

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## COLLECTIVE STUPIDITY

DR. WILLARD LIBBY, like many other scientists, abandons the methods of rational inquiry when he enters the realm of human affairs and "doublethinks" with the politicians (SR May 25). He apparently thinks of a less-than-Utopian agreement to ban H-bomb testing as "the terrible risk of abandoning the defense effort." The H-bomb has become a quasi-institution. Like all institutions, it is perpetuated by mental inertia. The dangers of fallout, although indeterminate, are universally recognized, while the presumed dangers of discontinuing testing are quite possibly non-existent. The only conceivable use of H-bombs is as a deterrent, and it is difficult to see how further increase in the destructive power of these already staggering weapons can materially enhance their deterrent effect. The present international tensions, which we help to create, and the tremendous extravagance of the arms race, which impedes human progress in all its constructive aspects, cannot be tolerated indefinitely. Our worst enemy may not be the Communists but the collective stupidity of mankind, which we share so abundantly with the other nations.

C. W. GRIFFIN.

Erlton, N. J.

## THREAT TO HUMANITY

SR's STATED policy regarding the nuclear weapons, their testing, and their threat to humanity has, I am sure, awakened many, many individuals, over the world, in all walks of life.

ROBERT L. GOULDING, M.D.

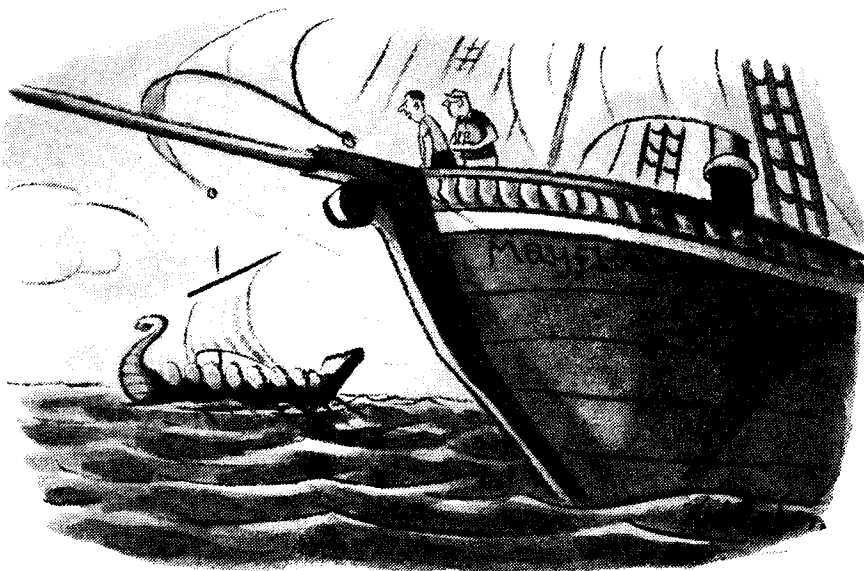
Bowman, N. D.

## DOWNWARD REVISIONS

THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION has recently revised its estimate of the amount of hydrogen-bomb detonation necessary to bring the world level of radioactivity up to maximum permissible concentration. This estimate, originally 110,000 megatons, has recently been lowered to 30,000 megatons, which represents what might be involved in only a "small" nuclear war. This revision was made necessary by a preliminary survey of the amount of weapons-testing-caused radioactivity in human bones. There is little doubt in my mind but that this estimate

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"Well, I think *that's* a pretty snide gesture on Norway's part!"

will be further revised downward in the near future when the importance of the three times higher concentration in children is fully realized, and when the effect of low doses of radioactivity on the blood system has been fully explored.

ALLAN B. BURDICK,  
Purdue University.

Lafayette, Ind.

## HE'S NOT CONCERNED

SORRY YOU INSTIGATED the sob-sister attack on the AEC which is as the buzz of flies in the ears of a working elephant. The John Public that maintains our strong central government will be no more concerned about this attack than the elephant will be annoyed by the flies.

J. C. ELLINGTON.

Galveston, Texas.

## ALL-TOO-CREDIBLE FOLLIES

IT IS BECOMING apparent that humanity is now committing a most terrifying crime: the irremediable poisoning of millions of now living men and the even more catastrophic poisoning of their children. That crime is commonly justified by another: the poisoning of the mind which blinds it to intelligent responsibility, and delivers it to the doctrine of fear which today dominates human government. We must not allow these all-too-credible follies to occur.

HUGH N. PENDLETON.

Pittsburgh, Pa.

## SHALL SR STAND?

WHILE *The Saturday Review* has never posed as the arbiter of usage, its readers somehow have expected that, to protect its immense prestige, SR would respect long-established expressions, look askance at questionable neologisms, and deliberately refuse to give a fillip to the

disintegrating tendencies that, for better or worse, characterize all languages: in down-to-earth plainness, to remain conservative, an overall stabilizing force, but open to the occasional changes that broadly accepted usage imperatively commends. The great Roman critic, Quintilian, once wrote that "even the great Homer sometimes nods." Was John Mason Brown, a critic for whom I have profound respect, guilty of "nodding" when, in SR June 1, he ignores the age-old distinction between *shall* and *will*, *should* and *would*? He writes: "We would be a poor breed indeed, if we permitted fear to stampede us into mistaking possibilities for certainties." Authorities who respect the genius of Anglo-Saxon forms have insisted that *shall* in the first person and *will* in the second and third express simple futurity, while *will* in the first person and *shall* in the second and third person denote volition or determination on the part of the speaker. The distinction also applies to the contingent forms of *should* and *would*. Inasmuch as mere willing could not prevent a stampede, it appears that Mr. Brown ought to have used the word *should*. Again he writes: "I trust we will have outgrown our lust for the mediocre," and "I trust we will not have lost our gift for laughter, or our ability to be outraged by wrong." Mere willing on our part can have no assurance that the desired ends will be attained, so the genius of the language demands the use of *shall* in each sentence.

With genuine regret I admit that there are millions who appear indifferent to the vital distinction between *shall* and *will*, perhaps would like to see all distinctions wiped out. My contention is that *The Saturday Review* should not add a downward push toward oblivion for these distinctive words.

LABAN LACY RICE.

Orlando, Fla.



## SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

### The Evolving Western

**T**HE WESTERN movie has never been quite the same since "High Noon," a picture so influential that it has given rise in the trade to the term, "a 'High Noon'-type picture." The cowhand, who used to be a simple soul, is much more likely now to be a man ridden with guilt and haunted with ghosts of the past. The sheriff, or the town marshal, compulsively sets out to get his man, or to fight it out with the bad guys (that is, the psychopaths) for conscience's sake, some mystic obligation to the community, or for an ideal, or because he just has to do it on account of there's something bigger than all of us—and not because that's the way he makes his living. I bring all this up to show how original and even refreshing "Gunfight at the O.K. Corral" seems these days, now that the id and the super-ego have been made part of the Western pattern.

The gunfight of the title was an actual gunfight, and it occurred on October 26, 1881, in the appropriately named town of Tombstone, Arizona. The participants were U. S. Marshal Wyatt Earp, his brothers Morgan and Virgil, and Doc Holliday, a gambler friend of Wyatt's—all on the side of the law—and the Clanton gang, a group of tough, organized outlaws. Each year, now, Tombstone wakes itself up and re-stages that battle at the O.K. Corral for the benefit of tourists. Wyatt Earp was one of the most renowned of the figures of the not-so-old West, and of course he has been recreated in movies before, but not nearly so handsomely and, to a degree, accurately as in this Hal B. Wallis job. As played by Burt Lancaster, directed by John Sturges, and written by Leon Uris, Wyatt Earp is a sturdy, quiet fellow who dresses neatly and speaks good English, and who is more likely to quiet a fellow down by hitting him over the head with a gun than by shooting him. His friend, the consumptive Doc Holliday, was a more colorful character, and Kirk Douglas does an exceedingly good job with him.

Not only has the movie been based on a good deal of fact, but it is far more relaxed than most movies of the type. Instead of building in a straight, tense, melodramatic line, it seems to be telling some anecdotes about Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, and there are, in fact, three distinct and

almost unrelated episodes that make up the picture. This is not formlessness at all, but, in view of the material, good form. The acting is at a high level—except for some rather foolish moments involving Rhonda Fleming—and Jo Van Fleet turns in another of her polished performances as Doc Holliday's tarnished lady. Seems to me that "Gunfight at the O.K. Corral" might set the Western off on a fresh and fruitful track, if only Hollywood can get its subconscious under control.

\* \* \*

Hollywood seems to have about given up making mystery and detective movies, probably because TV has cornered the market. But the British, bless them, stubbornly stick to doing things they know how to do well—and making detective movies is one of them. So here, in "The Third Key," is Scotland Yard at work again, this time methodically tracking down an ingenious criminal who opens safes all over London until finally Detective Superintendent Tom Halliday (played by Jack Hawkins) catches up with him. It's an intriguing, suspenseful movie for the most part, slackening now and then for some glimpses of the home life of a detective and the inner workings of Scotland Yard. It has some of those nice, neat characterizations British movies are known for, as well as an occasional witty line, and if the movie lacks the imaginative touches of the old Hitchcock and Carol Reed mysteries it is nevertheless made well, like a sturdy British shoe.

\* \* \*

It is a long bus-ride in "The Wayward Bus," made by Twentieth Century-Fox from John Steinbeck's novel. Among the passengers are Dan Dailey, Joan Collins, and Jayne Mansfield. The driver is played by a man with the improbable name of Rick Jason, and by the time he takes the bus through cloudburst, washout, and landslide to its destination he, and every passenger, has learned some sort of lesson in, I believe, humanity. As for myself, finding the journey without either significance or wit, I was glad to get off and rest my tired eyes.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

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