

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A PLACE OF QUIET

AS AN OCCUPANT of one of the lower rungs of the literary field—a public-relations man—our sole product is words, words which will inform, clarify, impel to action. Yet how can we produce a combination of words which separate themselves from the frightful deluge of spoken and printed palaver that threatens to crowd from existence all sense and logic, unless we find the key to the place where we can think? Day after day, night after night, people rush together in an endless succession of gatherings, meetings, and unneeded “social events,” which serve only as an escape from the shattering quiet which might confront the individual with an opportunity—and therefore terrible challenge—to think. Accepting the challenge to think, the individual would then feel obligated to arrive at decisions on the basis of that thought, instead of accepting the inevitable result of mass movement that lacks form or purpose. Mental and physical stimulants carry the individual mind to new quantitative records in production of meaningless and thought-barren words.

In N.C.’s reference to the availability of leisure time, in the editorial “Does Anyone Have Time to Think?” [SR Mar. 26], he might as well have said: “Never has so much leisure time been devoted so completely to the elimination of relaxation and the creation of tensions and frustrations which erode every possibility of logical thought.”

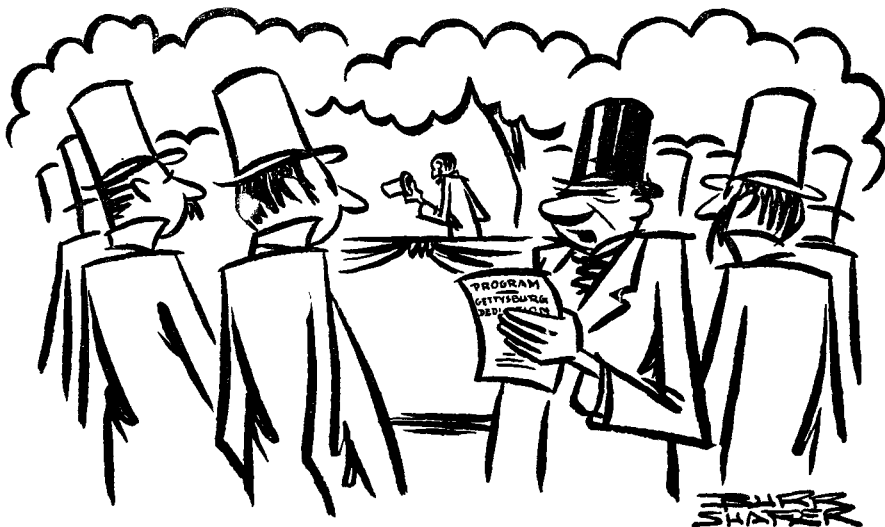
There was a time when the needs of this nation were so uncomplicated that they could be expressed in the phrase “What this nation needs is a good five-cent cigar.” Today what this nation—and the world—needs is a place of quiet and men and women with courage to step from the crowd and better it.

CARLYLE REED.

El Cajon, Calif.

PRACTICE MAKES THOUGHT

“DOES ANYONE HAVE TIME TO THINK?” Certainly. Anyone who is able to think and wants to think has time for it. In general people find time to do the things they consider important, provided they are able to do them. N. C.’s editorial rightly asserts that thinking is needed to solve the frightening problems that face the world. But the difficulty is not the lack of time to think, nor is it, as he suggests, that we do not value thinking sufficiently. There are many people in the world who run about crying “Think! We Must Think!” There are many more who listen, nod sagely, and agree: “We Must Think!” Millions of people would line up behind the proposition that thinking is of prime importance. The real difficulty is that we have so few people who are able to think. After all, thinking is a skill. It is a part of education; it should be started early in life, and practised steadily and hard for many years; and even then the result is only mediocre



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

“I think the President’s speech was entirely too short. Mr. Everett spoke for over an hour.”

unless there is a certain amount of natural aptitude to begin with.

SUZANNE STRAIT FREMON.

Charleston, W. Va.

THINKING A POSE

N. C.’s EDITORIAL “Does Anyone Have Time to Think?” made me think. I agree with all his major points, but I think he should add one more item to the list of things we are doing while we are “busy doing nothing.” We are acting.

I am presently living in what is called “the university atmosphere.” A university is theoretically a place for thinking, but what are so many of us doing here? Posing! We pose as Thinkers; we are satisfied with almost-apt quotes from Shelley or Orwell or with sarcastic generalities as a substitute for thought. Extending this observation from the university and comparing it with what I read in newspapers and magazines, I am almost convinced that everyone else is posing, too. In Washington we have Congressmen posing as Heroes-with-Flaming-Swords protecting the nation. In Hollywood we have producers posing as The-Supreme-Judge-of-Art. In New York we have advertising men posing as Busy-Molders-of-Opinion. The list goes on and on. Maybe thinking accompanies humility; maybe we need more humility.

T. E. BLACKBURN.

Milwaukee, Wisc.

NEW LEISURE A FRAUD

IDEAS on what’s wrong with America are the most plentiful commodity in this land of bounty. But N. C.’s editorial “Does Anyone Have Time to Think?” [SR Mar. 26] gets to the trouble behind the troubles we usually hear about. I hope it’s widely quoted. I’d take just one exception, and that to the suggestion that our “busyness”

is only an excuse, that all we need is admonition.

For millions of us the New Leisure is largely an illusion. Many teachers, lawyers, editors, executives, and other professional and business people work as many evenings and weekends as their fathers did. And others who do manage to make a living in a forty-hour week must spend their “leisure” doing the carpentry, painting, and plumbing that their fathers could afford to have done by specialists. It takes thinking to “do-it-yourself,” but not thinking of the kind N. C. is advocating. Besides, the people I have in mind are the kind who assume most of the responsibility for unpaid but time-consuming work in school, church, and civic duties. Add the multitudinous small chores of home and family, and the man who ought to be doing the thinking begins to feel like Emerson’s “giant slaughtered with pins.”

JAMES W. HOFFMAN.

Havertown, Pa.

FOR THE MAIDENS

RE N. C.’s EDITORIAL on the Hiroshima Maidens [SR Apr. 2]: I gather that all items of expense involved with the projected trip have been arranged for, with the exception of the petty-cash fund. I am sure that, like myself, many SR readers must be eager to donate their mite towards the relief of these victims of an American A-bomb. Accordingly, I hope that my small contribution will be acceptable for the petty-cash fund.

PATRICIA MACMANUS.

New York, N.Y.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The Saturday Review will be glad to forward all similar contributions. Please make checks payable to the Hiroshima Peace Center Associates, “Hiroshima Maidens.”



BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

THRIFTY AND NIFTY

THE revue has always been one of the most difficult forms of theatre to evaluate. The Wolcott Gibbs formula—in which he states that six numbers are reasonably entertaining, three more are passable, and eleven are intolerable—is in itself an admission that the revue-evening lacks the continuity of interest demanded in a musical comedy or a straight play.

Another approach is to compare the show with what one is offered at an expensive nightclub, but here again there is an implied reservation. A third approach is to write that the performance of one star is worth putting up with the mediocrity surrounding him, which is to praise with faint damns.

While Paul Gregory's "Three for Tonight" would certainly be rated a success by any of the above tests, this new format also totals up to a kind of theatre eupnesia. This it achieves through practising the strictest artistic economy.

The economy goes into effect from the moment one enters the theatre and finds the curtain up on a bare stage backed and flanked by symmetrical gray drapes. Soon it is compounded by Hiram Sherman, who is the most unextravagant barker in show business. Although his material and the songs and sound-effects that the voices of Walter Schumann (twelve men, eight women) must sing are frequently "cute," the performances are all straightforward and businesslike. And no one rests on his specialty. All participate in song and dance together so that the evening is interrelated.

Of course, it is the stars. Harry Belafonte and Marge and Gower Champion, who raise the show to all but one of its peak moments. The Champions with their contemplated capering go from puzzled abstract to peppermint-stick gutbucket with delightful ease. And the handsome young Mr. Belafonte, a mixture of Josh White and Ray Nance, is not only politely playful in "When the Saints Go Marching in" and in the calypso "Matilda," but he can also suddenly switch his mood to become intensely anguished in songs like "Take My Mother Home" and "Scarlet Ribbons." Finally, there is a really catchy showtune by Mr. Schumann called "Couldn't Be a Better Day" that the ensemble whips up into the concentrated eight-minute equivalent of "Plain and Fancy."

Add to this the fact that there are

no skits—nothing clogs the works of a revue more than a not-quite-funny joke—and you have a deftly satisfying evening of pure entertainment.

ANOTHER show which has attracted deserved attention is "Shoestring Revue." Playing at the President Theatre, which is an off-Broadway house in the Broadway area, this revue starts off in high gear thanks to a fine comic contempt for current foibles. The very first number is a take-off on the impossibility of bucking the established inanity of revue opening numbers, and it sets so high a standard that the remainder of the show is hard pressed to live up to it. Dorothy Greener as a roller-derby toughie. Bea Arthur as a torchsinger ("You called me 'garbage' and then you put me beyond the pail"), and Arte Johnson, who sings a hilarious song about the inundation of New York, are talented young entertainers well worth seeing. The skits are daringly caustic as they take apart Feuer and Martin, Gilbert Miller, Mike Todd, Marilyn Monroe, *The Reader's Digest*, ice shows, and Walt Disney. There is also one neat revue song. "Wabash 4-7473." by G. Wood.

Probably it is this show's brash originality that makes you want to like it even during its inevitable dull moments. Its shabby scenery may be worse than none at all, and two pianos may be an uninspired answer to shoestring economics. Yet, as a revue that faces the perils of a large amount of comic dialogue, "Shoestring Revue" is superior to many a gilt-edge musical.

DOWNTOWN at the De Lys, Patricia Joudry, a pretty Toronto serial-writer, has offered us her first play. Titled "Teach Me How to Cry," it seems to blend the "terrible" adolescent emotions of "Seventeen" and "Our Town," a pathetic mother-illgitimate daughter relationship reminiscent of "The Glass Menagerie," and a near-tragedy caused by an American middle-class family's struggle with bourgeois values that recalls "Death of a Salesman." Deirdre Owens, Richard Morse, Nancy Marchand, John C. Becher, and Nan McFarland all give sensitive performances under Robert Hartung's fine direction. And John Blankenchip's simple settings show a wonderful sense of theatre. "Teach Me How to Cry" is neither sensational nor very original, but it is tasteful and sincere. —HENRY HEWES

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