

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## COTERIE LEADER?

SINCE READERS have invoked the name of my father, William Rose Benét, in protesting John Ciardi's review of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's poetry, and since Mr. Ciardi seems to oppose my father's policy as Poetry Editor with the remark "when I took over . . . I began systematically to uproot Genteel poetry," I would like to comment.

I am as certain as one can be in such matters that my father would have endorsed Mr. Ciardi's plea, "Poetry is more important than any one poet. Serve poetry." But I think he would have been dubious about Mr. Ciardi's half-expressed distinction between "Genteel poetry" and "whatever you want to call the other kind." (For myself, I think such phrasing is just about as feeble as Mrs. Lindbergh's poetry.) While he had strong likes and dislikes, and fierce opinions, he thought a magazine like SR should be as far as possible a friend to all poets.

He would, I think, have been most unlikely to use such a phrase as Mr. Ciardi's "pernicious poetry." He didn't conceive of any poetry, or even rubbishy attempts at verses, as injurious. It seems to be this extravagance in Mr. Ciardi's language that has offended even readers who might share his opinions.

I don't know what my father would have said of Mrs. Lindbergh's latest book. For myself, I think it's worthless, and so I am that far on Mr. Ciardi's side. But then I don't care much for Dylan Thomas, so he will have to cast me into the outer darkness, too. And once he has started casting it is hard to know where he will stop, and I believe he may end in a position that seems undesirable for a Poetry Editor, as leader of a coterie.

JAMES BENÉT.

San Francisco, Calif.

## HEBREW FREEDOM

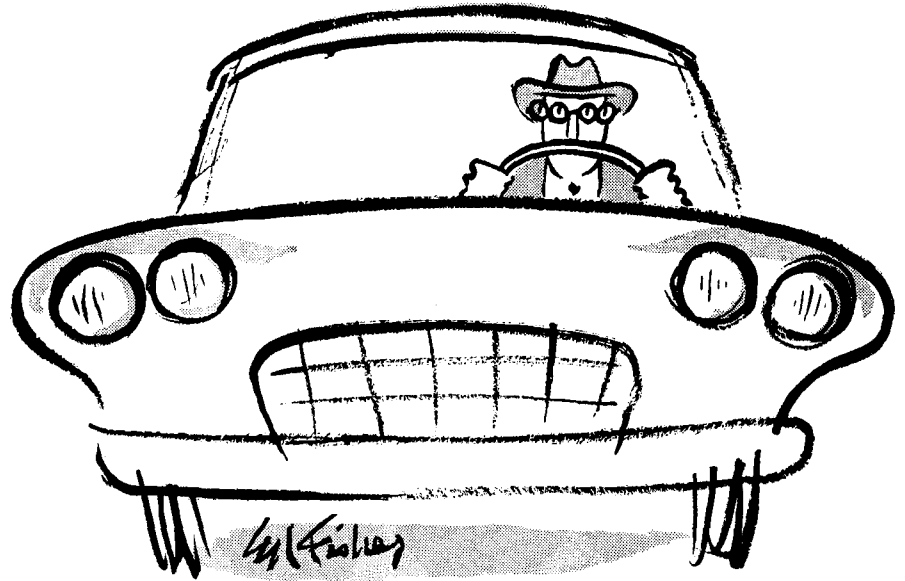
THERE IS NO DENYING Edith Hamilton's love for "The Greek Freedom" (SR Jan. 12). But to claim for the Greeks sole credit for the "idea that only man who holds himself within self-enforced limits can be free" is to forget the Bible (on which Miss Hamilton has written so well). Consider the laws of the Pentateuch and you find that they are rooted in freedom of choice—the choice to accept a discipline which will grant true freedom. If anything, the Hebrews went far beyond the Greeks in the matter of self-discipline. They conceived how self-discipline may be self-enforced—namely, through the acceptance of "revealed legislation."

ABRAHAM J. KARP.

Rochester, N. Y.

## A VOTE FOR TVA

IN VIEW OF SR's awards for distinguished advertising in the public interest (SR Jan. 19), I was particularly disappointed to see in the same issue the irresponsible advertising which you allow by "Amer-



ica's independent electric light and power companies." Since TVA is bringing a profit to the government beyond what it pays in taxes, I doubt that I am, in this sense, "helping to pay other people's electric bills." Even if I am, I'm sure the sum out of my pocket to make up this deficit is not nearly as great as the one I pay to compensate for the "unfair tax favoritism" enjoyed by independent power companies, among others. Considering the almost preposterous number of dollars the local independent power company demands of us each month, I'm surprised they don't have to pay far more than 23 per cent of it in taxes.

ETTA LINTON.

San Diego, Calif.

## LIKE AS LIKE SHOULDN'T

IS IT BEING TOO much of a purist to hope that in the losing battle we are waging against the use of *like* as a conjunction SR will not prematurely join the team of Winston cigarettes? Twice in a current issue your staff writers were guilty of such a use of *like*.

B. B. GAMZUE.

New York, N. Y.

## SECONDARY EDUCATION

MR. CRAWFORD GREENEWALT, in "The Culture of the Businessman" (SR Jan. 19), observes that "the educational process does not end with the diploma"—that college is not the end of a man's education—"Education is the never-ending process of exposure and experience." What Mr. Greenewalt did not say is that college is not the *beginning* of a man's education either. What of the first eighteen years—or the last twelve of them? Are these not the years when curiosities are awakened, interests developed, talents uncovered, when the fundamentals and background for college are laid? What of our independent secondary schools and their financial problems, which are ex-

actly the same as those of the independent colleges? Should we not consider the needs of these institutions at the same time we consider the needs of the colleges?

G. B. MONTGOMERY.

Radnor, Pa.

## SPACE-SHIPS AND PENICILLIN

F. R. COWELL'S "A Republic and its Natural Diseases" (SR Jan. 26) is one more sign of the grave concern over the future of democracy which agitates intellectuals today. It begins to look as if the cultural level required to build space-ships is greater than a cultural level which implies self-extinction of the species. The same process which produces morality and principle, which develops sympathy and kindness at the same time as it develops penicillin and Christianity and hydrogen bombs, is going to be the death of us in the end.

ALFRED B. MASON, M.D.

Concord, Calif.

## NEIGHBORS AND CIVILIZATION

IT IS A CONSIDERABLE service to bring to us the scholarly writing of Mr. Cowell. But I want to offer a conclusion to his thoughts. As we meet in groups, whether organized or not, *desiring* integration of interests, we tend to discover and expose the injustices in each other's claims. That climate of "neighborly" discussion produces several important results: (1) We tend to see where we can alter our own demands or claims which are revealed as inconsiderate or worse; (2) We tend to learn the qualities of analytic ability, of responsiveness, of patience and tact—and thus (3) as a *byproduct* of pursuing our own aims we not only move toward the justice Cicero sought but also acquire those civilizing attitudes on which justice ultimately depends.

FRANCIS GOODELL.

Yarmouth Port, Mass.



## Tebaldi in "Traviata," "Requiem" by Ormandy

A LOT of money and a lot of talent have gone into making the Metropolitan's third new production of the season a lot of "Traviata," though to say it was always what Verdi required would be a lot of overstatement. In the manner of its *Violetta*, Renata Tebaldi, the Oliver Smith settings, the Rolf Gerard costumes, and the direction of Tyrone Guthrie have size and are sometimes beautiful, but they seemed more suited to some other opera.

When Miss Tebaldi used her vocal resources thoughtfully and allowed her fine sound to caress the pathetic eloquence of "Dite alla giovine" (Act II) or "Addio del passato" (Act IV), this was singing to charm the ear and delight the mind. When, as too often happened, she turned on the kind of driving, attenuated sound she utilizes for "Aida" or "Andrea Chenier," it was oversized and slightly irrelevant to this problem. Altogether, the second and fourth acts (in this version) were her most successful, for she doesn't yet command the vivacious spirit or the champagne quality in the voice to make the music dance in the first act "Libiamo" or "Sempra libera." Even operagoers hardened to the transposition of sundry showpieces flinched at Miss Tebaldi's unprideful concession to convenience in singing the latter a whole tone down, in G flat rather than A flat. Disregarding the ugly clash of tonalities, it also forced the tenor's offstage responses into a range disadvantageous for him. What price star system?

As characterization, Tebaldi's was superficially operatic, suggesting that director Guthrie, an intelligent man as well as a brilliant theatrical mind, realized that making water run uphill would be easier than changing the postures and attitudes which suit Miss Tebaldi, vocally. When she has a driving climax to achieve, the head goes down and the sound tends to be pinched; when the line is flowing easily, the chin is up, the gaze level, the sound beautiful. Guthrie's most effective work was done in the final scene, where the groupings relative to the dying *Violetta* were artfully contrived, considering the huge space of her "boudoir" to be filled by four figures.

Rolf Gerard's sumptuous costumes contributed much to the radiant figure Miss Tebaldi presented from first

to last, whether in ball gowns (white with camellias in Act I, dark orange in the gambling scene), country frock, or negligee. Rather than suggesting the hectic flush of a consumptive, the radiance was all Tebaldi's own healthy beauty, too little dissembled for dramatic purposes, the attitudes and actions too firm and muscular to suggest a wasting disease. Such contradictions are as much a part of the operatic "art" as the prompter's box, but it could be hoped that a singer of her talents would do as much as such well-remembered *Violettas* as Bori, Sayao, or Albanese (not to mention Muzio) to make the role convincing. It may happen, but it hasn't yet.

Given the kind of *Violetta* Miss Tebaldi was singing (long-drawn-out phrases with ritards where none was indicated, a gush of sound where Verdi wrote "un fil di voce"—"a thread of voice") it was hardly surprising that Leonard Warren, as Germont, dragged some of his phrases, and Fausto Cleva's baton seemed weighted with lead. In commanding appearance and robust sound, Warren was the most Verdian figure in the cast. Recalling his treatment of the role in years past, Warren must be admired for mastering all aspects of it when he might have been content to coast on voice alone. Giuseppe Campora's appearance is ideal for Alfredo, though his light voice sounded in better blood at the dress rehearsal than it did at the first performance. Supporting Miss Tebaldi's heavy "Addios," when the melodic line is the tenor's, might well contribute to fatigue. All the small parts (Helen Vanni, Emilia Cundari, Calvin Marsh, Charles Anthony, Clifford Harvuot, and especially George Cehanovsky as the Marquis) were well performed.

To regard this truly as a Guthrie production would, I suspect, be inaccurate. Hans Busch was visible as assistant (though not identified on the program). The management of masses in Act I was reasonably good, but stilted and confused in a poorly conceived version of the gambling scene. Guthrie's hand could be seen in the scenes involving the principal characters of the drama, but little of the creative mind evident in his staging of "Troilus and Cressida" was engaged by this unrewarding assignment.

Smith's first settings for this stage were certainly spacious (a highdomed

glass-roofed conservatory for Act I, a summer house for Act II, a rather unsuccessfully gaudy staircase intruding on a limited playing space in Act III, an atmospheric if gargantuan "boudoir" for Act IV). But they had little relation to the intensity for Verdi's music, its throbbing affinity to fever, rapid pulse, and overwrought emotions. As in rather too many of Rudolf Bing's new productions, a lot of theatrical skills are dissipated through lack of firm agreement that in operatic production the needs of the *music* must be served by the surroundings, not subservient to them. Lots and lots of production? Yes. Lots and lots of "Traviata"? No.

THE magnitude of Verdi's genius was the dominant factor of a week which also brought a performance of his "Manzoni" Requiem by the Philadelphia Orchestra under the direction of Eugene Ormandy, with a superior quartet of soloists and ample choral elements. Taken together, this was about the most sizable thing to Ormandy's credit New York has heard, superbly organized in its orchestral detail, fervently sung by Leontyne Price, Nan Merriman, Richard Tucker, and Giorgio Tozzi, and the orchestra's own chorus augmented by that of Rutgers University. Tonally it reached its zenith in the post-intermission "Domine Jesu," "Sanctus," and "Agnus dei," whose melting sonorities conveyed a striking amount of Verdi's purpose.

Given this fine command of musical essentials, Ormandy might think of further dynamic subtleties, and a more vivid sense of verbal meaning. Such phrases as the basso's "Mors stupebit" have a deeper meaning than can be conveyed by a well-rounded sound alone, likewise the tenor's "Hostias." Among the solo quartet, Miss Merriman stood out for intensity of expression and sureness of meaning, as Tucker did for ringing sound, though his opera-bred penetration does not make for a ready blend with others. Tozzi added to the esteem he has earned at the Metropolitan with a clean projection of the bass line, somewhat more lyric than the dramatic function of Verdi demands. It is a compliment for Miss Price that in such able company she sustained a strong line at all times (the top B flat at the end of the "Requiem aeternam" was thoughtfully abbreviated by Ormandy).

Any performance of Verdi's "Requiem" at this time would stir unforgettable memories of its most eloquent interpreter. Ormandy did much to make his deed worthy of the thought.

—IRVING KOLODIN.