

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Superiority of Women

SIR: My thanks for your courage in publishing "The Natural Superiority of Women," by Prof. Ashley Montagu [SR Mar. 1]. It is gratifying.

I hasten to add, however, that even though I am a staunch supporter of women it is not my wish to have them considered superior now or in the future. The ideal state, to many of us, is equality—the freedom implied by that word. Only on the basis of such freedom of action can the individual (man or woman) develop, and who cares if the developed individual is man or woman.

JANE GRANT.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: I am a man teaching at a women's college who's all for women. . . . It seems to me that Mr. Montagu's article suffers from two major defects of logic. The first defect of the article under consideration is that it's illogical to argue, as Mr. Montagu unfortunately does, from the *natural* superiority of women to their *moral* superiority. For the normative conclusion that women are morally better than men does not automatically follow from the descriptive premise that the "chromosomal structure" of the female is biologically superior to the male's. Any attempt to argue so leads to a confusion of the categories of biology and ethics. Besides, to imply that women are morally superior by *nature* is at best, I suspect, to pay them only a left-handed compliment, not to say insult them outright.

The second difficulty I find is even more serious, because it defeats the humanistic thesis that Mr. Montagu defends with such justifiable conviction in his article. If the moral superiority of women is ultimately based on their natural superiority or specific sex, how in the world can the recurrent problem of man's inhumanity to man ever be intelligently solved? On the author's peculiar hypothesis of sex as the determinant of value in general and of morality in particular, it would appear that males are just out of luck simply because they lack the so-called "maternal spirit" that the female chromosomes are supposed to be blessed with. This implication is absurd because the crucial problem as to the "insufficiency of humanity" is really a social issue, and thus has nothing directly to do with the sexes *as such*. In other words, it is a general human problem, not a man-woman problem. What a pity that Mr. Montagu's noble effort at putting women on the map, despite his good intentions, turns out to be so self-defeating in the end!

PATRICK ROMANELL.

Aurora, N. Y.

SIR: Ashley Montagu suffers from a malady which is endemic in educational circles—the generalization fever. When he sticks to details based on actuarial tables he is right, but when he strays into conclusions and implications he flounders.



"If I were you, I wouldn't bother to write your next book."

Women, indeed, live about five or six years longer than men. "Survive" is a better word for it. Note, if you please, that those six years are tacked on to the tail of life, where they do more harm than good. Men, as a rule, have sense enough to discard those terminal years of pain or dotage. Men at thirty are usually younger, both physically and spiritually, than women of the same age. The same is true of men and women at forty, fifty, and sixty. After that, what does it matter?

Again, about women's greater love for humanity. "Suffer the little children to come unto me . . ." was not said by a woman. And St. Francis of Assisi was a man according to my information. . . .

And, oh, those poor chromosomes about which science knows so little! I note that the single cripples among them created Socrates, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Newton, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Beethoven, while the double-breasted, underslung ones created Lucrezia Borgia, Messalina, and the hatchet murderer.

One generalization of Mr. Montagu's is correct. Only women can produce children. But that doesn't mean that men couldn't do it better if they tried hard enough. Zeus did once, you know. And what a job it was! Athena sprang out of his head, mature and ready for action. I am told that the first thing she did was to spit in the eye of the midwife, who was standing by with swaddling clothes. And that baby had no teething problems, no measles, no mumps, no braces on her teeth, no whooping cough, and none of the other afflictions that children born of woman are heir to. I hope Mr.

Montagu doesn't question the masculine qualities of Zeus, for the evidence is preponderantly against him. . . .

I fear Mr. Montagu will have to find a third female chromosome far more potent than the other two and press it into service. I hope you do not think me biased. Some of my best friends are women.

ABRAHAM MILLER.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: "The Natural Superiority of Women" is so important I wish reprints could be made and sold to those who could use them.

SALLY B. TOMKINS.

Palisades, N. Y.

SIR: . . . What criteria can we use with regard to the "superiority" of one group as against another? On the basis of constitutional features? Then women are "inferior" as far as physical strength goes, *on the average*. On the basis of intellectual ability? Certainly not, if we consider them "man for man" over a long span of time. It all boils down to what criteria one uses for "superiority." Children might be categorized as "superior" to adults given certain criteria (the fact that they are more energetic, have "freer" imaginations, etc.). A similar point has been made with regard to questions of "superiority" of one race as against another. A Negro in the tropics is "superior" to the white in terms of adjustment to his environment; this "superior" person brought to a temperate climate is more likely to fall

prey to T.B. than his "inferior" in the other situation—the white. Which is "inferior" or "superior"? It seems to me that "superiority" (if there is such an animal) is relative. Mr. Montagu's criteria seem to be absolute. . . .

JEANETTE SEARLES.

Columbus, O.

SIR: Ashley Montagu is a competent physical anthropologist, an amateur social psychologist, and a poor logician. His statements on the physical superiority of women are sound; women are more viable, stronger, tougher than we men. His deduction from the fact of motherhood to woman's greater humanness, philanthropy, and "social understanding" is unscientific bosh. A gross *non sequitur*. There is no binding evidence on the issue one way or the other.

The absence of empirical grounds forces us to resort to anecdotal "proof." When Montagu says, "Women love the human race; men are, on the whole, hostile to it," I think of Jesus and St. Francis and Tolstoy and Semmelweis and Gandhi and Schweitzer. And then I think of all the tart-tongued, sour-teated "moms" who lend substance to Philip Wylie's stereotype and that picture of the Nebraska mother, smiling, holding up her child to view the lynching, and of all the socially exquisite babes who make Hemingway's Mrs. Macomber real. Then I think of some figures—tentative—on the amount of maternal rejection of children (USA) and the estimated number of pregnancies ending in abortion, and I conclude that Professor Montagu is a bleary sentimentalist. . . .

GWYNNE NETTLER.

Los Angeles, Calif.

SIR: After participating in the UNESCO warning against making mythical generalizations about whole groups of people, like Negroes, Anthropologist Montagu breaks the traces and generalizes, mythically, about a whole group of people, women. And another, men.

F. N. PILLING.

Washington, D. C.

SIR: "The Natural Superiority of Women" should be a bugle call to all good men to come to the rescue of their masculine superiority. Let us man the intellectual barricades and fire point blank our heaviest arguments against this "traitor" to mankind who dares to belittle his fellow males. . . . Mr. Montagu's alibis for the scarcity of genius among women cannot stand a careful scrutiny. Men of genius have often risen from most adverse environment and lifted themselves by their own bootstraps to great heights. Creative imagination and analytical power are two outstanding qualities found in man that are absent or scarce in women. The history of religion, literature, art, music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and politics supports this statement. Even in cooking, designing of women's clothes, and cradle songs man has taken the leadership. It seems that the secretion of the testicles acts like a catalyzer or spark on the brain of man, fires his imagination, and drives him to create or to conquer. If the testicles are re-

moved in childhood a man will develop some feminine characteristics and will lack the creative imagination and aggressiveness that are his birthright as a male.

"Women love the human race; men are, on the whole, hostile to it." Mr. Montagu, your slip is showing. Man is more cosmic and universal in his thinking; his mind, like the sperm, is a wanderer, the explorer ever restless, ever seeking the beginning and end of the universe and the causes of phenomena he perceives. The mind of woman, like the egg, is more passive, usually centered around the home and the children as it should be. Her womb is the center of her universe and all her physiological functions revolve around it. Man often leaves his wife and his children to fight and die for an ideal in some remote part of the globe. How many women do that?



Hardly any, fortunately for her children. History records the martyrdom of many men who rebelled against tyranny and who preached love for humanity, but no woman has been so universal.

More could be said on this interesting subject but I see the editor with the red pencil in his hand.

J. M. MARTINEZ.

Miami, Fla.

SIR: I suppose the usual hue and cry from the masculine contingent will attack Ashley Montagu's article with shouts of "traitor." But even the words "natural superiority" of women will fail to shock the uneasy sex out of its convulsive self-containment. . . . The male ego, the eternally starved, the eternally insatiable, is, always has been, a poor foundation upon which to build security—and now, in the ultimate term, world peace. Yes, of course, affirm his need to believe in himself, in his true capabilities and functions as an individual and as a man, but do not try to do the impossible, fill a vacuum, his vanity, with a myth, the non-existent, the unprovable, the inferiority of woman. There need not be any battle of sexes if men increase in number as mature adults. It is only the infant that carries into the years of so-called discretion the idea that he's the center of the universe. The woman related to him dismisses this as the usual tantrum of a baby and pacifies him with the teething ring of empty flattery. Woman is

a co-conspirator in this, and for her tragic centuries she must assume her share of responsibility. . . .

VIOLET L. ESTES.

Washington, D. C.

SIR: It seems incredible that a writer of Mr. Montagu's stature could have overlooked so great a work on this subject as H. L. Mencken's "In Defense of Women," published in 1918 by Knopf. . . . What Mr. Mencken emphasizes and Mr. Montagu overlooks is that women have a "sharp and accurate sense of reality," a "subtle and searching judgment," and a "keener esthetic sense" than men; and while they are "relatively uncivilized," are "not actively moral, nor—noticeably modest," "not naturally religious," not "really humble," and are "without that dog-like fidelity to duty which is one of the shining marks of men," they are nevertheless greatly superior to most men. . . .

WYNN YORK.

Indiana, Pa.

SIR: Nearly ten years ago I heard Pedro Albizu-Campos, well-known Puerto Rican patriot, expound the same thesis as Ashley Montagu's. It is refreshing to hear it from a Latin, who usually are not known for such egalitarian beliefs.

THELMA MIELKE.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: Ashley Montagu's article should have been published one hundred years ago for it reflects so many popular ideas of that time. Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale, the editor of *Godey's Ladybook*, would have agreed enthusiastically with him, for she wrote in 1850: "I have no sympathy with those who are wrangling for 'women's rights'; nor for those who are foolishly urging my sex to strive for equality and competition with men. What I seek to establish is the Bible doctrine as I understand it, that woman was intended as the teacher and inspirer for man, morally speaking, of 'Whatsoever things are lovely, and pure and of good report.' The Bible does not uphold the equality of the sexes. . . ."

ELIZABETH BANCROFT SCHLESINGER.

Cambridge, Mass.

SIR: The cover for *SR* March 1 is to my mind quite interesting. What catches your eye? "Messages for Everyman" and "The Natural Superiority of Women." Quite appropriate for Leap Year.

GRACE B. RHODABERGER.

Butler, Pa.

SIR: Ashley Montagu has accomplished something: he has convinced me of his inferiority to women. No question about it, he's no match for them. . . . Apparently the men he has been associating with are all upset by their incapacity to have babies. Now I've got my share of troubles, real and imaginary, but my incapacity to become pregnant isn't one of them. As a matter of fact, that's all I'd need. I speak, of course, only for myself, but if this incapacity is a sore point with my friends, they've been signally quiet about it. Next time the frus-

trated, hostile, aggressive group of us get together, I'm going to let them know that they've been secretly troubled all these years because they can't have babies. Once we get it out in the open, there's no telling what will happen.

As Mr. Montagu said, there are more men than women in our mental hospitals. But they haven't got them all yet.

DUANE FLAHERTY.

Kansas City, Mo.

Correction

SIR: We are always delighted to have our books reviewed in your magazine and therefore were delighted to see the review of "Classical Myths in Sculpture," by Walter Raymond Agard, which appeared in *SR* Feb. 9. However, the review listed the book as being published by the University of Minnesota Press. Of course, no great harm has been done, but I wonder whether or not some sort of correction might be made which would be of assistance to those people who are ordering the book and to the University of Minnesota Press, which will in turn have to forward any orders they receive to us.

JOHN J. SOLON,
Sales Manager,

Univ. of Wisconsin Press.

Madison, Wisc.

A Strengthened U. N.

SIR: Palmer Van Gundy's reference in his letter [*SR* Jan. 19] to the "high goal before us" (limited world federal government) recalls some sentences in Mr. Churchill's recent address before Congress. By the defense of Korea, Mr. Churchill said, "the cause of world law in our strong and valiant defense, and the foundations of the world instrument for preserving peace, justice, and freedom among the nations have been deepened and strengthened." . . . In a speech in the House of Commons on November 23, 1945, Ernest Bevin said: "I am willing to sit with anybody, of any party, of any nation to try to devise . . . a constitution for a world assembly, with a limited objective—the objective of peace." The new constitutions of France, Italy, and China grant to their executive branches authority and power to transfer such aspects of national sovereignty to a world organization as may reciprocally be agreed upon among the nations.

Is the reason that the United States lags in the demand for a strengthened U. N. simply because we have not had the bombs of war fall on our country? Do we really still expect the war system—"might makes right"—to settle the world's problems or produce justice, freedom, disarmament, and lasting peace? When are we going to demand an alternative to the war system?

FRANCES E. LAYER.

Warren, O.



LUTHER S. MANSFIELD and Howard P. Vincent tell us that their centennial edition of Melville's "Moby-Dick" (Hendricks House, \$5) "attempts to establish the final authoritative text of 'Moby-Dick,' to bring together the results of the past criticism and scholarship, and to add new information so that 'Moby-Dick' may be read as a work of its own time as well as of ours." The editors, both former presidents of the Melville Society, have been true to their purpose and have proved themselves capable of accomplishing it. In 250 pages of Explanatory Notes they have exposed Melville's sources, traced the influences under which he wrought, discovered his borrowings, examined his meaning, explained his multitudinous allusions, analyzed his characters, sought out their origins, and noted the several variations of the first English and American editions of the mighty novel.

No less than five pages of notes are devoted to the opening sentence—"Call Me Ishmael"—while the first appearance of Ahab's name evokes almost sixteen pages of learned comment and speculation. Small matters as well as large engage the editors' attention. Indeed, no allusion is insignificant enough to slip through their net. They explain the "Pythagorean maxim," mentioned in passing, and the phrase "as corrupt as Lima," as conscientiously as they explain the source of the *Pequod's* name and the nature of Starbuck. New Bedford, Nantucket, and Sag Harbor have their notes, but so have Herr Alexander, the magician, the girls in Booble Alley, a "plum-pudding voyage," the dog-vane, and the verb "to raze." It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the editors have answered every question that a reader of "Moby-Dick" might ask; and a thorough index of the notes makes the most important of them, on any desired subject, readily available. Readers of the excellent Introduction will gather that a good deal of fanciful nonsense has been written about "Moby-Dick," but the editors add no nonsense of their own. Here is editing in the grand manner, on a grand scale.

"Selected Writings of Herman Melville" (Modern Library, \$2.45) gives good value, like all Modern Library Giants. This volume contains "Typee"—with its sequel, "The Story of Toby"

—"Billy Budd," and all the short stories, including the comparatively long "Benito Cereno." Another addition to the Modern Library is "Six Modern American Plays" (\$1.25), with an introduction by Allan Halline. The six—"The Emperor Jones," "Winterset," "The Man Who Came to Dinner," "The Little Foxes," "The Glass Menagerie," and "Mr. Roberts"—demonstrate the vitality and versatility of modern American drama. Mr. Halline, with the courage of his convictions, ranks Kaufman and Hart above Congreve and Wycherley, and as the equals of Molière, in the field of social satire.

THE third novel to appear in the Borzoi Trollope series is "Rachel Ray" (\$3.50), for which I had the pleasure of writing an introduction. In the course of it I declared that, "despite Trollope's limitations it is still possible to say with complete accuracy, I think, that no other English novelist has put into his novels so large an area of English society, so thoroughly populated, or has imperishably recorded so many aspects and relations of English life." And I concluded: "All Trollopian will be glad that 'Rachel Ray' is again, and handsomely, available. For Trollope is a novelist who inspires in his readers the same sort of personal love that Jane Austen inspires in hers. The list of such novelists is short." It is because of this personal emotion that we who feel it welcome the reprinting of such comparative trifles as the five tales that compose the Folio Society's pretty edition of "Mary Gresley and other Stories" (Dushnes, \$2.50). This, certainly, is minor Trollope—but still Trollope. On the other hand, there is nothing minor about "The Prime Minister," now issued as a World's Classics "double volume" (Oxford, \$2), in which Trollope divides his attention, and his narrative, between an honest statesman and a scoundrel.

From Sheed & Ward come John Farrow's impressive, moving "Damien the Leper" (\$3); Gilbert Keith Chesterton's "St. Thomas Aquinas" (\$2.75), in which the author failed to penetrate deeply the great Dominican's thought, but wrote entertainingly around his subject; and "Saints Are Not Sad" (\$3.75), forty enjoyable, lively hagiographical sketches assembled by F. J. Sheed.

—BEN RAY REDMAN.