



SRL: Unfair to Literature?

THE NATION magazine, through its literary editor, Margaret Marshall, has accused *The Saturday Review* of being "unfair to literature." Behind that indictment is the following bill of particulars:

1. *The Saturday Review* has so far failed to publish a letter circulated by Mr. John Berryman denouncing the articles by Robert Hillyer and the supporting editorials on the Bollingen-Library of Congress Award to Ezra Pound. *The Nation* believes that SRL was high-handed, evasive, and specious in its decision not to publish this letter.

Mr. Berryman's letter, containing seventy-two signatures, was sent to *The Saturday Review* only after it had been included in a pamphlet condemning our position published by *Poetry Magazine*, of Chicago. We had learned of the existence of the letter prior to its publication in *Poetry* through a number of writers who had refused to lend their names to it. Mr. Berryman sent the letter to SRL, "urgently requesting" its publication here. We asked for a fairly full statement explaining the background of the letter. We thought it only fair, for example, that mention should be made of the fact that many writers refused to sign. We asked Mr. Berryman, in good faith, to acknowledge this fact and to include such names. This he refused to do.

Mr. Berryman's letter came to us many weeks after the Hillyer controversy on the letters page had been formally closed by popular request.

In all, SRL published ninety-four letters on the subject; toward the end the new arguments were virtually exhausted. There was nothing in the Berryman letter that had not been aired before.

2. *The Nation* contends that Mr. Hillyer and SRL believe that "poetry which the 'common man' cannot understand is undemocratic." No such statement has been made by Mr. Hillyer or the editors.

3. *The Nation* asserts we are against modern poetry because it is difficult. Not true. We are as opposed to the watering-down of literature as we are to coterie-literature. There is a distinction here which Miss Marshall may have failed to discern: the distinction between poetry which is difficult and poetry which is obscurantist. Even here, we entertained no objection to the publication of poetry which was not readily comprehensible even by students of poetry. What we did object to was the implied contention of the obscurantist school to the effect that if the public could read it, it probably wasn't poetry.

If *The Nation* wishes to know what it is we are against, we can be fairly explicit. We are against obscurantism masquerading as art-for-art's sake. We are against cults which profess to hold the exclusive keys to the literary kingdom. We are against cultural snobbery. We are against the mutual-admiration-and-benefit-society approach to criticism and literature under which members enjoy special privileges and immunities, and write blurbs and prefaces for each other and review each other's books. We are against ganging-up, whether by representation in such important bodies as the Fellows of the Library of

Congress, or by a program of denunciation of non-conformists.

4. *The Nation* claims that SRL is widening the rift between the artist and public, and, indeed, that we are "pitting" one against the other. Based on this interpretation of what we said, we are afraid that Miss Marshall has actually reversed our true position. It is precisely because criticism by coterie has driven a wedge between poet and public that SRL published its articles and editorials. Our contention, in fact, was that certain poets were writing for each other, reflecting the "public-be-damned" attitude that is apparently central in their thinking. Few things have contributed more to the rift between writer and public, for example, than the Bollingen-Library of Congress Award to Ezra Pound.

What is particularly galling to the members of this school is the fact that, as a result of Mr. Hillyer's articles, the Bollingen-Library of Congress Award has been discontinued. This has resulted in the charge of philistinism and Fascism against *The Saturday Review*. Charges of this sort can be answered only by the readers of a magazine and not by its editors.

In Miss Marshall's article and in much of the opposition now being rallied against *The Saturday Review's* position, the core center of the controversy has been largely forgotten. If the Bollingen Award had been a private matter, no questions would have been raised. The main question, as we see it, is whether a private group of poets can utilize the prestige of the American Government to advance its own school.

—N. C., H. S.

Falling Water

By Raymond Holden

THIS is a world for ears and eyes
 Making us calm and therefore wise
 And piteous toward the questioning words
 Which fly about in us like birds.
 Cool down the rock's frost-cloven stair
 The river flings its shining hair.
 The rainbow revel of its fall,
 Enduring and ephemeral,
 Flows and yet leaves a flood behind
 As does the torrent of the mind.
 The water's moves are motionless—
 A trick of its impalpableness—
 And ripe with music is its noise
 Its very tumult a vast poise,
 Such poise as in the reason's flood
 Were love, the balance of the blood,
 The liquid of man's solid will,
 The soul in motion, standing still.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Taylor Caldwell

SIR: I have read with deep interest the replies to my letter in *SRL* Nov. 12, in which I urged that there be an end to hatred and intolerance in America. It is very disheartening to discover that the writers of letters disagreeing with me seem to be educated and intelligent persons, for I had long held the naive belief that hatred was either the sole possession of the illiterate or those who had private axes to grind. If people like the readers of *The Saturday Review of Literature* can repeat canards and half-truths, what is the state of mind of millions less endowed with intelligence and less distinguished?

Only a victim of cruelty and intolerance can understand what it means to be attacked simply because one belongs to a certain religion or to a certain race. The very sound of hatred and intolerance arouses in me bitterness and sadness and disgust. The very word "minority" is unendurable to me. There are not, or should not be, "minorities" in America. "Minorities" and their "problems" are created by "majorities," and upon "majorities" rests the guilt of any suffering endured by their victims. It must be an evil thing to know that you have caused a fellow man pain or fear because he is weaker than you and more vulnerable. If there is an unpardonable sin, this is it.

I have read Paul Blanshard's "American Freedom and Catholic Power." Little as I know about the Roman Catholic Church, I can refute, or quote against, almost every page in that book. Where he cites one priest I can cite another priest to the absolute contrary. Where he repeats the statement of one Catholic "authority" I can repeat another which nullifies the first. There are as many differences of opinion, politics, and beliefs among the Roman Catholics as there are among Protestants and Jews. Under democratic government it is impossible for any one religion or race to "seize power" over all the rest of us, even if it wanted to. The bogey-man, therefore, exists only in the minds of those who believe in him or want to believe in him.

As an antidote to "American Freedom and Catholic Power" I urgently suggest the reading of that fine book "Punishment Without Crime," by Solomon A. Fineberg. They should be read together. It is the democratic way to hear all sides of the question. It is cruel to denounce the accused without letting him have his day in court, and it is un-American.

TAYLOR CALDWELL.

Eggertsville, N. Y.

Query Answered

SIR: J. J. Jones [*SRL* Nov. 12] wants to know why it is that Catholics should practise a policy which appears to him to be unfriendly or even hostile towards other religions. There is no unfriendliness or hostility. We are merely sure of our ground, that is all. We know the truth and



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"Are you sure that there is no danger involved in this process, M. Daguerre?"

practise the truth. We understand the word of God and are guided accordingly. We are not unfriendly towards other religions, but they are in error. There can be no error in religion; therefore Catholicism is right; therefore I am a Catholic. It is the duty of the right to uphold its cause against the wrong.

JOHN CARUSO.

Boston, Mass.

Einstein's Autobiography

SIR: It was with deep interest but not too much understanding that I read Albert Einstein's "Notes for an Autobiography" [*SRL* Nov. 26]. Although the material is less an autobiography than an essay on the development of Einstein's special field, and his contribution to it, his confining himself to that phase of his life shows an innate modesty which, unhappily for us laymen, seemed to be the result of the introspective question: "Who would be interested in anything about me except so far as it relates to the cause of my fame, physics?"

LEON YUDKIN.

Washington, D. C.

SIR: You are deserving of the highest literary compliments for publishing Einstein's essay. This memoir will stand with those of the giants—Helmholtz, Maxwell, Kirchhoff, Euler, Newton. And like Newton, Einstein would be the first to admit that if he saw further it was because he stood on the shoulders of giants.

JULIUS SUMNER MILLER.

New Orleans, La.

SIR: "Notes for an Autobiography," by Albert Einstein, is worth the price of the year's subscription. Of course, 90 per cent of your subscription list would die of starvation if it had to

rely for nourishment on this type of reading; but I venture that you can well afford to devote 10 per cent of your space to that 10 per cent of your readers who will have appreciated this article.

EDWARD E. AVERILL, JR.

Omaha, Neb.

News

SIR: I am reading with considerable interest your "Even Good News Is News" department (that is, I hope it will become a department, appearing regularly).

The September *UN Newsletter* contained one statement in the Annual Report for 1948-49 made by Trygve Lie which I think is worth reams of paper spent on reporting "socially" important marriages or sensational but unimportant murder or divorce trials. In this item Mr. Lie is quoted as reporting that the U. N. has succeeded in "either preventing or ending wars involving five million people."

This seems to me a truly breathtaking feat and yet I did not find any report of it in my local newspapers, let alone the headlines it deserved. For the U. N. to have done this in the past year, even if it had accomplished none of the other worth-while (but un-headlinish) activities of such agencies as WHO and UNESCO, would have been worth, and more than worth, its whole budget, in my opinion.

JOAN W. LYON.

St. Louis, Mo.

"Plot for an Epoch"

SIR: As a follower of science-fiction, I have come across the theme of using a common enemy to unite the world a number of times, a theme suggested in "Plot for an Epoch" [*SRL* Dec. 3]. A basic one was "Film