

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Sorensen's Dialogue

AS AN EXCHANGE student from Germany . . . I paid special attention to Theodore C. Sorensen's article, "A Dialogue with Bonn" [SR, May 20]. Mr. Sorensen's "suggestions for what might—but won't—be said" in a meeting between President Johnson and Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger of West Germany . . . showed that he is better informed about Germany than are many Americans. I only hope that both statesmen read this article and that Sorensen's suggestions come true.

HANS ULRICH KRIEGER,

Dubuque, Ia.

## Literary Northland

IN HER ARTICLE, "Is Canada Cultured?" [SR, Apr. 29], DuBarry Campau states that the only Canadian writers "certain to have been heard of beyond the borders" are Stephen Leacock and Mazo de la Roche. Apparently she has not heard of the poets Bliss Carmen and his cousin Charles G. D. Roberts; or Marshall Saunders — famed for *Beautiful Joe* — and L. M. Montgomery, creator of *Anne of Green Gables* (children's books, yes, but as famous and popular in their day as *The Bobbsey Twins*); or Morley Callaghan and Farley Mowat; not to mention Marshall McLuhan, among others.

Several internationally known writers, generally thought of as primarily Americans, were born or lived many years in Canada. Ernest Thompson Seton was born in England, lived in Canada during his early manhood (*Wild Animals I Have Known* has Toronto for the scene of several of its tales), and later became an American citizen although he called himself a Canadian. Willard Price and Thomas Costain were born and raised in Toronto; Will Durant was born in Quebec; and, if memory serves, A. J. Cronin was a Canadian minister before he wrote best sellers.

KATHARINE W. HELM,

Kneeland, Calif.

## Westmoreland's Views

N. C.'s EDITORIAL, "Patriotism and Vietnam" [SR, May 13], is both timely and extremely important . . .

I was very much dismayed, however, by the protective tone concerning our elected officials in power. The editorial failed to mention that President Johnson deliberately provided General Westmoreland with the opportunity to appear in a joint session of Congress to air his views—an unprecedented event during wartime in the history of this country . . . or that it is our President who has appointed the General as commander in Vietnam . . . or that our President is well aware of the views of the General.

General Westmoreland is where he is only because our elected officials have put him there. Does he deserve to be castigated for his views? The man who put the General in power and brought him here to serve whatever motives he had for doing so bears the responsibility.

H. D. KALOUSTIAN, M. D.

Cambridge, Mass.



"Disregard Plan 'B' — I just saw it in a movie."

## Over Forty

GOODMAN ACE's column, "An Old Story" [TOP OF MY HEAD, May 6], strikes close to home. Perhaps one of this dynamic nation's most paramount problems is to salvage the experience and brains of citizens past forty or fifty and make it possible for them to have income and live with pride in doing something worthwhile, if not profitable.

How ironic life is for American senior citizens, especially those who have not stayed in the rut or groove that they landed in during their twenties or thirties. Scientists are prolonging our lives by the year. Still, anyone over forty is too old for almost all the jobs available—although I sincerely believe that most of those over forty will do better and stay longer than their juniors.

DONALD L. MOORE,

Decatur, Ga.

## An Old Watch Trick

I WAS RATHER surprised to find as good a historian as William Henry Chamberlin in his article, "John Stuart Mill: Independent Radical" [SR, May 20], reviving as gospel truth the discredited story of how Charles Bradlaugh, "a militant unbeliever . . . practiced the rather corny trick of publicly taking out his watch and challenging God to strike him dead in ten minutes"—if God existed.

This was a generic tale, going back well into the eighteenth century, and had been attached to many people in France, Great

Britain, and America before Bradlaugh's religious and political enemies tried to hang it on him in the 1870s. Bradlaugh's repeated and vociferous denials, however, were so ineffective that in 1880 he filed suit for libel against the Tory *British Empire*, which had resuscitated the story in its campaign to prevent him from taking the seat in Parliament to which his constituents in Northampton had elected him.

But the Victorian world in the Seventies so buzzed with the story that shortly after the brash young Bernard Shaw arrived in England he terrified a bachelor party of young professional men by announcing that if Bradlaugh had not really issued such a challenge he ought to have done so, and that since he, Shaw, "happened to share Mr. Bradlaugh's views as to the absurdity of the belief in these violent interferences with the order of nature by a short-tempered and thin-skinned supernatural deity," he would himself try the experiment.

As he recalled the experience almost fifty years later when he recounted it in the preface to *Back to Methuselah* (1921), his production of his own watch precipitated such consternation in the group that, in spite of his urging "the pious to trust in the accuracy of their deity's aim with a thunderbolt," his host intervened and forbade the completion of the experiment.

ARTHUR H. NETHERCOTT,  
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Oxford University Press



## French Novelists of Today

By HENRI PEYRE. Professor Peyre's *The Contemporary French Novel*, published in 1955, became a standard work on modern literature. But much has happened in French fiction since the mid-fifties. Some figures such as Proust, Malraux, and Green have grown in stature; others, such as Gide, are now viewed more critically; the existentialist novel is in decline; and the "new" novelists of the fifties have been challenged by even "newer" writers. These changes, and many others, are reflected in this revised and expanded edition of an important book in French studies.

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By ARNOLD TOYNBEE. Twenty-four people or couples who made an impression on Dr. Toynbee are described by him in a book that sheds new light on a number of well-known people, and a very warm light on its author. The characters include public figures such as Nehru, Smuts, and T. E. Lawrence, whom he merely met, but in interesting circumstances. Close personal friends and relations are portrayed with affection and admiration and in an entertaining manner. \$7.50

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## MEN AND THE MATTERHORN

By GASTON RÉBUFFAT; translated by ELEANOR BROCKETT. Gaston Rébuffat, the great Alpine guide, relates his own and other's experiences on the Matterhorn. In reviewing the French edition, the *Appalachian Club Journal* wrote: "What is peculiarly the author's own is the intuitive grasp and style of creating a mountaineering book, the subtly rhythmic and poetic interplay between plate and text, rock and idea, engraving and aerial photograph . . . snow and shade, sunrise and the apprehensive joy of climbing." \$12.50

## THE ROLE OF THE CHINESE ARMY

By JOHN GITTINGS. This especially timely book examines the transformation of the Chinese People's Liberation Army since its victory in 1949. The author also discusses the theory of political control and the mechanics of revolutionary mobilization. The civil war and the Korean War, plus the connection between military policy and Sino-Soviet relations, are studied. Concluding chapters examine the character and status of the military leadership from 1949 to the present. (*Royal Institute of International Affairs.*)

\$8.50



# Books

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## LITERARY HORIZONS

### Students of American Culture

THE LATE Perry Miller, in the two volumes of *The New England Mind* and in various texts that he edited and interpreted, did more than any other man to compel a widespread reevaluation of Puritanism. Having read thousands of sermons and theological treatises, he knew what he was talking about, and he destroyed a multitude of superficial generalizations. As a historian he believed that ideas are important, and he set out to discover exactly what the early settlers of Massachusetts and Connecticut believed.

Miller did not accept Puritan theology, nor, so far as I can make out, any other theology; he was a thoroughgoing skeptic. But he respected the Puritans as thinkers, and he regarded them more highly than he did their successors who moderated their teachings. In the nineteenth century, he believed, "a double disaster" occurred: "on the one side, the splendor of the Protestant conception of life as an ordeal was watered down to a comfortable moralism of good cheer; on the other, the meanness, the brutality, which Calvinism always recognized in the ordinary conduct of Christians, was covered over with a gauze of sentimentality."

*Nature's Nation* (Harvard, \$7.50) is a collection of essays and lectures that Miller wrote in the later years of his life. The first six or seven are by-products of his studies of Puritanism, and they show how his mind worked. As he comes down to the nineteenth century his tone grows sharper, and there is a ruthless analysis of the shortcomings of Theodore Parker. He sees the weaknesses of Emerson, too, especially the vestiges of Boston Unitarian snobbishness. (Speaking of Emerson's condemnation of Jacksonian democracy, Miller writes: "A man need not be a transcendentalist to find this ill thing disgusting; he need only to

have gone to Harvard.") Yet in the end he does Emerson justice.

He also writes about Thoreau and Melville, and there are two brilliant essays that have not appeared before in book form—"An American Language" and "Romance and the Novel." In the former Miller traces the development of the "plain style" from Thomas Hooker through Melville and Thoreau to Mark Twain. (*Moby Dick*, as he admits, doesn't fit neatly into his theory; but he argues that the plain style is at the heart of it.) In "Romance and the Novel" he discusses Cooper, Melville, Hawthorne, the local-color writers, James, Howells, Mark Twain, Hemingway, and Faulkner. The final essay is amusingly and pointedly entitled "Sinners in the Hands of a Benevolent God."

Miller was a specialist and an influential one, but he was not merely that, as this volume shows. He read widely in the whole field of American literature, and he was alert and unconventional as well as scholarly. It is a pity that he did not live to complete his study of the American mind.

Robert Sklar's *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Last Laocoön* (Oxford, \$8.50) is the best critical discussion of this writer that I have seen. We have had two excellent biographies of Fitzgerald, by Arthur Mizener and Andrew Turnbull, and there have been several special studies of his work; but Sklar is the first critic to offer a comprehensive analysis of Fitzgerald's development as a writer. He discusses everything—the novels, the volumes of collected short stories, the stories that have not been collected, the available manuscripts—and he finds a surprising degree of coherence in the whole body of work.

Sklar begins by saying: "Of important American novelists, F. Scott Fitzgerald was the last to grow up believing in the genteel romantic ideals that pervaded late nineteenth-century American culture." Fitzgerald's early work, Sklar ar-

- 27 "Nature's Nation," by Perry Miller; "F. Scott Fitzgerald," by Robert Sklar; "Jeffersonianism and the American Novel," by H. M. Jones
- 28 Preview of Toronto
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