was about an altogether different volume from the one I purchased, while the one in my hands is typical tripe! For instance, I bought a book the back-flap of whose jacket said: "His American admirer, Henry James, urged [the author]—to keep on with them all, please, and continue to beckon me along the gallery. . . ." Well, I thought I was being "beckoned to." Too late I discovered that Henry James was talking about another writer altogether, and of a totally different book from the one I purchased. . . . To me this practice is dishonesty on the part of the publishers. Let's have no more of it.

M. EDMUND SPEARE.

New York, N. Y.

The "Rebecca" Case

SIR: Your editorial, titled "The 'Rebecca' Case" [SRL Feb. 7] points out not only a real hazard even to the conscientious writer, but a lacuna in the law. You do not, however, suggest



RUSS PRIESTLEY

"Well, another day, another twenty dollars and thirty-two cents."

the remedy. It is simple. There are many types of suits such as this—claimed plagiarism—where long experience has demonstrated that the vast majority of the claims are frivolous. Statutes should be enacted providing that in cases of this kind the expense of litigation, including a reasonable attorney's fee, should be taxed against the unsuccessful party, and that an adequate bond should be required to insure payment. Such acts would discourage both plagiarism and unconscionable claimants.

WALTER P. ARMSTRONG.

Memphis, Tenn.

Plug-Uglies

SIR: Where can I get some of the devices Rolf Kaltenborn wrote about [SRL Jan. 31] to sift out the plug-uglies from radio? Eighteen dollars is cheap; often I feel like paying \$18 to stop the foul plugs broadcast by some of our best people, so-called.

Some years ago, I had a hand in an article on the plug-uglies. We got 78,000 hot responses from the public, all angered to the point of fury by the stupid overselling. I went and asked the ad agencies whose fault it was. "The clients," they said. "The client compels us to write selling stuff." I asked the clients. "The agencies," they said. "They shove it down our throats." I asked the radio stations. "The agencies," they said. The agencies were guilty, two to one.

Kaltenborn did a marvelous job.

ROGER WILLIAM RHIS.

South Kent, Conn.

SIR: Must the reformer always be starry-eyed?

Rolf Kaltenborn writes in praise of subscription radio that "those stations producing the best programs will nat-

urally attract the largest number of subscribers." 'Tain't necessarily so—unless one defines the best as that which is most popular. And, if this is the test of "best," there's no need now "to do anything for radio."

GWYNNE NETTLER.

Santa Barbara, Calif.

Current Reading Abridged?

SIR: Honestly, don't you sometimes wonder when you get in these lists under My Current Reading if these noted characters have told all? Aren't they holding something back? Don't any of them ever read trash? Almost all of these are such unrelieved tomes, and the lighter the character, the heavier the tomes. If you publish Mae West's list, she'll be reading "The Decline of the West," Motley's "Dutch Republic," and the "Tragedies of Euripides."

I know you have thought about it, but do you really want to encourage them?

MARY PAXTON KEELEY.

Columbia, Mo.

SIR: Bless Judith Anderson! acclaimed
brightest of stars
in Medea's sky and ours
who named
the Bible first on her reading list: *
a best-seller all the others have
missed!

MARY MOON.

San Diego, Calif.

*SRL Jan. 17

Goat-Getter

SIR: That picture of Truman Capote on the book jacket of "Other Voices, Other Rooms" gets my goat.

PAUL STRAHL.

Gary, Ind.

Personal History. *Foreigners have often noticed with amazement the zany character of America in election years. No one, for instance, will be able to assess the true character of Henry Wallace until the election clouds disperse, and probably not for many years thereafter. Anyway, Wallace is probably as controversial a figure as was Mirabeau of the French Revolution, who receives magnificent treatment at the hands of Antonina Vallentin (see below). . . . For the aficionados of solid biographies like "Mirabeau," we recommend also "The Strange Life of Lady Blessington," by Michael Sadleir, "John Ruskin and Effie Gray," by Admiral Sir William James, and "The Hooded Hawk," by D. B. Wyndham Lewis, all from England; and, among recent American biographies, "Lewis and Clark," by John Bakeless, "Abigail Adams," by Janet Whitney, and "The Saint and the Devil," by Frances Winwar.*

Impaling the Third-Party Candidate

HENRY WALLACE: *The Man and the Myth.* By Dwight Macdonald. New York: The Vanguard Press. 1948. 192 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT S. ALLEN

THE Democratic National Committee should invest heavily in Dwight Macdonald's new book. Widely distributed, it should be very potent campaign ammunition—provided the reader isn't too discerning.

The author undertakes to demolish Wallace as a high-minded and steadfast liberal leader. The author's thesis is sound. But, unfortunately, he is guilty of the same failing of which he accuses Wallace. Like the latter, the author frequently gallops nosily in opposite directions.

It is fiction, says Macdonald, that Wallace is a man of notable integrity; that he has great moral courage; that he is a dreamer whose spirit moves in realms far above petty political considerations; and that he has fought the good fight against privilege and injustice. The author presents considerable evidence to support his disclaimers. But the significance of this damning "proof" is repeatedly distorted and undermined by the author's muddled conclusions, contradictions, and vagaries.

For example: when the author is not castigating Wallace for his inadequacies as a liberal, on which the author is generally on sound ground, he is hotly pursuing him for his "Stalinoid" connections. "Stalinoid" is a term of the author's own coining. Apparently, with the courts having held that it is libelous to call an individual a Communist, a new word was required. The author defines his brainchild as indicating "a general adherence to the Communist Party

line of the moment," and says it embraces "Party members, fellow travelers, and the vast army of 'innocent dupes'."

But even with this ingenious excursion into semantics, Mr. Macdonald has considerable difficulty with this part of his mission. His charges don't square with his facts.

Stalinoid though he was [says the author], Wallace, as always, made little connection between his general political philosophy and his specific policy. Thus he passed over the liberal Wilson Wyatt for the under secretaryship [of Commerce] and appointed instead Alfred Shindler, a conservative St. Louis businessman who had served under [Jesse] Jones. And his choice for the top job of Director of Domestic Commerce was another conservative businessman, Albert J. Browning, who at once began to demand incentive wages.

There are many such examples of the author's attempts to arrive at conclusions in spite of hampering facts. Here is another instance:

"He [Wallace] still praises capitalism and free enterprise and still deplores the class struggle, even when his specific analysis sounds like a *Pravda* editorial." Eighty pages later—pages on many of which appear similar abortive efforts—the author concludes that Wallace's most revealing statement is one in which he suggested it would be unfortunate for world peace if anything occurred inside Russia to upset its system of government at the present time. Mr. Macdonald finds this

an indication of Wallace's essential conservative mentality. He cannot conceive of any radical break with existing power-institutions anywhere. For all his criticisms of present United States policy, he has

never made any objection to the "American way of life"; on the contrary, like the Communists, he is loud in his admiration for American institutions.

And, finally, the author completely befuddles his case with this crowning incoherence, "It is not true that Henry Wallace is an agent of Moscow. But it is true that he behaves like one."

Presumably, so that the reader will know just where the author stands, he throws some interesting light on his own viewpoint. About the Four Freedoms, for which millions of people fought and died all over the world, Mr. Macdonald proclaims that they "are now as mercifully forgotten as Phoebe Snow and the Sapolio jingles," and in a reference to world democracy he uses the phrase "and other ominous topics."

Wallace-haters will undoubtedly enjoy this book. But the informed reader will come away with a sour taste. There is a strong case to be made against Wallace. His record is splotted and muddy. Some of it is downright tawdry. Time and again Wallace has said one thing and done exactly the opposite.

If Mr. Macdonald had confined himself to that record, he really could have "burned up" Wallace.

He Who Shook France

MIRABEAU. By Antonina Vallentin. New York: The Viking Press. 1948. 542 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by THOMAS CALDECOT CHUBB

THOUGH its drama, its achievements, its wonder, and its terror are less startling to those of us who have lived through the events that began in 1914 than they were to the generation that preceded us, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era that inevitably followed it are still among the great periods of human turmoil and of human accomplishment. And in that short stretch of years which spawned dynamic men almost as the sea spawns herrings, there were few more significant and none more dynamic than Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, described by Carlyle as "he who shook France from its basis; and, as if by his single hand, has held it toppling, still unfallen."

Opinions of this descendant of "Col d'Argent" who achieved at least romantic fame by refusing to die when his jugular vein was severed on the field of battle, of this son of warped and vindictive Victor de Mirabeau, "friend of men" and Physiocrat, are