

## The Saturday Review



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## The University Publisher and the Lady

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** For its University Press Issue SR has asked August Frugé, vice president of the Association of American University Presses and director of the University of California Press, to discuss problems peculiar to university publishers.

**A**PUBLISHER, like a lady, must learn the art of saying no. Failing that, he will find himself scrambling from one awkward position to another and at an ever-increasing disadvantage. If he (or she) is experienced, he knows that tact and understanding are essential, especially when facing those still tender with their first love. But more important is the honesty, the courage to give the true reasons for declining the unwanted manuscript or suitor. It is unwise to fall back on excuses or to make conditions, for the most unlikely people are apt to parry the excuses, meet the conditions—and then what do you do?

It is easy, seductively easy, to say that a book cannot be published because it will lose money, when the real reason for rejection is quite different—its restricted subject matter, its lack of quality or significance (in the publisher's opinion), its poor organization or style. To make this kind of excuse is to invite an offer of financial help or to send the author off to other publishers, secure in his belief that only an ugly moneyed attitude separates his work from the public that deserves it. This is leading the author on, without any real hope, and it is about as reprehensible as any other kind of teasing. A variety of the practice is indulged by those commercial editors who tell

the author of an unpublishable manuscript that his work is probably just right for a university press.

Despite all these harsh words, there are good books that cannot pay for themselves and that may be accepted with enthusiasm if help can be found. But the enthusiasm must be real, must come from an inner conviction; it cannot be put on and off like a new dress. Heaven preserve us from the "hard sell." If author or publisher (or lady) can find little heart for the venture, no good will come of it.

Much of this wisdom is practical, based on some knowledge of the consequences that follow weasel-worded letters. But on another level, what is the publisher's duty to the author who has entrusted him with a manuscript and asked an honest question? Surely it is to give an honest answer along with the best, the fairest appraisal he knows how to make. If the opinion is negative, the publisher may well qualify it by acknowledging that his own judgment and that of his readers is human and fallible, subject to reversal by another publisher and another set of readers. The value of this attitude is perhaps greater to the publisher himself than to the author.

And lest all this sound too negative, I should add that it is equally important, perhaps more important, for the publisher to have the courage to say yes when yes is called for, even if the circumstances be difficult, even if the risk be great. Again like the lady, he should not build his defenses too high or too tight, for thus he may fail to discern the spark of promise, the seed of value, the barb of fruitful controversy. The publisher

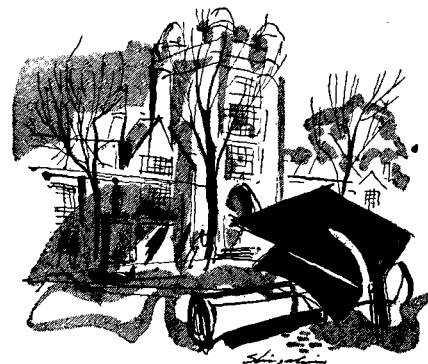
must be willing to follow his belief. There is no rule of thumb to tell him when caution must be thrown to the winds, but sometimes it must.

It has been said that the scholarly publisher stands with one foot in the ivory tower and the other in the market place—a trying position and one that requires either a firm faith in the future of scholarship or a split personality. He must have a practical sense or he will accumulate a warehouse full of unwanted books and will look the other way when a university administrator passes; but if he sees himself only as a businessman and his books only as merchandise, he had better get himself into a sounder business. For the making and selling of books (as distinguished from novelties) is not an economically sound enterprise in a culture that regards them as luxuries.

**T**HE newcomer to scholarly publishing sometimes longs for the big sales that a sensational book or a novelty may seem to promise. Later he learns that popular books are not always popular, that the flimsy book is more likely to reach the remainder shelves than the best-seller list (in spite of many examples to the contrary), and that his money has gone down the drain along with his reputation. As a university publisher pointed out years ago, the soundest scholarship is the most practical course for the scholarly publisher, the best book is the safest risk of all. A little patience, a little time, and it will go out of print, but nothing is so unsalable as last year's mediocrity.

Curiosity becomes a publisher, a wide ranging curiosity and not too many unrecognized prejudices. Closely related to this is the ability to listen (a trait that is charming in ladies, too). Ordinarily he can know little about the author's specialty and he will only lose respect by a pretense of knowledge, but the ability to listen, to catch the excitement of another's discovery, to see the human implications in detailed research, these are close to the heart of his vocation.

—AUGUST FRUGÉ.



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## POCKET, PLAY, OR FULL LENGTH

NATURALLY I was interested in George McMillan's implication in his letter [SR April 10] that I was dishonest in describing the lot of military nurses in the South Pacific during the last war.

I wonder whether Mr. McMillan formed his opinion from reading my novel, the abridged Pocket Book version of it, or from seeing the play written around it by Oscar Hammerstein and Joshua Logan, where one of the loveliest heroines of modern drama appears.

During the past seven years I have received about 300 letters from men and nurses arguing about my two chapters "An Officer" and "A Gentleman and Our Heroine," and most agreed that I gave an honest account of what transpired, but many felt it would have been better left unsaid.

Had Mr. McMillan based his judgments on either the abridged version or the necessarily softened dramatic interpretation I can understand his being a little confused; but if he read the novel, if he saw the passages about the savage sexual conditions that resulted, if he read the section about enlisted men attempting to hijack a nurse's car, if he saw the part about the evil system of having enlisted men drive nurses to dates with officers . . . if he caught anything at all of what I was trying to say, then I'm confused by his charge of dishonesty.

JAMES A. MICHENER.

Bucks Co., Pa.

## EXPRESSION OF WOE

DEAR MR. COUSINS,—

Gladly would I publish dozens  
Of poems in your weekly sheet  
(Could I approval always meet,  
But *this* my eye did lately greet:  
On January nine  
In "Rampart," a short poem of mine:  
You changed *popular* to *popular*—  
The error's not just ocular,  
But breaks into my ordered frieze  
Of wintry bare imagined trees.  
My woe is more than jocular!  
So, revered Mr. Cousins,  
Please  
Restore  
My row of trees!

KATHARINE DAY LITTLE.

Boston, Mass.

## BUCHANAN'S YOUTHFUL LOVE

ALTHOUGH AN ADMIRER of much of *The Saturday Review*, I have grown increasingly annoyed at your travel editor, Horace Sutton, and his flippant inaccuracies. Why is it that travel writers seem to feel expert on every subject after a day or two of exposure to it? And why must these writers insist on perpetuating historical inaccuracies? . . . A case in point is his effort to lend unneeded drama to the life of James Buchanan [in *BOOKED FOR TRAVEL*, SR April 10]. A little inquiry beyond the obvious sources would have



"Do you suppose it means anything that I've gained ten pounds during the Eisenhower Administration."

informed Mr. Sutton that "Buchanan's youthful love," Anne Coleman, did not take her own life. She died during a sudden illness; I'm sure this was just as heartbreaking to Buchanan if not as dramatic. . . .

ROBIN W. WINKS.

Baltimore, Md.

## NORMAN AND MELVIN

BACK IN 1940, I had with me on the Rudy Vallee-John Barrymore radio show the fine writing team of Panama and Frank. They were fast fellows with a "switch," but I can't believe that they would carry the practice so far as to switch their given names as stated in Arthur Knight's review of "Knock on Wood" [SR April 10]. In those days they were known as Norman Panama and Melvin Frank.

J. A. McFADDEN.

Philadelphia, Pa.

## FREE AND FAIR

. . . YOUR FAIR TREATMENT of the Buckley-Bozell book, "McCarthy and His Enemies" [SR April 3], is the way I like to see a free press act. I read both reviews and I feel that I have a deeper understanding of this important situation in our Government. . . . You are perfectly frank as to your opinion, but still you present both sides as presented by representative men.

(Rev.) JOHN J. REILLY

Phillipsburg, N. J.

## DEFINITION WANTED

MR. SOKOLSKY in his defense of McCarthy says that the problem is one of becoming conscious of the Communist conspiracy or risking an occasional error. I would

appreciate it if Mr. Sokolsky would define his use of the word "occasional" as well as knowing what it would mean if he himself happened to be that "occasional error." Would he be willing to sacrifice himself and his family if it meant that other Communists would be found by the same method of disregarding the means? . . .

FLORENCE ANN DRAKE.

New York, N. Y.

## EXACT OPPOSITE

IN THE ORIGINAL TEXT of my review of Bernard Berenson's two books [SR April 3] I said, "Against this ignominious theory, Mr. Berenson—*resenting* crowd emotion . . ." For this SR inadvertently substituted "representing crowd emotion," which is, of course, the exact opposite of what the author and I intended.

WALTER PACH.

New York, N. Y.

## OUR NATIONAL PARKS

"MILLIONS FOR THE MILLIONS," by Bernard Kalb [SR April 17], is a fine reminder of how some of the national parks were established. It is unfortunate that Uncle Sam is not willing to spend the money needed to take adequate care of some of these areas, and worse that our Secretary of Interior, who is entrusted to protect them, is trying to break the back of the National Park System by recommending a dam and a reservoir which would inundate the unique Green River Canyons of the Dinosaur National Monument. If built, this dam would establish a precedent which could lead to exploitation of other parks.

HERBERT W. LEVI.

Wassau, Wis.