

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## CLARIFIED THINKING

MY HEARTFELT THANKS to you and to Dr. E. R. Goodenough for his fine article "Our Faith and Doctor Freud" [SR May 14]. I am precisely one of the people he hoped to reach in writing it, and it certainly clarified my confused thinking and eased the load of guilt I've felt for some time over my inability to believe in the traditional religious concepts.

MARGARET VAN AKEN.

New York, N.Y.

## WHO IS THERE FIRST

IN THE EDITOR'S NOTE preceding Robert S. Richardson's article "The Day After We Land on Mars" [SR May 28] SR spoke of the Soviet Union's interest in a space-station and went on to say "that it is imperative for the Free World to be ahead of the Slave World" in getting to our sister-planet.

More important than who gets into space first, it seems to me, is that the people on one side of the divided world, at least, learn to think and speak of themselves in less self-righteous terms and of those on the other side in less derogatory terms. It was Jesus who said, "First get the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see to get the speck out of your brother's eye." Unless somebody on this earth can put into practice this idea relatively soon it will not make a tinker's damn who gets to Mars first.

JOHN B. ISOM.

Wichita, Kans.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPACE

LET ME THANK YOU for the article "The Day After We Land on Mars." It is indeed satisfying—at least to an amateur astronomer and idealistic individual such as myself—to see a publication with the integrity of SR place such prominence on an article of this nature. Of course, I am in complete accord with your editorial commentary wherein you stress the significance of space travel. Too many people today are still not cognizant of the effect interplanetary flight may play upon our future. Many persons still deem all of this as highly fantastic. I contend that your article will help widen the gap of such insular, limited thinking.

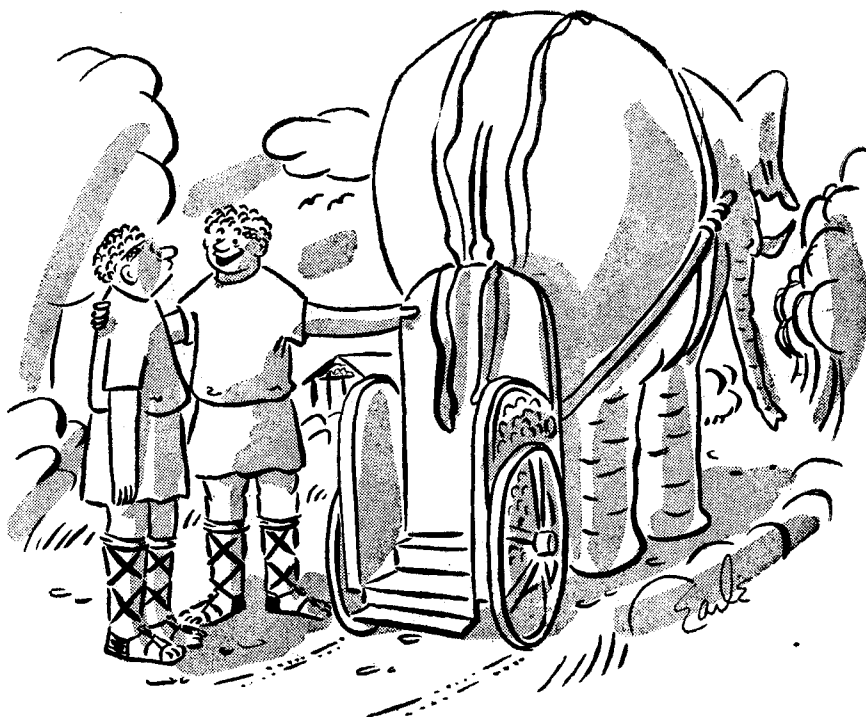
IAN T. MACAULEY.

Atlanta, Ga.

## LIFE ON MARS

I QUESTION the logic in Richardson's assumption that, because of the absence of oxygen on Mars, no animal life could possibly exist there. It reminds me of something that Voltaire once said about the farsightedness of the Creator in providing us with noses so that we could wear glasses.

On the earth oxygen abounds everywhere from the depth of the ocean to the highest mountain peak. How, then, are



"How'd ja like to take a ride in my new horseless carriage?"

we to know what forms of life could or could not have developed if our atmosphere had been of a different composition? On this planet all plant life is dependent upon an abundance of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Does the existence of vegetation on Mars (if it does exist) prove that this same gas must be prevalent there? Or is it possible that life on Mars adapts itself to its environment just as it does here?

WILBUR J. DOWD.

Hartford, Conn.

## DECLINE IN FAMILY IDENTIFICATION

JOHN STEINBECK finds it strange that a man is punished for damage done by his dog but not for the criminal depredations of his son ["Some Thoughts on Juvenile Delinquency," SR May 28]. The assumption, of course, is that the son has free will and the dog does not. Aside from this, however, I am disturbed by Steinbeck's proposal that we return to the medieval concept of group or family responsibility.

In the first place it is not true, as he suggests, that this practice has been entirely forgotten. The Nazis incorporated the basic idea in their hostage system utilized in Czechoslovakia, Norway, and elsewhere. Lidice was the logical conclusion to this type of reasoning. But why assume that punishment of the family will deter the son when in many cases the psychological motivation behind the delinquent behavior may be to do exactly this, punish the family? And what justification for it is there if the son's delinquency is caused, let us say, by genetic

factors—if he is, for example, a sociopath, or constitutional psychopathic inferior?

I do believe, with Steinbeck, that the major cause of delinquency may be the marked decline in family identification, with its compensating attachment to the gang mores. But you can not very well legislate the love and respect that is necessary within the menage if the possibility of family punishment is to constitute an efficacious deterrent. Where such love exists no action is necessary. Where it does not the return to feudal law would put a deadly weapon in the hands of the unloved and unloving child. What pernicious use a bad seed might make of it.

BILL BRADEN.

Chicago, Ill.

## CALL TO CONSCIENCE

CONGRATULATIONS on John Steinbeck's great editorial. We think it should be required reading for every parent and schoolteacher in the United States, and would also like to see clergymen of every faith use it as a basis for sermons.

SARA AND RICHARD TUCKER.

Great Neck, N.Y.

## GRATEFUL AUTHOR

THANK YOU for John Steinbeck's editorial "A Plea to Teachers" [SR Apr. 20], for it has stopped my answering the many students who for various reasons write me letters almost as tearful and fearful as the ones he received.

BERNARD M. BARUCH.

New York, N.Y.

# Caligula Polk and His Circle

By CHARLES EINSTEIN

IT IS conjectural whether the art of non-fiction as practised by our books, newspapers, magazines, and *The Congressional Record* could exist today without the descendants of Caligula Polk.

Caligula, of Muskogee in the Creek Nation, appeared half a century ago in "The Gentle Grafter" and was described by O. Henry as "a spokesman by birth." Heirs to Caligula are the true indispensable men of our time—the inner circles, sources close to, and immediate aides. They exist in every field, from politics to sports, from welfare to war, from fashion to finance.

Maybe the advent of public relations as a national industry brought them to the fore, but for whatever reason they have become the lifeblood of our community. No business organization can rightly function without at least one spokesman; to judge from the newspapers, the White House alone has at least ten. Indeed, the point has been reached and passed where the spokesmen have spokesmen, along the principle of the diminishing Chinese box toy. The business is handled so fluently that nowadays we can read or hear this sentence—"Sources close to White House circles quoted Presidential aides as saying the Chief Executive was disturbed at the news"—and remain blissfully unaffected by the fact that this intelligence was funneled down through an apparent minimum of seventeen Caligula Polks.

Caligula's basis of operations is three-fold. In order of increasing importance, the reasons are:

- 1.—*Don't Quote Him*—where the source is too important to be identified with the news;
- 2.—*Won't Quote Him*—where the source is too unimportant to be identified with the news;
- 3.—*Can't Quote Him*—where the source doesn't exist.

A good example of Category 1 would be Vice President Nixon's reaction-testing remark last spring that our intervention might be necessary in Indochina, a quote he got off on the condition that it be attributed only to a "high Government official"; or, to take another example of the same category, we may read this sentence—"A spokesman for the newspaper publishers said the strike would not hurt revenues"—where no self-

respecting paper would admit that the spokesman for the publishers was actually one of the publishers.

More commonly encountered is Category 2. Sample—"A reliable source said the manager called his first baseman 'yellow'." No right-thinking sportswriter would dare confess that his "reliable source" happened to be the clubhouse janitor.

Categories 1 and 2 have in common the desire, whatever the motives that may have prompted it, to protect the source. Unfortunately, in practice the effect of this generally leaves Categories 1 and 2 indistinguishable from Category 3.

A harmless but pertinent example would be the way *Time* magazine of August 2, 1954, began and ended its review of the Alfred Hitchcock movie "Rear Window." The first sentence says:

"'Rear Window' (Paramount), just possibly the second most entertaining picture (after 'The 39 Steps') ever made by Alfred Hitchcock, is the movie equivalent of what boxing circles call 'the handkerchief trick'."

The last sentences:

"'It makes you want to fool him (Hitchcock) by reacting some other way,' said another movie-maker, 'but you can't. You're condemned to enjoyment'."

Who are those boxing circles? What's the name of that other movie-maker who has such a nice turn of phrase? These are questions that of course need no answering, because nobody gives that much of a damn. And that is another way of saying

that the spokesman and all his anonymous allies have become as much a part of our language as any of the components of Basic English.

In some instances there is simply no other way to tell the news than to invent an anonymous informant to hang it on. In December 1946, as a young sportswriter in Chicago, I "broke" the big answer to the big sports question of the day—would Army or Illinois be invited to the Rose Bowl. I said it would be Illinois. My reason for saying it was that a group of Big Ten officials had left for California to confer on the Rose Bowl question with leaders of the Pacific Coast Conference. It seemed utterly illogical to me that so many men would go that far so late—the game was less than a month away—if there was any chance that they could lose out.

So I wrote the story. But first I had to invent my source. It would have been manifestly ridiculous for me, with no column, no authority, no background deeper than a year's experience as a sportswriter, to come out and say "I think Illinois and not Army." So I started the piece by saying "Reliable sources indicated today . . ."

A by-product of this action was to establish for myself a fire exit in case I was wrong. I could always blame the source. True, I was masquerading a guess in the guise of news. My imaginary source could have been wrong. So what? Only too often real-life sources are even wronger.

This is the crux of the newspaperman's dilemma. A reporter is respected not so much for whatever brains he may have as for the people he knows, whether they exist or not. Why? Because any indication of brainwork suggests in our trigger-

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