

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Independence of Solitude

THANK YOU for your editorial, "Memories of A.E.S." [SR, July 31]. Emerson must have had someone like Adlai Stevenson in mind when he wrote:

It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion—it is easy in solitude to live after your own; but the great man is he who, in the midst of the world, keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

EDWARD H. DARE.

Glenbrook, Conn.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For other commentaries on Adlai Stevenson, see page 43.

Engineers and Morality

ONE PARTICULAR ARTICLE stood out in your issue of July 31. It was Seymour Melman's, "Our Depleted Society: Behind the Mask of Success." That a professor of industrial engineering would have such a great concern for such crucial moral issues indicates that there is still some hope.

Other engineers now have a model that their profession can gladly emulate. Too bad we don't have more like him right now.

JOHN P. KOWAL.

Buffalo, N.Y.

SO IT MAY BE a whimper after all. "Our Depleted Society" as seen by Professor Melman may expire from functional malnutrition before it has a chance to make the bang.

MRS. FRANK DUINO.

Index, Wash.

Appearance and Reality

WHAT A RELIEF to come across someone who attacks a problem directly, draws conclusions logically, and expresses them lucidly, as Professor Henry Steele Commager did in his article "A Historian Looks at Our Political Morality" [SR, July 10].

Most of us have lost our critical capacity. We no longer examine things objectively.

Somewhere along the line we decided to accept appearance for reality. If we are told the U.S. is fighting for freedom, it *is*. If we are told we offer equal civil rights to all in this country, then we *do*. When some tooth-paste says it will ensure a happy love life via white teeth, sales go up.

Deluged by illusionary articles, ads, and pictures, we sink back into our easy chairs and unthinkingly give our stamp of approval.

Mr. Commager's article must be appreciated; truth is rare.

MARGARET JOAN NORRIS.

Staten Island, N.Y.

Poetry or Puttering?

YOUR LISTING of John Ciardi as poetry editor is obviously meant as a joke. If any of your readers retained any doubts about the humorous intent of this listing, they were pointedly disposed of when you published Mr. Ciardi's "Alphabetary." I got the dis-



"Congratulations! You're receiving the 100,000th ticket on this parkway."

tinct impression that Mr. Ciardi expected that we should consider such mangled glibberish poetry. Really!

The personal consideration that would allow the occasional printing of a short piece of so-called poetry in order to keep from wounding the heart of an old friend can, I am sure, be appreciated by most SR readers. But, please, not whole pagesful again.

And, please, do get a poetry editor. There are some of us who would like, from time to time, to come upon some poetry in your magazine.

W. L. GEORGE COLLINS.

Harlingen, Tex.

SINCE Mr. Ciardi took such a verbal beating over his piece about Los Angeles, may I offer a little soothing syrup? I like his "Alphabetary." I wish "B is for Bombers" could be inscribed on a coffee cup and served to Lyndon B. Johnson with every meal.

MISS LEOLA SOUTHWELL.

San Bernardino, Calif.

Is Space Black and White?

AT A FIRST superficial reading, Mrs. Joseph Silverman's letter to the editor in your issue of July 10, "First Things First," makes eminently good sense. "Of course," I said mentally, and went on to other pages.

But her words were working under the surface; subconsciously, her argument bothered me. It would seem that any conscientious, intelligent human being could find no argument with her contention that the conquest of space should be put aside until our own world has solved its monumental problems of disease, poverty, and ignorance.

And yet, is it so simple, so unrelievedly black and white? I'm afraid not. I strongly doubt that humanity, being human, will ever be free of problems that demand solution. Was it not, by Mrs. Silverman's reasoning, wrong for the Medicis and others to spend their resources on art and the fostering of an intellectual renaissance, when all

around them existed abysmal and almost totally ignored human misery?

We will, thank God, always have our Dr. Schweitzers and Dooleys, our Father Damiens, Helen Kellers, and Eleanor Roosevelts. But we will also have our dreamers and creators, and the Glenns and the Whites to implement their achievements. In short, we will probably, alas, always have human misery and people with the will, energy, and ability to combat it; we will also always have the spirit of adventure and those who must live it.

Moreover, who knows what may lie beyond the threshold of space? New problems, certainly, but perhaps as well the answers to some old ones. Human benefit often comes in unlooked-for-places. Queen Isabella's motives in backing Columbus seem to have been a mixture of a desire for riches and a love of adventure. Yet America became the Golden Door to the many people fleeing religious, economic, and social oppression.

Mrs. Silverman pleads in conclusion: "Please let us walk upright with dignity on earth before we fly into the wild blue yonder." It is a noble-sounding plea. But let us remember, Mrs. Silverman, that if his wings had been clipped, man might never have learned to fly.

JANET B. FISHER.

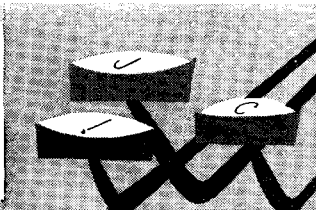
Kerhonkson, N.Y.

I WOULD simply like to look Mrs. Silverman squarely in the eye and ask her if she really and truly believes that a drastic cutback in the space program is the solution to our problems of inadequate food, housing, education, and health. Since this is not an either-or situation, it is unlikely that a cutting back of space expenditures by the government would magically call forth a blossoming of efforts to find solutions to these social problems merely because of the money saved.

WILLIAM VESELY,
University of Chicago.

Chicago, Ill.

Manner of Speaking



Dear Editor: How Do I Become a Writer? At least half the mail on any editorial desk yearns, implicitly or explicitly, toward the unanswerable and always pleading question, "How do I become a writer?" In its most common sub-form the question reads: "If my writing is not publishable, will you analyze it for me and tell me how to improve it?" And often, as if flashing a credit card in payment of the check, the writer adds: "I am a subscriber."

I mean to quarrel with our subscribers only on principle and only when I must, but I must in reason if the assumption is that a subscription buys not only the magazine but the personal services of the editors. Let me believe, rather, that SR is bargain enough at the price, without including the editors, who are, in any case, no bargain.

Neither are they teachers. If a writer seriously wants guidance, he should enroll in a workshop at the nearest university, extension service, writers' conference, or adult education center. If there is none available to him where he lives, I know of nothing he can do except, perhaps, to move. And if the reasons against moving are more compelling than the desire to be a writer, then that man has something more important in his life than his writing, and he would be well advised to go for what is most important to him. The writer who means to write will find his guidance, whatever it costs him. Nor will any substantial part of it come from an editor—not at least until he is well advanced in his own craft. About all the editor can do for the beginning writer is done when he buys a given piece or rejects it. If he buys it, he may very well offer some suggestions. If he rejects it, he will normally do so with a rejection slip, the essence of which is "Sorry—not for us."

In the mercy that a day's work may hope to earn, there is little more an editor can do about unpublishable manuscripts. It is out of the question to think of providing individual criticisms, and nothing can change that fact, no matter how yearningly the question is put. Some of the other most common sub-questions can, however, be answered with more or less standard information, and those I shall try to answer here.

Q. How do I go about submitting manuscripts for publication?

A. Legibly, and with a stamped self-addressed return envelope. Standard practice is to type the manuscript,

double-spaced, on regular typing paper. Put your name and address on each page. Write an accompanying letter, if you like, but it will serve no purpose: the writing must sell itself. Above all, if your ego cannot stand the thought of having your writing returned with a printed rejection slip, keep the manuscript at home. The editor does not hate your soul. But he will have before him baskets full of the work of equal souls, some of whom may be better writers. His job is not to carry on a correspondence with your soul but to get through those baskets and to find in them the manuscripts that speak to his soul and, as he hopes, to the souls of his readers.

Q. Will my manuscript be read by the editor himself?

A. Yes—as far as the first cliché. No self-respecting editor will willingly buy clichés and the first one is reason enough to stop his reading. He owes at least that much to the readers of his magazine. If you want the editor to read to the end, you need only make sure that you provide him with no cliché-marked stopping places.

Q. How do I break into print?

A. More or less as everyone else does—by submitting manuscripts, collecting rejection slips, and restudying the writing in the hope of improving it until your manuscripts begin to break down the resistance an editor is hired to have. Any one editor may be wrong, but when any considerable number of them have sent back your manuscripts with plain rejection slips, that total adds up to a kind of information any reasonable man can interpret.

Q. Where can I get an agent?

A. In the future—maybe. Until you have published a few things on your own you probably have nothing to offer an agent. He lives on 10 per cent of his authors' sales and 10 per cent of nothing is no return. Go the first mile on your own, and when you are ready for an agent he will find you.

THERE are people who advertise as agents but they generally make their living by charging you a reading fee, not from a percentage of your sales. The code of ethics of the American Society of Authors' Representatives forbids advertising, and it is SR policy to accept no advertising that offers to place for sale the manuscripts of unknown authors.

In general, too, an agent is not of much use to a poet. There are too few

paying markets for poetry, and their fees hardly invite agency interest. Any persevering poet can soon learn the possible outlets for poetry as thoroughly as an agent is likely to know them.

As with agents, so with publishing houses. There are vanity presses that publish at the author's expense, and all such must be approached with great caution. Their method of operation is legal enough, though it is ethically questionable when it involves flattering the writer beyond his merits in the hope of getting him to invest his money in a publication that will be ignored by all but his friends.

If you are in doubt about whether or not the agent or publisher is reputable, there is a simple test. Type out a batch of the worst possible writing you can bring yourself to commit, and send it off to what mystery-story fans call "the suspect." If he replies in nothing less than dithyrambs and panegyrics, duck: you have uncovered a pirate.

IF, on the other hand, you sneak back to his letter and reread it with long rapt pauses, and then turn to the carbon of the manuscript and begin to think that maybe you outdid yourself without really knowing it at first—then, ah then, son of man, you have invented no part of the mistake the human race may turn out to be, and the universe does continue to spin around you in the same motion that includes mind and talent and the sublimities of both, but as a writer you are beyond the furthest hope of love or mercy.

And though your other virtues are as the stars in the firmament—though you honor your parents, love your children, earn your paycheck, vote thoughtfully, and do not beat your wife or husband, as the case may be—though every civil merit shines in you, and though you yourself shine in society as a personage, yet, I submit, you have no business with editors, nor have they any with you.

Your soul remains as real, and as unreal, as any other, and the editor means it no disrespect. But your papers on his desk are a daily nuisance of which he must rid himself in the simplest way, and the simplest way is the rejection slip.

You may not like the form of that slip, and your ego may find in its impersonality a rebuff to the intensity with which you recognize your own individuality. Yet the rejection slip, though necessarily vacuous, is always sweetly worded. It is meant to convey no rancor. And properly understood, it does answer your question. You wanted to know what he thought of your manuscript and he has told you, impersonally, yes, but politely enough: he doesn't like it.

And that, alas, does happen to be one of the answers of which the universe is capable.

—JOHN CIARDI.