

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"The Pollsters"

SIR: In his excellent article "I Still Believe in Polls" [SRL Mar. 26] Mr. Roper might have added one further observation. He could have told about the many fantastic stories that get bruited about regarding polling techniques. A good case in point is the book review written by Warren Moscow under the heading "Political Weather Prophets."

In his article Mr. Moscow says that a person purporting to belong to our organization told him that in the New York State election of 1942 we were employing "only two men using one telephone." Mr. Moscow says he did not place credence in the telephone call idea until he received a confirmatory letter a few days later.

This statement by Mr. Moscow amazes me in exactly the same way that Mr. Moscow would be amazed if he saw a statement in the SRL to the effect that all of the foreign dispatches published daily in his newspaper actually were not written abroad but were concocted in a loft in Brooklyn by an ex-liquor salesman.

I can assure Mr. Moscow that never in our entire history have we consulted any political writer or anyone else about any forecast which we have made. I can also assure Mr. Moscow that we have never based any poll result, election or otherwise, on telephone calls. We do all of our interviewing in person through field reporters.

I can tell Mr. Moscow exactly how many people we interviewed in New York State because a record of every ballot which we have ever gathered is to be found in the files at Princeton University. In this particular election we interviewed 1,750 people, using trained interviewers who obtained responses in all sections of the state.

It so happens that in this particular election we forecast that Mr. Dewey would receive fifty-three per cent, Mr. Bennett thirty-nine per cent, and Mr. Alfange eight per cent of the votes cast. They received 53.0 per cent, 37.0 per cent, and 10.0 per cent respectively. If we could achieve this degree of accuracy with two men and a telephone, then we have wasted thousands and thousands of dollars keeping a field staff of some 1,200 persons.

GEORGE H. GALLUP.

Princeton, N. J.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Warren Moscow's reply follows: "I can understand Mr. Gallup's feeling of 'amazement.' It matched mine when the incident occurred. I am sure I need not argue the point beyond the fact that it did happen, and the confirmation letter was on Gallup poll stationery. Mr. Gallup, with possibly characteristic impetuosity, has decided that the election I had in mind was the gubernatorial election of 1942 in New York State, although I did not mention the particular election in my article in the SRL. The election in question was the election for Lieutenant Governor



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"Aren't you afraid, Mrs. Ross, that thirteen stars will prove unlucky?"

in 1943, an election which was unimportant, as I stated in the SRL, except for the fact that it confirmed Dewey's ability to carry New York State in that period for his administration."

SIR: In his most interesting article "I Still Believe in Polls" Mr. Elmo Roper says that my book "The Pollsters" deals with "straw men" and that I "and some others set up a 'hypothetical pollster'—a gargantuan man of astounding proportions—who speaks for all those engaged in this field of research" and who has "an all-abiding faith in direct democracy, under which representative government is cast to the winds, and the results of polls are substituted in its stead."

I do not know about Mr. Roper's "others," but the only pollster I quote on wanting "direct democracy" is Dr. George H. Gallup. "After 150 years," Dr. Gallup said, "we return to the town meeting. This time the whole nation is within the doors."

I am not privy to the meaning Mr. Roper attaches to "gargantuan" but surely Dr. Gallup is not a straw man even though in company with Mr. Roper he takes straw votes.

LINDSAY ROGERS.

New York, N. Y.

"Bogus Best Sellers"

SIR: May I be permitted to comment on "Bogus Best Sellers" [SRL Mar. 26]?

"The Seven Storey Mountain" is primarily a religious book in the Catholic field. It is my understanding of the *Herald Tribune* and *New York Times* best-seller lists that the intention is to give sales of books which have a general appeal. Specialized books such as this would not normally be reported by our store and was not until its sale increased from

the specialized Catholic field to readers of those of other than Catholic faith. Even so, my guess is that a great majority of the copies we have sold of this title have been to Catholics.

There are many titles of new books in the religious field of which we have sold far more copies than we have of "The Seven Storey Mountain," yet we have never reported them to *The New York Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, *Publishers' Weekly*, or the local newspapers. The same is true in our technical department. There are many books in this classification which we buy in 500 lots, and they far outsell any title in the regular trade department.

... As one of the booksellers not queried by Mr. Gelatt as to the value of best-seller lists, I should like to be recorded emphatically in that group who are in favor of best-seller lists. As the originator of "What America Is Reading," I should like to give my reasons for recommending it to the *Herald Tribune*. The book trade for years had been cursed with six best sellers which narrowed the field quite definitely. I was attempting to make fifty best sellers, twenty-five fiction and twenty-five non-fiction, instead of the old six best sellers which, if I remember correctly, were practically all fiction. This, I believe, the *Herald Tribune* "What America Is Reading" has succeeded in doing, so much so that the same idea was copied by *The New York Times* at a later date.

I have had many complaints from publishers since "What America Is Reading" was introduced. Almost without exception, I have found that their titles were not well up on the list. These same publishers, a few months later when they hit the jackpot with a fast-selling book, would be high in their praises of "What America Is Reading." Jealousy hits even in the ivory tower of publishers.

... I will grant without question

APRIL 23, 1949

21

that there are some abuses by some booksellers. Human nature being what it is, there are some black sheep in every field. I think it was President Roosevelt who in one of his happier moments said that the great majority of businessmen were honest in their intentions but that the trouble lay with the ten per cent who were not. This is true with booksellers, publishers, lawyers, doctors, and even editors of papers. I think that such an article as Mr. Gelatt's has a value because a little jacking-up will keep people on their toes, but I hate to see the readers of SRL get the impression, as they most certainly will, that there is an awful lot of crookedness in best-seller lists. This is just not so. If any way can be found to give a clearer picture of best sellers than we now have, I will be all for it. Mr. Gelatt's suggestion for improving it does not strike me as practical or obtainable.

RICHARD F. FULLER.

The Old Corner Book Store,
Boston, Mass.

SIR: PUT THE ST. LOUIS TIMES DOWN AS TOSsing OUT BEST-SELLER LISTS. WE'RE IN BUSINESS TO SERVE READERS NOT TO GIVE DISSERVICE.

NORMAN E. ISAACS,
MANAGING EDITOR.

St. Louis, Mo.

English Teachers and SRL

SIR: Martin Wolfson's letter asking what is wrong with teachers of English [SRL Mar. 19] cuts a broader swathe than his limitation of the problem to high-school teachers who do not derive the benefit they should from reading SRL. Too many teachers of English everywhere are out of touch with the realities of life.

"Words, words, words"—that's what is wrong with teachers of English, and the professional system of training these teachers aggravates the evil. Teachers need jobs, and jobs are secured through graduate credits. More and more courses in literature, language, and education, more and more letters after one's name, have given us the teachers of English that we have.

... It is the insecurity of limited experience that promotes escapism into verbiage. Inadequacy flocks with its own kind. The anemia of departmental inbreeding has devitalized more studies than the English merely. The vicious circle must be broken, but the torture on the wheel will be long and hard.

SARAH WINGATE TAYLOR.

San Rafael, Calif.

SIR: May I ask by what methods Mr. Wolfson is able to distinguish so expertly between English teachers who do read SRL and those who don't? Or do all English teachers with whom he is acquainted read SRL and thus make such glib generalizations on his part possible? Personally I heartily object to being classified as blasé, nor do I enjoy the implication that I am "inflammable." As a teacher of English—and not an English teacher—I feel obliged to defend my alert and interested colleagues, who incidentally also read SRL weekly. It may indeed be true that we do not appear each morning with a "glow

of fire" in our eyes, but it is equally true that we do attempt daily to assist our young students in attaining a maturity that is realistic and yet not artificial. Furthermore, we teachers read other magazines and pamphlets; thus Mr. Wolfson would do well to check on the effects of other reading. Granted that SRL furnishes inspiration and delight to us all, it should not be expected to bear the entire onus of ineffectual teaching wherever found—and teachers of English are not immune to this criticism. Teachers, as people, are not perfect; some are good; others are fair. It is all a matter of degree. There are not teachers; there is instead the teacher whose moral fiber is an individual growth pattern, and not a matter of paper imposition.

EVELYN I. BANNING.

Cambridge, Mass.

SIR: Martin Wolfson writes of some teachers in touch with reality who are "... sicklied over with effete sophistication ...". Shades of Hamlet! Shades, also, of Noah Webster! What does Mr. Wolfson think "effete" means?

It would seem to me that SRL is intended primarily for adult readers who desire the considered views of competent literary critics. It is not intended, I believe, to arouse in them any great zeal for the reformation of their inferiors. Mr. Wolfson is evidently either a neophyte teacher or a would-be novelist in search of a theme. Several excellent novels about teachers have recently appeared; but none of them blames any teacher apathy on SRL. English teachers are probably a species apart, beyond the redemptive magic of SRL.

LOUIS SALBITANO.

Utica, N. Y.

SIR: How can Martin Wolfson generalize to the extent he does about people as varied as English teachers? How does he know that all English teachers read SRL? All I know do, but what does that show? ... I know English teachers who have climbed up into an ivory tower so that nothing outside the circle of their own egotism can reach them, but these, I feel, are the exception. Most English teachers that I know are good citi-

zens, good neighbors, good parents, when they have reached that stage, and even Sunday School teachers or members of Kiwanis clubs or the League of Women Voters. Some of them don't even like coffee, but are addicted to tea, or enjoy hard liquor. ... We English teachers feel it is our business to teach literature and/or to teach our students to write clear, forceful, effective English. That is no easy job. Even if we had the time for propaganda, we respect our students too much to try to superimpose on them our own particular politics, religion, or philosophy of living. If we can awaken in them some intellectual curiosity so that they may think things out for themselves, we will do about all that anyone can expect of us.

MARY PAXTON KEELEY.

Columbia, Mo.

SIR: Perhaps Martin Wolfson has observed only those teachers of English who teach it because it is their major—not their love. I am only a beginning teacher so have not yet lapsed into this moral sleep that Mr. Wolfson speaks of so knowingly.

I find that SRL causes me to "catch on fire" quite soon after opening it each Saturday, and, furthermore, I believe the flame is in evidence for my students all the next week.

MELVIN F. SAMPLES.

Guttenberg, Iowa.

Letters from Mark Twain

SIR: Mark Twain's Estate, of which the undersigned is one of the trustees, has a very important collection of Mark Twain papers and letters which will eventually pass to one of our great universities. Mark Twain was one of the world's great letter writers. There are literally thousands of Mark Twain letters in the hands of the public.

Mark Twain's daughter and his estate have arranged for an official volume of Mark Twain letters to be published by Harper & Bros. All holders of Mark Twain letters are invited to communicate with Mr. Dixon Wecter, Editor, Mark Twain Papers, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino 15, Calif.

Certain unauthorized persons have been soliciting copies of Mark Twain letters. While a Mark Twain letter may belong to its holder, the publication rights belong to the Estate of Mark Twain. The public should not be misled. It is right and in the public interest that the facts should be made known. As Mark Twain said: "Always do right. This will gratify some people, and astonish the rest."

THOMAS G. CHAMBERLAIN.

New York, N. Y.

The Ubiquitous Typo

SIR: In your LETTERS TO THE EDITOR of Feb. 26 there was one of mine, but I beg you—Henry Miller's name is not Henry Meller, and John Wilstach's name is not John Welstach. I do not write naughty words like Mr. Miller, which is one of many reasons I do not share whatever kind of renown he boasts about—but I have had readers of my books, etc., and would still like to sign myself—

JOHN WILSTACH

Rhinebeck, N. Y.

Atomic Age Fables



VIII. Man Is the Measure

"I WONDER who lacks more: a man or an ant," said an ant.

"The ant, at least, is not aware of what he lacks," said a second ant.

"Are you so sure that man is?" asked the first ant.

—J. S.

IDEAS AND STUDIES

(Continued from page 19)

Yale, Harvard, and Chicago, he subjected many students to an almost excessive stimulation and his fame has consequently continued to grow since his death in 1947. Posthumous volumes from his pen, of which this one is the fourth (fifth if one counts the Holmes-Cohen correspondence recently edited by his son), have contributed their share to his substantial reputation.

All but one of the chapters in the present book have been reprinted from various sources, ranging from the *Philosophical Review* and the *Journal of Philosophy* to the *New Republic*, and dating back to 1910. The exception, a lecture and subsequent short seminar on philosophy and the scientific method, is not located as to time and place of origin, but in it a certain participant, a "Secretary Wallace," suffers from one of Cohen's barbed responses. The essays as a whole fall into three groups, one on the philosophy of science, one on philosophy proper, and one on science. There is no indication of the identity of the person who selected them, but in view of what is included (for example, a short encyclopedia article on "Belief" and three book reviews) the reviewer regrets the exclusion of at least two things: one, Cohen's masterly article on the scientific method in the same encyclopedia, and the other, his famous review of Vernon



L. Parrington's "Main Currents in American Thought." There is enough here, however, to give the reader a notion of Cohen's erudite performances in the realm of ideas.

The outstanding exhibit in this collection is entitled "Some Difficulties in John Dewey's Anthropocentric Naturalism." Here, as in some of the other essays, we find Cohen at his best, criticizing with shafts both pointed and profound what he conceived to be the erroneous emphases of his contemporaries. He saves his most withering sarcasm, however, for Francis Bacon, the apostle of empiricism who is popularly believed to have founded the modern philosophy of science. Cohen maintains that far from launching the enterprise known as modern science, so pure and planless an empiricism as Bacon espoused could not possibly result in scientific knowledge, nor even in an orderly classification of things.

There is really only one word for Cohen. He was brilliant. No one who enjoys watching an agile mind at work can fail to find excitement and even high intellectual adventure in these essays.

Rationalism

THE CITY OF REASON. By Samuel H. Beer. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1949. 227 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by BRAND BLANSHARD

WE are slowly rounding a corner in the discussion of ethics and politics. The relativism of Westermarck, Mannheim, and "Patterns of Culture," so popular until yesterday, is already beginning to seem dated. Here is one of the evidences of the change. Samuel Beer, who is an associate professor of government at Harvard, has written a book in which he insists on the existence of a common reason, on objective standards in morals, and on metaphysics as the ultimate basis of ethics and politics. In his work the reaction against reason has come full circle and reached again an uncompromising rationalism.

Mr. Beer begins by considering the relativity not of morals but of truth. He takes John Dewey as a leading representative of this doctrine and attempts to show that in his work the doctrine is self-defeating. Dewey of course disbelieves in any fixed rational structure in the world; for him the business of thought is not to follow the outlines of such a structure, but to help us find means to our ends. Knowledge is an instrument in action; that is why he calls his theory instrumentalism. To this Mr. Beer replies that if there is no fixed structure in things, there are no fixed laws; and if there are no fixed laws, there are no means that we can wholly rely on to take us to our ends; and that means practical skepticism. I do not think Dewey would be much disturbed by this argument. He would admit that all beliefs are hypotheses whose success in application we can never count on with assurance. But he would add, why need we? Granting that the order in the world is not certain or complete, there is enough to make it profitable to guide our lives by it. More than that it is idle to ask.

Mr. Beer is more convincing when he turns to the relativity of morals. Nothing is easier, he would agree, than to show that hospitality among the Arabs differs from that of Australian aborigines. But does this sort of evidence show that beneath these varying customs there is no underlying reason, molding them slowly into conformity with a common ideal of the good life? Not at all. The fact is that everywhere alike there is the desire to realize such faculties as one has; everywhere there is at least the budding awareness that if this fulfillment is good for me, it is good like-

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

BLOOD IS THICK

Fannie Gross, of Asheville, N. C., lists in column one eighteen Shakespearean characters who are blood relations to the eighteen characters in column two. Can you match them up? Allowing six points for each correct answer, a score of sixty-six is par, seventy-eight is very good, and eighty-four or better is excellent. Answers are on page 32.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Antonio, father to | () Alonso |
| 2. Baptista, father to | () Coriolanus |
| 3. Benvolio, nephew to | () Cressida |
| 4. Brabantio, father to | () Cymbeline |
| 5. Calchas, father to | () Desdemona |
| 6. Celia, cousin to | () Duncan |
| 7. Claudio, brother to | () Earl of Gloucester |
| 8. Donalbain, son to | () Hamlet |
| 9. Duke of Clarence, brother to | () Henry IV |
| 10. Edgar, son to | () Hermia |
| 11. Egeus, father to | () Isabella |
| 12. Ferdinand, son to | () Katharina |
| 13. Gertrude, mother to | () King John |
| 14. Guiderius, son to | () Leonato |
| 15. Hero, daughter to | () Leontes |
| 16. Jessica, daughter to | () Montague |
| 17. John of Gaunt, uncle to | () Pericles |
| 18. John of Lancaster, son to | () Proteus |