

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Wounded Feelings

SIR: Horace Sutton, after his BOOKED FOR TRAVEL of August 27, will have to go some to soothe the wounded feelings of hundreds of female librarians all over the country. He claims that to look for friendship in the book reviewed would be like making love (he imagines) to a librarian. While we do not claim to be a spokesman for the American Library Association, we're sure that its Committee on Intellectual Freedom would not uphold this principle of "guilt by association." We feel that Mr. Sutton has erred in judgment—that he expects too much of books and not enough of librarians!

ETTA SALITA.

Chicago, Ill.

## Our French Heritage

SIR: Allan Nevins overstates his case in reviewing "Our English Heritage" by Gerald W. Johnson [SRL Aug. 20]. It is but another case, all too common in recent years, of ignoring the influence of French thought in the Americas.

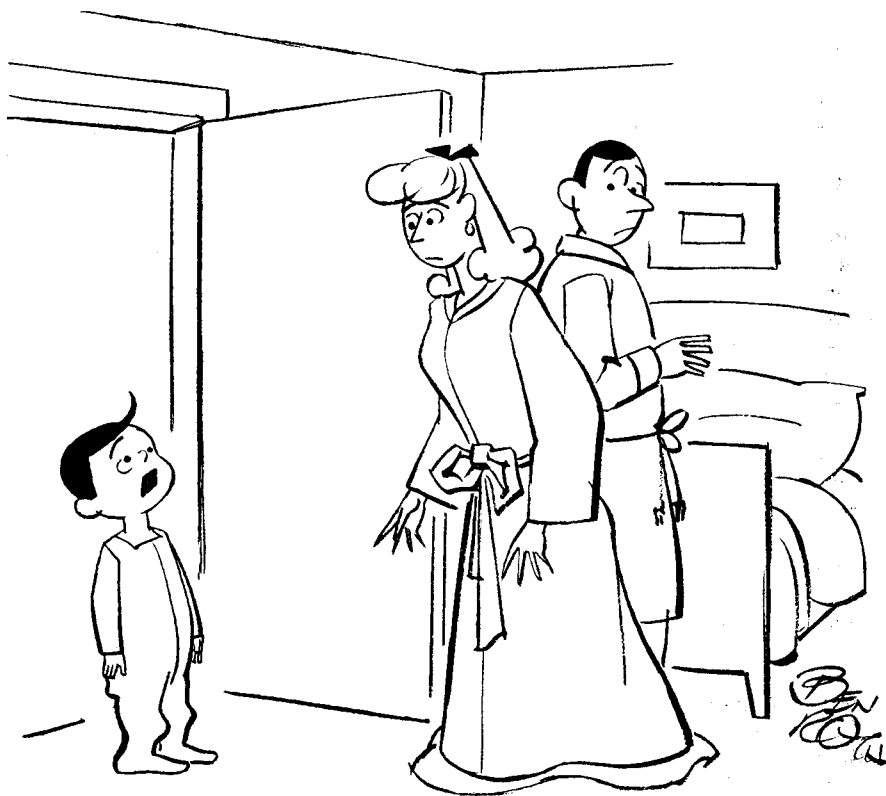
Mr. Nevins says "our culture is as distinctly an Anglo-American culture as that of Quebec is Franco-American and that of Colombia Spanish-American." He says our "fundamental political concepts are primarily of British origin." This is only looking at surfaces. There was something unique, in both the Americas, which set up the American republics.

The American revolution would never have happened had it not been for French thought. Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Voltaire were read and reread by the founding fathers. Montesquieu, it is true, noted the good things in the English political system, which the English themselves did not realize. But his evaluation of them was French.

Something happened in this country that could never have happened in a country dominated by British ideas, for the British—despite their ideas of personal liberty—are monarchists to the core. The most radical and astonishing thing happened in the thirteen colonies at the end of the eighteenth century. A secular government based on the sovereignty of the people was set up. The only Englishman who seems to have been carried away by the French radical thought that made this possible was Thomas Paine.

I cannot speak for the French-Canadians, but I know the Latin Americans pretty well. I can assure Messrs. Johnson and Nevins that their revolutions early in the nineteenth century were similarly dominated by the intellectual ideas that swept through the educated classes at that period in history. The Latin American republics were modeled after the republics set up in the United States and in France. Spanish thought had no effect. It was French thought plus an independency that seems to have resulted from pioneering life in the whole of the Western Hemisphere.

The English to this day do not un-



"It's my birthday. What do I get that's educational and what did you get me that I can play with?"

derstand the spirit of the American Revolution for the reason, perhaps, that French thought never dented their intellectual isolation. I can understand this. But I cannot understand why so many American scholars ignore the influence of French eighteenth-century thought in the making of their own country.

TIMOTHY G. TURNER.

Los Angeles, Calif.

## Ie Shima, Not Iwo Jima

SIR: While reading through the Anniversary Issue [SRL Aug. 6] my attention was arrested by the caption beneath Ernie Pyle's picture. It stated that he, Pyle, was "killed in the attack on Iwo Jima." I think, with a bit of inquiry, you will find that he was killed during an attack on Ie Shima, a small island, which lies off the west coast of Okinawa in the Ryuku Island chain.

WEATHERS Y. SYKES.

Chicago, Ill.

## "The Decline of Attention"

SIR: Clifton Fadiman's article on "The Decline of Attention" [SRL Aug. 6] represents a superficial view of the modern scene with which I am in thorough sympathy. For all those who are productive in the arts, or what pass therefore in an inattentive society, the attention accorded to obvious trash by ever-widening circles of the population must be a source of constant agony and embarrassment.

The inspiration of the word "super-

ficial" in the first sentence of this letter is the suspicion that Mr. Fadiman has been misled by the mass phenomenon, which he and I deprecate, into believing that the circle of attention to the strains of art and truth is narrowing proportionately as the audience to more ignoble themes expands. That Mr. Fadiman's conviction on this score is genuine is shown by the fact that he himself felt constrained, a step somewhat puzzling to his admirers, to abandon the book review column of the *New Yorker* for "Information Please" and the book clubs, in other words to participate personally in capturing the attention of those not wedded to finer things.

To return, however, from Mr. Fadiman to the point at issue, I wonder if the record of appreciation of works of art in America in the last twenty years is not something of which we can be proud. It is true that there is now an enormously expanded circle of those whom a half-baked education has prepared for an easy surrender of their attention to the stimulating fictions which today congest all realms of art and philosophy. It is also true that the seductive appeal of these fictions to even the noblest of purists eats dangerously into the intellectual core about which our body politic so precariously spins.

As in all fertile eras, however, do we not live fruitfully if dangerously? As the intellectual core is whittled away by the seductive devices of Mr. Fadiman and others, is not there being built up on its outer peripheries, like a world acquiring form out of gaseous elements, a far wider circle of potential auditors, deafened at the moment

by the beating of the brasses but apt nevertheless, through their fresh exposure to the media of communication, to develop in coming decades the sensitivity reserved in the past to aristocracies? In short, whereas the digests, the movies, the slicks, and the radio may corrupt those fitted for deeper insights, may they not also in their crude way fertilize the multitudes who in the past were born to blush unseen but in the future may, when the insemination has reached a subtler stage, give culture a currency unknown in more attentive epochs?

This may be wishful thinking (after another war or two it could easily become so), but there seems no more reason at present to regret that art is being vulgarized than that the same fate is overtaking politics, medical care, scenery, and psychoanalysis. After all while the first result may be to debase the coinage in each realm, its freer circulation may well lead in the end to a wider distribution of the wealth of the mind.

CHARLES W. YOST.

Washington, D. C.

### For Whose Sake Art?

SIR: Ezra Pound mad may serve a better cause than Ezra Pound sane. His "Cantos," which are the debris of yesteryear's romantic poetries, reveal the ultimate stultification of our times by showing up both our poetic paucity and the hopeless condition of our cultural values. Mr. Evans, Librarian of Congress, referred to these "Cantos" [SRL July 2] "—from my poetically ignorant point of view—"! The head of the world's greatest library floored by a primordial art form! Today we don't build parks, we build playgrounds. Today the Metropolitan Life Building mocks the robot colonies of Parkchester and Stuyvesant-Cooper Villages. Our automobiles are doughy globs. Our women wear the New Shnook. Our motion pictures explore new developing solutions. Ezio Pinza mounts from Metropolitan Opera to the heights of M-G-M.

The dilemma of the liberal—for whose sake art?

I. J. ALEXANDER.

New York, N. Y.

### "My Kind of Poetry"

SIR: It is fortunate that the Struthers Burt letter, "Pro Bollingen Bosh," should appear in the same issue with "My Kind of Poetry," by Peter Viereck [SRL Aug. 27]. They complement each other perfectly and are, I think, the most important contribution that has been offered in the controversy, the most sustained and lucid. And they cover a larger field of the arts, too. "My Kind of Poetry" is without rancor, and its candor and objectivity are refreshing. It supports the argument of Struthers Burt, and the two go far in penetrating the smoke screen of verbiage. The original Hillyer articles left a slightly bad taste like political oratory, but these support both sensibility and intelligence with penetrating candor.

RAY BOYNTON.

Santa Fé, N. M.

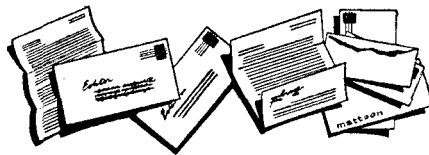
SIR: Peter Viereck's essay represents an attempt to restrict the scope

of poetry to an absurd extent. Most of us, poets and poetry lovers, respect the artist who is able to meet successfully the challenge of the sonnet or the ballade. But some people, including myself, feel that the form of the poem should be determined by the content—indeed, by the poem itself! There are poetic "ideas" which cling to an unconventional form, yet are destroyed if that form is changed, because the form is an essential part of the "idea." Are these "ideas" less poetic because they are not conventional? Mr. Viereck's "kind of poetry" is a kind I happen to like; I think he is good. But this does not make less conventional poems less poetic for me. The inseparability between what is said and how it is said is one of the major sources of unconventional poetry. I do not speak for the "moderns," but it seems to me that the best case for their poetry is found in the importance of form as a contribution to the whole poem, not in any declaration that the form can stand alone.

ROBERT H. MARSH.

San Diego, Calif.

SIR: As just one lover of real poetry, no doubt a pitifully unenlightened one, please allow me to make my very humble contribution to the great controversy. Peter Viereck's article seems to be just the same old rigamarole we have learned to expect. "The dragon



is dead—I am the dragon." Condemn the fake, praise the fakers as "great poets," and give us a specimen of the new, the real, thing, just like the old.

GRANVILLE TRACE.

Atascadero, Calif.

SIR: Peter Viereck's observations that the men who made the Bollingen Award are non-Fascists and are "among the world's most serious poets" are well taken. Nevertheless, the award to "The Pisan Cantos" and the nature of much modern poetry and criticism reflect the attitude that appreciation of poetry must filter down from the elect few to the many through the media of an esoteric criticism. Witting or unwitting, this is an authoritarian attitude so far as literature is concerned. A good poem should be able to make its appeal to an intelligent, cultured reader without the intermediary of elaborate exegesis. The best of Eliot's work and indeed of Pound's does stand on its own; unfortunately the obscurantist tendencies in each poet have been widely admired and imitated, and it is against the tortuously obscure that the independent reader has the right to protest.

Poetry is usually symptomatic of the state of a culture. In an age that idealized democracy and the individual, Wordsworth began a literary revolution with poetry written in the language of the common man. During the past three decades, when small groups of various complexions have been arrogating to themselves absolute authority over political thought,

the literary revolt has been toward poetry not merely for the intellectual few, but for those of the intelligentsia who were of the inner circle. This attempt to restrict poetry to the super-intellectual is not, of course, Fascistic, but it does fit into an attitude, recognizable in the political field, that the unguided individual is not competent to make his own decisions. Meanwhile it is heartening to believers in literary independence that a few young poets do not think it beneath them to address their verse to the intelligent general reader.

ARTHUR M. SAMPLEY.

Denton, Texas

### Treasury of Divine Wisdom

SIR: In his letter [SRL Sept. 3] David J. Lamb says that the Catholic Church is universal, that members are of all shades, and that anti-Catholicism is the result of complete ignorance. All history, our own included, is replete with illustrious men who were anti-Catholic. These, in recent times, included many of our presidents, and, to name one writer of world fame, H. G. Wells. I am in distinguished company. Sin and Satan preceded the Catholic Church and numbers all shades. Does that attest to the desirability of its universality?

Dr. Blanshard is not renewing an unsuccessful effort but continuing a highly successful one which began centuries ago, being continuously fortified by truth-seeking, hypocrisy-hating, informed, courageous minds, many of whom paid with their lives at the hands of this "Treasury of Divine Wisdom." The influence of that "Treasury" caused our army to print a Bible distributed to Catholics in the armed forces, which contained the expression, "The Jews are the synagogue of Satan." Some Treasury of Divine Wisdom; some Christianity!

RALPH R. SACKLEY.

Chicago, Ill.

### Concerning Rose Horses

SIR: Referring to THE FINE ARTS in SRL of Sept. 3, I know nothing about art (no, I won't say the rest of it), but M. Baudelaire was almost right when he asserted "that horses of a light rose color could be found in nature." The color known as "strawberry roan" is close enough to rose to justify the assertion. So the point was not at all "downright insecure." Like the yellow horse in "The Three Musketeers," probably an early type of Palomino, the rose horse need not have been a matter of argument, except between those whose ivory towers have no windows.

J. DAVIS REICHARD, M.D.

Staten Island, N. Y.

### Challenge Answered

SIR: In your editorial "Unsung" [SRL Aug. 27], the writer issues a challenge, "Name two other editors of Maxwell Perkins's generation." Well, here goes: Richard Walsh and Alfred McIntyre, both classmates of Maxwell's at Harvard, Class of 1907. Does this answer the query?

THEODORE W. KNAUTH.

New York, N. Y.



## SCIENCE

(Continued from page 23)

been "not the least of the alchemists' achievements."

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THE career of Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Spain's only Nobel Prize scientist, was a passionate drive to understand the most complex structure nature has yet evolved—the human brain. His brilliant discoveries are fundamental to many current studies, including the much-publicized field of "cybernetics," which aims to make a science out of the comparison between brains and electronic calculating machines. Furthermore, his life was one of the most colorful in science history.

Yet of all the great scientists of modern times, Cajal is probably the least known. His vividly written autobiography, which was translated into English more than a decade ago, received notice mainly in technical journals, and the man has enjoyed public obscurity together with the book. Dorothy F. Cannon, medical editor of the J. B. Lippincott Co., has finally helped remedy this situation with a new book, "Explorer of the Human Brain," on the Spanish anatomist written in easily understandable language. She has drawn liberally from the translated autobiography (as any biographer would have to), and has also added information from other sources.

Cajal was born in 1852 and died in 1934. From 1880 on he published about 275 papers and books on brain research conducted at Zarazoga, Valencia, Barcelona, and Madrid. He started by improving an already discovered way of staining nerve cells with silver nitrate so that they could be more readily observed under the microscope. This unexciting technique became a powerful tool for exploring what Cajal called "the cerebral jungle," masses of cells embedded in a matrix of delicate and tangled fibers.

Most anatomists of Cajal's time were overwhelmed by the jungle. They had not developed techniques for analyzing its complex structures, a limitation they dignified in the so-called reticular hypothesis, the idea that the brain's fibers were fused together into a single continuous net. As Cajal realized, this theory was simply a white flag, a way of saying "it is all one, you need investigate no further." By studying nervous-system structure in animal and human embryonic tissue, before the jungle had grown to its full complexity, he showed that the brain—like other organs—was

composed of individual cells. These were nerve cells or neurons which communicated with one another by the intimate contact, but not the fusion, of their fiber-tendrils. He also found that each neuron is designed with an entrance and an exit; it has certain fibers to receive electrical signals from other neurons, and different fibers to transmit its own messages.

Miss Cannon writes clearly about these and other discoveries. She describes the scientist as a frustrated artist, a self-made Sandow (during

his "muscular epoch" when he determined to thrash a local bully), and an ardent Spanish republican. For readers sufficiently interested to look up Cajal's own story of his life—and, judging by the interesting material in the present book, there should be many—one minor error ought to be corrected. The autobiography was published by the American Philosophical Society and not the American Historical Society.

Both the Taylor and Cajal works are in the Life of Science Library.

## From "Souvenirs Entymologiques"



—Edwin Way Teale.

**THE INSECT WORLD OF J. HENRI FABRE.** With Introduction and Interpretative Comments by Edwin Way Teale. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 333 pp. \$3.50.

By DONALD CULROSS PEATTIE

THIS is a new and fairly compendious selection, if not an "omnibus," from Fabre's immortal "Souvenirs Entymologiques." For those who do not own a complete set of Fabre's works it will be found a satisfactory collection, made all the more so by the brief but excellent remarks by Edwin Way Teale, which precedes each selection.

As the poets and artists have made it an exciting moment to the American when he first hears the nightingale or the European cuckoo, first beholds the ilex and olive trees made immortal by Homer, Theocritus, and Virgil, or sees the wildflowers of the Alps, so

Fabre has made the insects of his native region a part not only of the science but the literature of the world. When I first heard, in a Provençal summer, the cicada lift its voice, Fabre and his famous chapter on this song rose up before me. When I saw the pine caterpillars making their procession, eagerly I performed over Fabre's simple experiment of tricking them into an unending circle where their guiding instinct misguided them. The whole countryside, in my six years there, was alive with Fabre, long dead, and his beloved insects.

What he did with his pen for the insects of the south of France, Mr. Teale with his camera is doing right here in this country. And that reminds us that we miss in this collection any illustrations. Not even line-drawings have been vouchsafed to show the reader what these insects look like. In this respect the present volume compares poorly with "Fabre's