

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bouquet

SIR: Your magazine seems to me to be more deeply concerned with human freedom and moral values than any other I know of. Keep up the good work.

G. R. CRONEMILLER.

New York, N. Y.

Rotten Egg

SIR: Certainly intensive research should be made and published on the sociologic phenomena represented by Capone, Mayor Curley, Dillinger, Jimmie Walker, *et al.* It is only after careful education that the public will ever learn to protect itself against such characters whom at present it not only nourishes but seems masochistically to embrace. This same capricious public demands that someone describe books for them and tell them which to read, a demand which results in the "best-seller" list and in the existence of your magazine. You have insisted that the lists should be honest. It behooves you, having assumed the solemn obligations implicit in guiding the reading and would-be reading public, to employ wisdom and honesty. I charge that the former was alarmingly absent in the engaging of one Lucius Beebe to review "Beau James" [SRL April 9].

I read the review, I confess, without noting who had written it. As I read, my anger mounted against the reviewer. When I checked to see who it was I realized how misplaced was any serious feeling against him, and my full ire was directed towards you who felt your publication to be on such a sound footing it could afford the insinuation of the Beebe effluvia. You went on to compound the boner by printing, "And who now, save a handful of jurists and newspaper reporters, remembers the name of Judge Samuel Seabury?" Whom is precious Lucius trying to insult?

ROBERT S. ECKE.

Kew Gardens, N. Y.

Conclave in Alabama

SIR: I am writing to ask that you correct a misstatement that appeared in Herschel Brickell's "Workouts for Writers" [SRL April 2]. This article states: "Despite the South's current interest in writing, and the number of writers who live there, no conferences of the kind discussed here have ever been held in that section" (italics mine). I am sure this was an oversight on Mr. Brickell's part, for the Alabama Writers' Conclave was founded in 1923 and has met annually ever since, except during the war years. The organization was developed with the aim of bringing together all the writers of the state once each year in a meeting where they could exchange information, hear lectures, and have informal discussions.

It would be ungracious of me to close without saying that even though our efforts were not mentioned in the article, the Alabama Writers' Conclave finds deep satisfaction in learn-



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"Oh I'll print it all right, Mr. Paine—but a title like 'Common Sense' isn't going to appeal to very many people."

ing of the work being done in other sections by writers' groups.

LINNIE MAE BROBSTON,
President, Alabama Writers'
Conclave.

Bessemer, Ala.

Salvos Over China

SIR: Edgar Snow, in what purported to be a review of my book "Russia's Race for Asia" [SRL April 9], started off with an ugly sneer at my conduct of the Committee of Public Information in the First World War, and then proceeded to berate me for "errors of fact, judgment, and understanding," the "use of quotations out of context," and other dishonesties.

Inasmuch as he does not support the charges by citations, I have no other course than to answer in the same strain of angry and personal attack. I doubt, however, whether you would print my opinion of Mr. Snow, so may I claim space for discussion of certain ethical aspects of the case?

I have always assumed that it was the right of an author to have his work reviewed objectively or, at least, with some reasonable degree of impartiality and dispassion. Also that the purpose of a review was not controversy but critical assessment with criticism based on firmer and higher ground than prejudice. If these are justifiable assumptions, then what could be more unfair than to turn a book over to another author whose own writings give plain warning of a bias that will impel him to use his review either for attack or attempts at rebuttal?

When you handed "Russia's Race for Asia" over to Mr. Snow you cannot have been unaware that for years, both in books and articles, he has specialized in presenting a favorable

picture of the Chinese Communists. You must have foreseen the violence of his dissent to my charge that the Chinese Communist Party was organized and financed by Russian agents, and that for a full thirty years it has been under Moscow's direction and control for the conquest of China and the subsequent communization of Asia.

It could have been no secret to you that he would particularly resent my denunciation of "those credulous liberals and fellow-travelers" who have labored so faithfully to persuade American opinion that the Chinese Communist Party is a purely native movement, led by agrarian reformers, and born of a people's spontaneous revolt against corruption and oppression. All propaganda that I branded as the Ultimate Lie.

True, certain metropolitan dailies have made a practice of this type of "reviewing." *The New York Times*, for example, put General Claire Chennault's book at the mercy of Annalee Jacoby, co-author of "Thunder Out of China." Higher standards, I submit, are to be expected of you.

GEORGE CREEL.

Washington, D.C.

SIR: The first three paragraphs of Mr. Creel's letter question my competence to review his book and the stain of original sin thus falls upon the editors of the SRL. In this case the devil declines to be his own advocate. Mr. Creel may be quite right.

The balance of his letter has no specific point of reference to the actual text of my review. He speaks of the "violence" of my dissent to one item and thinks that I "particularly resent" another set of opinions. In fact I did not examine either. To do so here would require more space than I wish to use to separate some par-

tial truth from much implied untruth, in an opaque syllogism.

My review of his book was a statement of its avowed purposes and a synopsis of its contents, approached with the assumption that a non-fiction work must be held accountable for its historical foundations. A responsible critic must examine the material and technique used to buttress an author's conclusion, and point out structural defects, indicating lapses in ratiocination, where they exist.

Mr. Creel's assertion that my criticisms were based on personal prejudice must be judged against the internal evidence of his book contrasted with my evaluation of it. The truth is that I have never met Mr. Creel. I have no personal animosity toward him. I think I had never before read anything composed by him. I did not know he had accomplished the present work until I was asked to read it. Had any of these circumstances been otherwise I might have declined to review it. The only other reviews I read—Nathaniel Peffer in *The New York Times*, and Richard Lauterbach in *The New Republic*—offered much the same judgment, mitigated somewhat perhaps by personal acquaintance with Mr. Creel so far denied me. He can comfort himself with the thought that we are all biased; plenty of people will agree with him.

• EDGAR SNOW.

New York, N. Y.

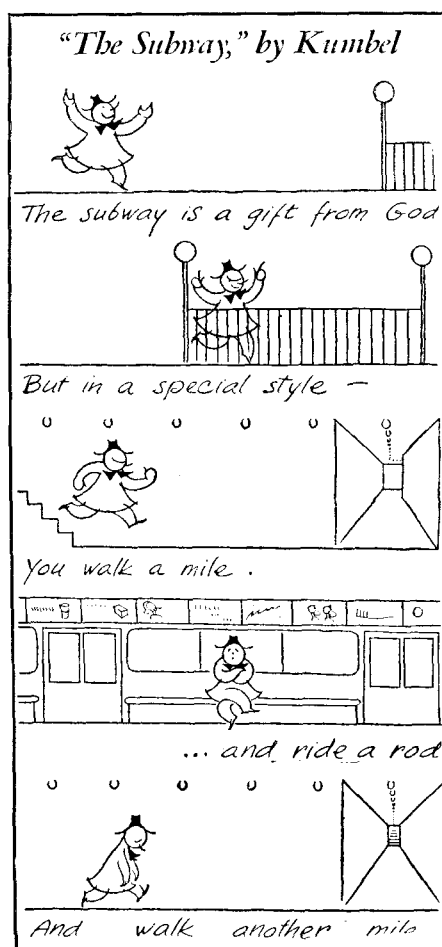
Man's Fate

SIR: The trite expression "A plague on . . ." is appropriate but I refrain. Shaw says, "Lysenko has to pretend . . . Lysenko has to tell the flat lie . . ." ["Behind the Lysenko Controversy," *SRL* April 16]. The truth is, no man is compelled to do or say anything. He can be made to suffer and die, but if of stern stuff, he cannot be made to stultify himself in any respect. Implication of the need of thought control in Shaw's article is surprising, coming from such a thoroughly uncontrolled person as himself, but however attempted by State, Church, organization, or gang, should be resisted to the utmost. Mental reservations do not render submission any more tolerable.

. . . . It is beside the point to refer to "life force," *"élan vital,"* or the like, as outside the range of science. Is "growth" (as the unfolding of a plant seed or the development of an animal egg) to be placed there because we cannot explain it? The fact is that science mostly does not explain; it merely describes.

We accept growth from the embryonic to the mature state as a fact of life, as we do also the deterioration and death of the individual. Why not accept the equally evident: development, prime, senescence, and extinction of species? Accepting those facts (not pretending to explain them), we need only apply in the biological world the law of variation (apparently universal), the countervailing principle of inertia (or the tendency of things to keep on going the way they are going), the working out of the law of averages (considering the usually large numbers of individuals and the multiplicity of reasons for their elimination), and of entropy (all systems finally run down) to have as

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reasonable an understanding as we are ever likely to have of evolution as it seems to be.

Phrases can be selected from each side of the debate to fit this solution, as it is rational and naturalistic and is to be accepted as a natural fact. It is in the attempt to explain, and to defend a certain explanation as the only true gospel that men get into inextricable difficulties.

W. L. McATEE.

Chicago, Ill.

Rabbi Lewis Replies

SIR: As a matter of personal privilege, please allow me to reply to John Mason Brown, who attacks me quite sharply in his column in the issue of March 12. I am as bitterly opposed to censorship as he is. However, it is my contention that the motion-picture medium is in a category radically different from that of the printed word. Even the latter often presents unusual and complicated problems, as the current discussion touching comic books clearly indicates.

Neither the New York Board of Rabbis nor I has sought to exclude "Oliver Twist" from any library. What my colleagues and I have resisted, and will continue to do so, is the release of the Rank screen version of "Oliver Twist," because it is not true to the text of Dickens, and therefore calculated to arouse the embers of anti-Semitism and race prejudice. While I have not seen the picture, competent judges like Albert Deutsch and others have seen it and condemned it as violently anti-Semitic and as certain to stimulate anti-Jewish hate. That riots did follow where-

ever "Oliver Twist" was exhibited, proves how sound this judgment was.

While Jews have never sought to suppress "The Merchant of Venice," there is no sound reason why high schools are obligated to select for class instruction that comedy which is most derogatory and hateful to Jews. As I would not deny anyone the right to read "The Merchant of Venice," neither would I force it upon anyone. How this attitude becomes "censorship" eludes me.

RABBI THEODORE N. LEWIS.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Sleeping FPA

SIR: To FPA and SRL: May one inquire why in hell Adams, with SRL's permission, Says, when he means "conjunction," "preposition"?

Indignor quando Frank dormitat
At things he's usually bright at.

JOHN W. CLARK.

Minneapolis, Minn.

Parlez-moi de Parlograms

SIR: *Aux Galeries Lafayette:* Lafayette, we are upstairs.

L'après-midi d'un faun: buzz me this p.m.

CHARLES FOLTZ, JR.

Washington, D. C.

SIR: *Donnez-moi le beurre:* you give me the chills.

ENSIGN H. A. WEISS, USN,
USS *Amphion* (AR-13).

Norfolk, Va.

SIR: *Le colporteur est arrivé de nouveau:* Cole Porter's come up with a new one.

O.K. Louis, drapes la gonne. Maintenant, chansons "London derrière."
Pardonnez les bum mots.

BARBARA LORD.

South Coventry, Conn.

SIR: *Hic jacet:* drinking jacket.

LILIAN JACKSON BRAUN.
Detroit, Mich.

SIR: It shouldn't happen to a chien, but here goes:

Cinq heures: doughnuts.

Mangez-vous: lousy scenery.

Pousse café: restaurant cat.

Trois heures: pants.

Back to oeuvre.

DOROTHY GRAY.

Sioux Falls, S. D.

SIR: *La jeunesse au front radiant:* June is bustin' out all over!

ANNE MARIE GREENE.

Sunnyside, N. Y.

SIR: Your . . . French translations brought joy to my heart and tears of merriment to my eyes. . . .

Fais do-do: make lots of money.

Noblesse oblige: the nobility always comes across.

ELLEN JANE L. PORTER.

Dayton, O.

SIR: *Vous avez déjeuné?:* Do you know my birthday?

EMILE VAN VLIET,
Managing Editor,
Pocket Books, Inc.

New York, N. Y.

Religion. *The torrent of books on theology and faith which steadily pours from the presses—quantitatively religious titles regularly rank near the top of non-fiction books published—vividly illustrates man's desire to have the verities restated in contemporary terms. The two books reviewed here, though notable for other reasons, do not serve present-day readers in this way, and so are partial failures. Robert Sencourt's "Great Writers of the World," as Edith Hamilton comments, "enthusiastically and ably" restates the teachings of St. Paul, but unlike St. Paul does not make Christianity seem particularly applicable to mid-twentieth-century problems. Leo Tolstoy's "The Law of Love and the Law of Violence" is interesting only as the work of an aged literary figure, but here again his viewpoint is suited only to a now vanished world.*

The Mouthpiece of God

GREAT WRITERS OF THE WORLD: SAINT PAUL. By Robert Sencourt. New York: Sheed & Ward. 1948. 378 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by EDITH HAMILTON

THIS is a well-written and often vividly written book, giving an account of all that is known and all that may reasonably be imagined about St. Paul. Mr. Sencourt's reading has been comprehensive; the list of his authorities is impressive. All St. Paul's great commentators are there, and the many quotations from them are a valuable addition to the book.

St. Paul is presented as the Church has always seen him, the mouthpiece of God, speaking the words of God. It appears to the reviewer that this is the reason why no consideration is given to passages which are incomprehensible to many readers today. For instance, the picture in the ninth chapter of Romans of an angry, irresponsible God, an early Hebrew idea abandoned by the great prophets, is completely passed over—and yet statements of this order are important because they have obscured Paul's greatness to numberless people. Not one of them is discussed by Mr. Sencourt. The familiar stumbling block, St. Paul's view of marriage, is passed over so easily it really does not come in sight. The words that the unmarried alone can please God and that marriage is permissible only as a provision against lust, are not quoted by Mr. Sencourt but translated or rather transfigured into an elevated as well as most reasonable teaching: "That there are in the single life special opportunities for freer devotion to God, but also special temptations: and each Christian must do as he is guided first by nature and common sense, then by his spiritual aptitudes." In view of this

interpretation it is not surprising that Mr. Sencourt is able to conclude that St. Paul's idea of the married and the unmarried state "is accepted universally by those who wish to live a moral life."

Enough has been said to show that the book follows strictly the old ways. The tone is devotional and real criticism never obtrudes. It is true that the reasons for and against ascribing the doubtful epistles to St. Paul are in each case fully given, with, however, the verdict that they are all his, even the Epistle to the Hebrews, although in this case not without some qualifications.

There is nothing new in the picture Mr. Sencourt paints, but it is warmed and vivified by a glowing devotion and admiration which lift it out of the class of the commonplace. The author has evidently followed in St. Paul's footsteps everywhere he traveled and



—Michelangelo.

Detail from "The Conversion of St. Paul."

he describes scene after scene as if it were hallowed because almost 2,000 years ago those eyes beheld it. The descriptions are so good, the emotion which pervades them is so moving, that they bridge over the centuries. St. Paul comes to life; the reader is seeing just what he once saw.

It is a book which will be welcomed by many. Nothing is more acceptable than long-cherished opinions enthusiastically and ably presented. It will arouse no stirring of disapproval. Neither will it give any help to those who are longing to have Christianity restated for today, in modern terms, exactly as St. Paul did for his day.

Edith Hamilton, after serving twenty years as headmistress of the Bryn Mawr School at Baltimore, retired to write such successful interpretations of the past as "The Greek Way" and "The Roman Way."

Weapon Against Evil

THE LAW OF LOVE AND THE LAW OF VIOLENCE. By Leo Tolstoy. New York: Rudolph Field and Gaer Assoc. 1948. 130 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by GORHAM MUNSON

AN unsigned note, inserted by the publisher, tells us very little about the composition of this fragment by Tolstoy, heretofore unpublished in English. One gathers that its slackly organized text was jotted down after Tolstoy was eighty and that it appeared in Paris in a French translation before Tolstoy died at eighty-two in 1910. A Russian author named Halperine-Kaminsky is said to have secured the manuscript and to have made the French translation. It was never published in Russian, and hence has not been included in the English translation of Tolstoy's collected works. Mary Koutouzow Tolstoy's translation is from the French, not from the original manuscript.

The little book is an octogenarian performance of slight interest. Thirty years earlier Tolstoy had passed through his famous and profound crisis when he had asked himself about his life: "What is it for? What does it lead to?" He had arrived at his answer: the rejection of institutional religion and full reliance on the words of Jesus as he understood them. Following those words, he had become anti-State in his outlook and a preacher of non-resistance. The cardinal principle of Jesus he took to be love. "The Law of Love and the Law of Violence" reaffirms and repeats what he had written with greater vigor in the years following