

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## LIBERAL RELIGIOUS TRADITION.

WHILE THOSE OF US who walk in the free church or liberal religious tradition may be small in number, we are proud that men such as Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Adlai Stevenson have been associated with that tradition. Thus it is all the more disturbing that such a distinguished magazine as *The Saturday Review* would completely ignore the liberal wing of American Protestantism, Unitarianism and Universalism, in its *GUIDE TO RELIGIOUS BOOKS* [SR March 6].

Your review might have included such spring publications of the Beacon Press as these: "Man Against the Church" (The Struggle Between Religion and Ecclesiasticism), by Duncan Howlett; "Religion Without Magic," by Phillips Endecott Osgood; "The Human Tradition," by H. J. Blackham; and "In Quest of a New Ethics," by Charles Mayer. . . . I would be willing to leave the final choice to the critics, but please include a review or two which might offer "spiritual succor" for the religious unorthodox.

DONALD R. STOUT,  
First Unitarian Church.  
Louisville, Ky.

## OBTAINING THE OFF-BEAT BOOK

N.C.'s EDITORIAL calling on the book publishers to "retool" [SR March 6] is most welcome. . . . A surplus of time, money, or formal education has never robbed me of sleep. Yet, in spite of the close pursuit of the weekly paycheck, I have accumulated a great many volumes simply because I love books and make an effort to acquire them. However, in most cases I cannot obtain a book locally, unless it is a guaranteed or "pushed" best seller, in which instance I can depend on a cheaper reprint or book-club selection being on the market in short order. The less publicized book I have to order either directly from the publisher or through one or two local book outlets. All this to obtain something I wanted in the first place and did not have to be induced to buy, in an age where sales promotion, advertising, and distribution are key words!

ANN THOMAS.  
Miami, Fla.

## PREACHMENTS OF MATURITY

WILLIAM S. LYNCH'S REVIEW of the Overstreets' "The Mind Alive" [SR March 6] ruefully notes that such books are "produced with a high degree of regularity" and that "much of this is familiar." But though by now "all of us should know" the elements of mental health, he concludes that the saturation point cannot have been reached, since "anyone who has worked in the field of education or guidance is constantly being horrified by



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"And the prospects! By 1956 this country will need—for crackers alone—"

the life-long difficulties imposed by the ignorance of some parents and teachers."

Is it not possible that most problem parents and teachers likely to read these books know the basic dos and don'ts of mental health, but can't help giving way to damaging emotional reactions when confronted with the exasperating behavior of their children? The Overstreets, "suggesting emotional attitudes," make the same error they deplore in that classic parental admonition, "You should love your baby sister, Johnnie." Demanding love does not create it, and may make it less likely. Urging admirable emotional attitudes as mature similarly should not be confused with achieving them. Our anxiety at the gap between the preachments of maturity and the actuality of our reactions to two or three—or six—children about 5 P.M. may make natural positive feelings less likely.

PEG BRADNER.

Foxford, Mass.

## THE ROOTS OF DELINQUENCY

CROSWELL BOWEN'S ARTICLE "Why They Go Wrong" [SR Feb. 27] hardly "points to some answers" in anything more than a very scattered, superficial way. At times when he seems to be nearing some of these "answers" he immediately jumps away and goes back to the common mistakes that are always made in any so-called study of juvenile delinquency.

The biggest error that is made by teachers, parents, and the authorities is to mistake the symptom for the disease. Clearly the child who blames "bad companions" for his difficulty is not aware of why he is attracted to these companions. Somewhere in his personality

these companions serve a purpose, albeit a misguided, neurotic one. Children who act in a dissocial or anti-social manner are trying to satisfy some inner need or impulse. They have not learned how to do it in a social way because their emotional education has been thwarted somewhere along the line. Thus, they choose a dissocial means of gaining satisfaction. Punishing the child for his acts will hardly bring results.

This matter of people needing to belong to a group is certainly something of importance. Everybody belongs to a group of some kind, and the group one chooses is governed by many things. Children who are angry and discontented or frightened will pick a group of angry, discontented people who react to their fright and anger in a violent manner. This very violence is in protest against the underlying feeling of weakness and fear.

The only real answer to the problem is a program of emotional and social re-education. Psychiatry and psychoanalysis enable us to understand more fully the real roots of these dissocial, unhappy children. It seems that it is only through the application of these principles that emotional re-education yielding some permanent results can be achieved. However, there is the rub. Trained people are scarce and clinical facilities are scarce. The answer does not lie in building more play facilities but in building more clinics and staffing them adequately. Teachers, playground directors, and youth activities directors should all be taken into the scheme and given some training in order to be able to understand and handle the children properly.

STANLEY J. GELLER, M.D.  
Beverly Hills, Calif.



## Lay on Macheath!



"... genuinely exciting piece of theatre ... a masterpiece."

**W**HAT a wonderful surprise it is for a reviewer to return from London and Paris and find right in his own backyard such a genuinely exciting piece of theatre as "The Threepenny Opera." This musical comedy written by Kurt Weill and Bertold Brecht in 1928, and now adapted lovingly into English by Marc Blitzstein, completely captures its audience from the instant the curtain of Greenwich Village's Theatre de Lys rises and a tattered but elegant streetsinger moves slowly and deliberately along a London street to sing with malicious hoarseness:

O the shark has pretty teeth, dear,  
And he shows them pearly white;  
Just a jackknife has Macheath,  
dear,  
And he keeps it out of sight.

This "Ballad of Mack the Knife" is sung to music as flamingly contagious as any tune ever written for the non-operatic stage, and most of the audience would have been satisfied to listen to it for two hours. But dramatically the ballad's great value is that it tells us that we are to be offered both a romantic and a harshly realistic view of life simultaneously.

Since we live in a rich country at

a prosperous time, the romantic view will tend to predominate. We will enjoy the gaiety of a dashing Macheath, the broad humor of the operation of an organized beggars' racket, the quaintness of a wedding supper conducted with awkward elegance by a band of uncouth cutthroats, a picaresque chase which leads through the London underworld to Newgate prison, and a merry ending which kids the old-fashioned operetta.

But spiking and adding character to these events is the author's awareness of the tragic contradictions that attend the struggle for power and survival in this life. J. J. Peachum, who has found that the secret of his beggars' syndicate is that "the powerful of the earth can create poverty, but they can't bear to look at it"; Jenny, who can daydream of nothing better than having a pirate ship come and blow up the whole business and carry her off fully revenged for the indignity and misery that has been heaped upon her; Mrs. Peachum, who understands the contrast between delicate sentiments of love and the cruder demands of sex; her daughter Polly, who can love Macheath in that "anywhere-you-go-I-will-go-with-you" way and at the same time reconcile herself to becoming his widow and inheriting his estate; the police commissioner, Tiger Brown,

who cannot bear violence or cruelty when it is put on a *personal* level; his daughter Lucy, who turned down the good men who made her feel a lady only to be ruined by a rogue who didn't; and finally Macheath himself, with his slavishness to social habit and to the amenities of life which finally interferes with his business ruthlessness.

The songs employed to make these comments are distinguished beyond their individual pleasantness by an economy that keeps their romantic quality dry of mush. In addition, Mr. Blitzstein has most appropriately inserted a song from "Happy End," another Weill-Brecht show. This is "The Bide-a-Wee in Soho," a number telling of Lucy's ability to find the acme of pleasure in a tavern whose principal virtues are a smelly alley, nasty words scrawled on the door, and beer puddles on the floor.

**U**NFORTUNATELY, all of the performances in this necessarily inexpensive production are not first rate. Some of the actors sing better than they act. However, this is a defect that will be lessened through steady work. Scott Merrill, who in the past has been one of Broadway's top dancers, is just beginning to get some of the comedy out of Macheath, and the adorable Jo Sullivan only really gets at the meat of Polly's character in her songs. However, Lotte Lenya brings a wonderful Old World sadness to the role of Jenny, and Charlotte Rae as Mrs. Peachum exhibits a comic technique that compares very favorably with the late W. C. Fields. Gerald Price, who plays the street-singer, is one of those actors whose personality glows the instant he sets foot on the stage, and much should be heard from him in the future. Beatrice Arthur, "a big complete girl," has a winning directness in her one solo describing her deviation from "the perpendicular."

William Pitkin has designed a smooth-working series of curtains which move forward and backward as well as sideways, making it possible to keep the action moving at a constant pace. Carmen Capalbo's direction is ingenious at moments, though it sometimes lacks the kind of authoritativeness than can come only with experience. Samuel Matlow'sky's eight-piece orchestra sounds as full as one three times its size and makes an overwhelming contribution to the show's success.

While there are some who will quarrel with such materialistic philosophy as "even honest folk may act like sinners unless they have had their customary dinners," it will be hard for anyone to refute the final bitter stanza that so truly describes a society that tends to divide the world