

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A VOTE FOR EXCHANGES?

THE OCTOBER 27 issue of *SR* was one of the first of my own country's publications I read after landing at Idlewild Airport during the afternoon of October 24 after four and a half weeks of operatic appearances in Russia. A day previous, following President Kennedy's historic speech announcing the Cuban blockade, I sang my final performance as "Boris Godunov" at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. Despite the tensions that must have been besetting him, as certainly they were besetting me, an American singer, Premier Khrushchev attended, came backstage later with congratulations, and kept his private worries to himself. Was this, I wondered, a public vote for our cultural exchange program?

Therefore, the article "Should We Continue the Cultural Exchange with the USSR?" by former U.S. Senator and former Assistant Secretary of State William Benton, struck strongly home to me personally. Some who gathered at the airport as I landed safely seemed to think I was one of the "last men out," barely escaping, as it were, from "the cultural exchange." This, of course, was not in question. The warm audience response at the final "Boris" proved that the love of art and music that both nations have in common stands firm against the most pressing global situation.

After the problem of Cuba has been settled, and it must be for the sake of every human being in the world, I believe that all of Mr. Benton's provocative views should be considered at the highest levels. Certainly he is not in error in giving what I interpret as a qualified approval to the exchange of artists between the two countries. Certainly he is correct in writing that "Other types of exchange . . . offer the greatest promise of creating a climate that improves the chance of peace." And his statement that the Iron Curtain is an "Iron Curtain of misunderstanding" is incontrovertible.

I know from my own recent experiences that a free exchange of our ideas, our science, and our art with the Russian people can help us find eventual lasting peace. Beyond these crucial, immediate days, the peoples of both our lands promise hope rather than despair.

JEROME HINES,
Metropolitan Opera.

New York, N.Y.

WHERE IDEAS COME FROM

HAVING LIVED IN the South for the past five years, I was especially interested in Lillian Smith's article "A Strange Kind of Love" [*SR*, Oct. 20]. Much of what Miss Smith says is undoubtedly true, but I think she misses an extremely important point—and one that has been widely missed in general—when she ignores the fact that for the Southerner the truly



"Nonsense! I never get the wrong number."

agonizing part of the conflict is not so much between the races as it is between the generations.

The typical segregationist in the South, I would submit, has never thought about dehumanizing the Negro because the Negro was already dehumanized for him. The idea of Negro inferiority was instilled into him since childhood by his parents, his grandparents, their minister, his teachers, the mayor of the town, the sheriff, and in short by every single person he was ever taught to respect and admire since the day he was born. That the Negro should have equal civil rights would, under other circumstances, be a comparatively easy idea for him to buy; what hurts is coming to the realization, as the Yankees would have him do, that all the people he has been taught to respect and admire since childhood are *wrong*. Many of my acquaintances in the North seem to think that all they are asking the white Southerner to do is make a simple choice between right and wrong. Far more important for an understanding of the situation is that they are asking the Southerner to reject so much of what he has been *taught* to be true.

All this is of course a truism, and there will be many who feel it goes without saying. What surprises me, however, is that it is so often discounted by authors attempting to understand the situation in the South today. Any reader who doubts its validity, or who in any way tends to underestimate the tremendous power of parental authority, could perhaps gain an insight into the matter by imagining himself to be a visitor from Mars, curious to know why, for example, most of the people in the U.S. are Christians, whereas most of the people in Egypt are Moslems.

There can be no doubt that "the South-

ern way of life" is disappearing, but those who would hasten the process should at least realize what kind of a force they are up against.

G. ALAN ROBISON.

Cleveland, O.

THE PACE OF SCIENCE

DR. ALBERT SZENT-GYORGYI's guest editorial "Science, Man, and Politics" [*SR*, Oct. 20] is the most concise yet comprehensive statement of the three historical eras of science that I have ever read.

On one page he has compressed the essence of scientific progress from Thales in the fifth century B.C. to Becquerel in the last years of the nineteenth—truly a remarkable summation.

The cataclysm that shattered the concepts of "classical science" has been graphically told by Henry Adams, in his famous "Education" when he wrote that "the man of science must have been sleepy indeed, when, in 1898, Mme. Curie threw on his desk the metaphysical bomb she called radium." What has followed, we know only too well, but even Adams's prophetic foresight failed to perceive that by the middle of the twentieth century we would have reached a point that he did not anticipate before the year 2000.

Dr. Szent-Gyorgyi is quite right in asserting that if scientists are not given more to say in matters of state policy, then the future is dangerous indeed.

For, unless the American people take heed of these warnings, then, to paraphrase Macaulay's dire allusion, some future traveler may take his stand upon the broken arches of Arlington bridge to photograph the ruins of the Capitol.

JOHN A. DRON, SR.

Ojai, Calif.



Something for Everybody

AS THE days grow shorter, the weather colder, and the scent of Academy Awards fills the air, the movie companies are beginning their annual barrage of big pictures saved just for this occasion. To an industry that is forever focused on the next film, a movie released only a few months back is almost ancient history—ancient enough, at any rate, to be forgotten by Awards time. Since Academy nominations demonstrably mean cash in the bank for the nominees, the new pattern is to release studio hopefuls in Los Angeles and perhaps one or two other major cities, but hold back their main distribution until after the Academy members have delivered up their deliberations. What this means is that readers in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles are likely to see the pictures discussed in these columns during the next few months just about the time they are reviewed. Less favorably placed but no less avid film fanciers may have to wait quite a while. Fortunately, *ars longa est*.

High among the current contenders (in certain strategic cities) is the protean Peter Ustinov's adaptation of "Billy Budd," which credits as its source the play by Louis O. Coxe and Robert H. Chapman rather than the novel by Herman Melville. To be sure, the Messrs. Coxe and Chapman fashioned for the stage a taut and dramatic exegesis of Melville's mystic philosophy; in Hollywood parlance, they had "licked" the story. It is just possible, however, that by going back to the original, Ustinov might have "licked" it still further into better screen shape. As it is, the film alternates between scenes of high action and spectacular beauty aboard an eighteenth-century British frigate, and scenes all too palpably studio-made in which the cast stands about discussing knotty problems in ethics. Melville articulated his ethical considerations into the development of his story handily enough (indeed, they were central to it); in this screen version, they often appear both intrusive and inconclusive. The climactic summary court-martial, with its examination of the differences between justice and law, is in fact so very summary that Billy seems to have been whisked off to the gallows with virtually no trial at all.

Another difficulty, posed by both the book and the play, is the inability of today's sophisticated audiences to accept a character as all good or all evil, all black or all white. Terence

Stamp, as Billy, gets around this somewhat by playing with an open-faced honesty and simplicity that make the lad's unblemished virtues appear the product of a natural naïveté. Robert Ryan's Claggart, on the other hand, smacks of nineteenth-century melodrama—all smiles and smirks and knitted eyebrows, and carefully measured menace in his every speech. It is a performance that Ustinov, as director, might possibly have modulated if he were not so concerned with the fussy details of his own Captain Vere—a role, incidentally, that he never quite seems to master. He is soft when he should be commanding, blubbery when he should be stern. Stout and unshaven, he is almost the antithesis of the precise, logical, soul-wracked captain of the *Avenger* that Melville drew. Indeed, either of his underlings, John Neville or Paul Rogers, might have cut a more likely figure in the role.

This is not to declare "Billy Budd" a disaster area. Far from it. Ustinov, as producer, director, co-author, and star,

has aimed high. He has earnestly tried to encompass Melville's purpose into his screenplay, and has permitted no compromise to soften the edge of Billy's tragedy. He has mounted his production handsomely, and Robert Krasker's black-and-white photography of men crawling the rigging of a ship under full sail is not easily forgotten. And he has invited an almost uniformly excellent cast to compete with him for scene after scene. He may have fallen short of his target, but the effort to reach it is admirable.

"What Happened to Baby Jane?" sets out, on the other hand, to do considerably less, but achieves its goals with something breathlessly close to perfection. Quite simply, it is a shocker—a shocker in the best Hitchcock tradition; and at the same time a superb showcase for the time-ripened talents of two of Hollywood's most accomplished actresses, Bette Davis and Joan Crawford. Scenes that, in lesser hands, would verge on the ludicrous simply crackle with tension—or, as in the shots of Miss Davis dancing raptly on a crowded beach, they are filled with unbearable pathos.

Tempting though it be to fling all the bouquets at these long-reigning favorites, no small part of the credit be—
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