

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## World Law

SIR: Allow me to comment briefly on Sir Alfred Zimmern's stimulating article "Are There Any Experts in the Field of International Relations?" [SRL July 10].

I have always admired Sir Alfred's devotion to the cause of international peace. After reading this article, however, I would hardly call him an expert in international law. I am amazed at his dogmatic assertion that international law "is not law." Our own Supreme Court has not only declared repeatedly that it is law but has even held that it may at times supersede domestic law.

In lamenting the confusion of thought concerning the law of nations among the "experts" Sir Alfred would seem to be revealing his own lamentable confusion. He has apparently fallen into the common error of the average layman in the subject of saying that because criminals go unpunished there is no law. And yet he at the same time concedes that international [law] is customarily obeyed."

The assertion that "in international law neither the community nor the individual is present" constitutes a strange denial of the universal belief in the community of nations and of peoples.

The theory advanced by Sir Alfred that there should be a "world law" that would replace international law is most confusing. He apparently has in mind a law imposed by a supernatural authority and arbitrarily enforced without right of appeal. In the normal community law proceeds from the people who have every recourse to appeal from its interpretation, or to have it repealed. This conception of a "world law" would seem to resemble the ideals of fascism or totalitarianism.

PHILIP M. BROWN.

Williamstown, Mass.

### "The Double Axe"

SIR: I have just finished reading Selden Rodman's bewildering review of Robinson Jeffers's new book of poems, "The Double Axe" [SRL July 31], and cannot forbear an expression of one reader's reaction thereto.

Has Mr. Rodman been affected by the Jeffers's brand of double-talk? For what else can one call the California hawk-fancier's description of his own attitude as "recognition of the transhuman magnificence"? If "transhuman" can be taken to mean "sub-human" or "anti-human," then the word is necessary to our language; otherwise, it seems to me we must face the fact that it is an attempt to make palatable to readers merely human (but created in the image of God) Mr. Jeffers's utter and noisome contempt for the human race into which, it appears, he regrets having been born. Incidentally, I cannot pass by the quotation from "The Double Axe" which appears with the review: "When man stinks, turn to God." What kind of God does Mr. Jeffers's muse recognize? How can a person—



"Junior . . . Junior . . . if you're in there send up a flare."

even a person who, according to Mr. Rodman, "remains as close to a major poet as we have"—have faith in God who has no faith in man?

What Jeffers says with his vaunted "integrity," it appears from Mr. Rodman's own dissenting comment, "seems . . . totally irresponsible, politically, poetically, humanly." I should agree with the tone of this comment, while altering the term "irresponsible." Mr. Jeffers, and those of his ilk, wherever and in whatever form they write, are not "irresponsible"—they are "responsible" rather, by their "gripping and powerfully paced" writings, for much of the totalitarian madness that has been loosed upon the world, which has led so many human beings ("Man stinks," says Mr. Jeffers) to death, or dispossession, or the worst kind of stinking degradation. That goes for all kinds of totalitarianism, whatever its political coloration.

No, Mr. Jeffers is not irresponsible, he is a responsible human being (though the term seems strange in the context). But a review like Mr. Rodman's is truly irresponsible. How in heaven's name can he condemn a point of view so strongly—and justly—and then praise its expression in such terms as this: "But how many poets since Shakespeare have combined (various qualities not found in Jeffers) with over-all directness and dramatic power?" Even worse, how can he mention Jeffers in the same breath with the poets he brings in for comparison—"He belongs in the ranks of Dryden and Byron, Whitman and Lindsay"? Whitman and Lindsay, who believed in the American dream, and in the dream of all unfettered humanity—Byron, who threw his life away in the cause of freedom? even Dryden, who, though he said "Thy

chase had a beast in view: / Thy wars brought nothing about," nevertheless added, "'Tis well an old age is out, / And time to begin a new"?

GERARD PREVIN MEYER.

Jackson Heights, N. Y.

### "Don't Resign from the Human Race"

DEAR SIR: I should like to make two comments about your searching editorial entitled "Don't Resign from the Human Race" [SRL Aug. 7]. First of all, I should like to underline your telling sentence in which you point out that "the only price he [modern man] has to pay for his survival is decision." We need this word at a time when lack of a sense of direction vies for dominance with a feeling of personal and group insecurity. For too many people believe that we are caught in a global process which carries us, willy-nilly, into a future which depends, little or not at all, upon our own decisions.

I was disappointed in the last four or five paragraphs of your editorial because they seemed to be negative in tone. Surely the time is past when we can rouse people about the urgent problems of our time by trying to frighten them with a fear psychology. I believe you are using this method in the last few paragraphs of your fine editorial. Such a negative approach in my judgment is sterile.

A. WILLIAM LOOS.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: You write: " . . . we doubt whether you can find either security or greatness today

by looking for it through a gun barrel."

"... ability to retaliate in modern warfare, even by a nation which enjoyed superior force, is no longer assured."

Then you say:

"This does not mean that America should throw away her weapons... unilateralism with respect to disarmament is as dangerous as any other form of unilateralism in the world today."

The scientific proclamations of those in the know to the effect that discouragingly total oblivion is the world's fate comes the "next" war—these proclamations placed alongside their continued assistance in the manufacture of just such weapons—put me in a blue funk.

You and thousands of others who think along these lines probably have as much or far more sense, wisdom, honesty, sincerity than I—but damn it, I just can't see but that you make out a powerful case and then suddenly retreat from the clear implications of your own logic. You decry unilateralism, knowing all the while that had you been in the Nazi army and commanded to turn on the faucet of a gas chamber wherein were a couple of thousand prisoners you would *unilaterally* have refused. "Yes," you say, "but individual unilateralism and national unilateralism are two different things." I wonder? I'm making what I believe to be an honest effort to see how you and many, many others can reconcile what seems to me a paradox.

STUART MOORE.

St. Louis, Mo.

SIR: Congratulations. It's a masterpiece. I hope it will be widely distributed in pamphlet or book form. It should also be thrust upon every statesman and government official in the U. S., and in every other nation in every language.

DEWITT LOUNSBERY.

New York, N. Y.

### Our Error

SIR: In the biographical piece on Elliot Paul [SRL July 24] it is stated that Mr. Paul founded *transition*.

Regardless of the merits of *transition*, some writers and scholars have been laboring under the impression that *transition* was founded by Eugene Jolas, single-handed, and that Elliot Paul became an associate editor quite a while after.

As a subscriber to your family journal and as a stickler for accuracy, I would welcome your setting me right on this score.

JACQUES LE CLERCQ.

Flushing, N. Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE: "Twentieth-Century Authors" misled us. Mr. Jolas was, indeed, *transition's* sole founder, and Mr. Paul became an associate editor in 1927.

### Fitzgeraldana Wanted

SIR: I am interested in any memories or mementoes of or on Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald. I wonder if your readers could help me out?

PAUL MCLENDON, JR.

18 Scott St.,  
Montgomery, Ala.

**Personal History.** *Many will say that the great days of the American theatre have passed, the days of John Drew, Helena Modjeska, Otis Skinner, so freshly evoked in Cornelia Otis Skinner's "Family Circle," reviewed below. Yet it is worth listening to Allardyce Nicoll, who writes in the recently published new edition of his "The Development of the Theatre": "The important thing for the theatre today is to recapture its lost sense of myth, to forget the incidental and cast its memory once more back to the eternal, to find scope for those words on which ultimately its strength must rest. Words, created by the poetic imagination and given true actor's utterance; costumes adorning these actors and making rich play for the eyes; light bathing the actors in a varied radiance—these are the things which might bring the theatre truly to life again."*

## At Home & Abroad with the Skinners

**FAMILY CIRCLE.** By Cornelia Otis Skinner. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1948. 310 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by LUCIUS BEEBE

IT is a mistake, the reviewer of this particularly urbane and agreeable volume of reminiscences believes, for its author to confess herself, as she does in one of its middle chapters, to be a contemporary of Madame Helena Modjeska. The reviewer himself is a contemporary of Edward VII, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and an unconscionable number of old-time sirs, but discovers that its admission has a depressing effect upon his friends who, on its strength, incline to assist him with his wraps and caution him about the steps. Modjeska is, somehow, associated in the general intelligence with goldrush days in California or, at the most recent period available with, say, Lola Montez and Piper's Opera House at Virginia City, and the effect doesn't do justice to Miss Skinner.

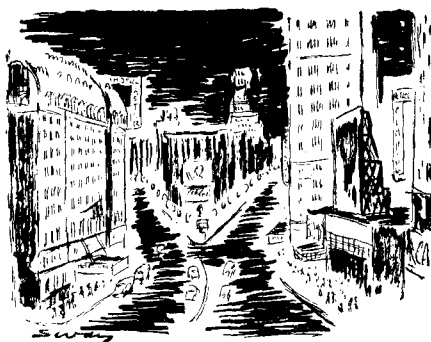
"Family Circle" is removed from the usual actor's reminiscences by the pleasant determination of its author that it should be a family story about her mother and father, the American theatre's immortal Maude and Otis Skinner, and herself as a member of the Skinner family, not

as a character in her own professional right in a glittering worldly midst. It is an American book, largely about American people and American places and, as such, the direct antithesis of, say, the memoirs of such equally vital performers as Gertrude Lawrence or the late Grace Moore, whose chronicles are a veritable vertigo of royalties, regal processions, and aristocratic triumphs. The nearest approach to dealings with the *haute noblesse* contrived by the Skinners was when, during a tour of Spain, they were received by a proud Castilian nobleman named Don Diego somebody, whom Mrs. Skinner, in an inspired moment, insisted on addressing as San Diego. It was Mrs. Skinner, too, who, confronted with Blasco Ibanez when Otis Skinner was preparing to play "Blood and Sand," contrived to salute him variously as Blanzo Ibasneth, Blisco Ignatius, and occasionally Balco Posnet. Travel with the Skinners was more or less like that.

But travel Miss Skinner did on a determined and almost continuous scale that was characteristic of the families of actors when there was such a thing as the road. At an early age she experienced an earthquake in San Francisco, a train wreck at Sand Point, Idaho, oysters Rockefeller at Antoine's in New Orleans, and the fairly unique humiliation of being detected as genteel and ejected from the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake.

Later she attended Bryn Mawr, and a frighteningly clear portrait of what goes on in women's colleges emerges briefly to explain the conduct and complexes of any number of women in American business and public life:

The standard ideal was to be athletic, studious (to a temperate degree), and splendidly clear-eyed. Miss Bryn Mawr was the wholesome



SEPTEMBER 11, 1948

25