

Emanating from Idlewild, Fountainhall Road, Aberdeen, under the guidance of Douglas Webster: being a contribution to the Michael Rosenblum mailing.

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 EDITORIAL HARANGUE, omitted, I hope, in future. The Gentlest Art would, naturally, refer to letters in general, & without letters there can be no Gentlest Art. Wherefore, let everyone disagree vehemently with something he sees in this sheet, & the address is as above: or if some constructive person were to feel like starting a new argument, airing a particular peevish problem, dislike or grudge, this should be included in the periodic letter to "Idlewild". As Julian Parr suggests, anything as long (but not necessarily as formal) as an article - or a thesis - would be welcome. A description in the sweetest prose or most passionate verse of... say, how one puts the cat out at night... or has prophetic dreams à la Dunne... would come under the heading of Interest to me, & might be fun. Anything goes, you understand: a slogan kindly supplied by one Medhurst being--Fans Flourish on Palme (that's Flame) and Fury.

Thanks are due to Julian Parr for going to the trouble to provide Anton Ragatzy's problem; & to these two, DRSmith & RGMedhurst for offering to help in future. To Michael Rosenblum in particular, for what the Burke feelingly calls "the time, sweat & energy" spent in duplicating such trivia as farmaggory.

It would be vain to point out that the present stencilling is (will be) bad, for I've never cut a stencil in my life before (besides, I managed to stave a couple of fingers yesterday - these Gordon Highlanders are such rough players). * * * Please, gentlemen, let there be argifying a-plenty.

To start off, one known to none of you--a Professor here who shall be nameless. When asked to contribute to a fund to bring well-known lecturers to Aberdeen, the two named being - note - Drs. Olaf Stapledon & Hugh Nicol, says he:-

"But I am not convinced that it is the province of the A.U.S.A./Aberdeen Univ. Scientific Association/ to invite lecturers on social-political subjects, and I feel less desire to encourage such action when I notice that the lecturers who are apparently most in favour are men drawn from what is generally known as the left wing of politics."

Press comments on this view (one of two of which follow) were so mild that I fear I did wrong in writing the poor man a couple of pages around the subject.

QUOTE JGAC: "I must needs pass no remarks, derogatory or otherwise, anent Prof. Nameless (I've always wanted to use that word anent, & I've probably used it wrong now). /Shades of Ted Carnell! No - he gave me a guarded but entirely satisfactory testimonial, so he must remain the dear old pal he's always been, viper or no viper. But he shouldn't say rude things about the dear old AUSA - nay, nay."

AND DRB: "I deduce from your letter that he is a man of pronounced political views."

AND MIV: "...And every time we sit listening to the blighter, & Cardno & I take turns at guessing from his text-book in front of us what precise words he's going to use next, I think 'You and your leftist lecturers...!'"

The following extracts are rather amusing & might be said to be essentially human.
 FROM DAVE MCILWAIN: "By the way, I did not pass up your R&F amikono. I mailed him the second issue of GG plus a delightful letter, carefully planned & worded so as to make him dive immediately for his cheque book, and telegraph me a life subscription to Gargo."
 /This written under the stairs, during an air-raid in October/

FROM RAMBLACKLAW of the R.A.F.--"I received the copy of G.G., thanks a lot, only yesterday. It's been lying in H.Q. since leave & it was only two days ago I was informed. Yesterday I wended my weary way to aforementioned place & after two hours or so questioning (perfect yank style), signing of papers & proving I was myself - although I had begun to wonder if I was - I was handed a large envelope & told frankly to beat it & not waste the staff's time. I suppose they meant time in which they played cards & flirted with the WAAFLs. * * * By the way, the very witty following letter was enclosed:-

Dear Sir,

Doug. Webster has asked me to send you a sample copy of Gargoyle, which infamous publication is what is known as 'S.F. fan-magazine'. I suspect ulterior motives but cannot say any more. Perhaps he is trying to make a fan out of you, wicked fellow. Don't let him, hang on to your sanity, like grim death. I apologise in advance for the poorish hectographing, but the request came in rather late when all the most legible copies had been mailed. I hope you had no difficulty in reading it.

With best wishes, Sincerely yours, David Mellwain. "

ANTON RAGANZY comes out with a problem for scientific detectives: "The following is a collection of relevant facts, from which you are requested to make a feasible theory. The writer offers you his own theory next month. * * * ". valves are more numerous in the veins of the lower limbs, those in the arms stand next in point of numbers, while there are few valves in the veins of internal organs." (Black's Medical Dictionary, p.807) This statement gives no reason for the difference in the character of the veins of the limbs, of the internal organs with regard to the frequency of valves within them. Your problem is to find the complete reason for this unexplained fact. To do this, one must first know what valves are. Ibid, p. 807, we find the following:- "...most veins are provided with valves similar in structure to the...valves of the heart, & consisting each of two segments or pouches, which lie flat against the wall of the vein as the blood passes in the proper direction, or meet & close the passage whenever the blood tends to flow backwards..." The reason for this tendency is given in Dent's Medical Dictionary, p.590, as follows:- "...but when the direction of the flow is against gravity, as in the limbs, it is obvious that the presence of valves is advantageous..." Gravity resists the flow of blood upwards, & the valves within the veins are for the purpose of compensating this resistance. As the arms & legs are usually erect, & so within them the blood flows vertically up the veins, the great number of valves contained in the veins is justified. But the abdomen & thorax are also erect, and the blood below the heart also flows upwards. The veins in this section of the body should also have valves to oppose the effects of gravity in the same way as the valves in the limb-veins. * * * Before trying to explain this strange question, one must have definite knowledge as to which veins in the trunk have, & which veins have not, valves. The following extract comes from the Illustrated Family Doctor, p.694:- "...the veins of the...limbs are specially well provided with valves, but the spinal cord veins, the branches of the portal vein, and the brain veins, have no valves at all..." The portal vein, according to Black's Medical Dictionary, p.303:- "...begins in the...lower end of the rectum & from this point...into an inferior mesenteric vein upon the left & a superior mesenteric vein upon the right side...The latter...sinks into the liver... (p.453):- "...After the blood has circulated...it is emptied into the vena cava through the hepatic veins... (p.311):- "...this opens into the heart..." * * * The veins leading from the brain to the heart will not need valves, as gravity favours the blood's flow downwards. With regard to the veins of the spinal cord, all veins above the heart will need no valves, & actually have none, but the ones leading up to the heart do need valves, but do not have them. * * * The position is now:- (1)a: Veins of the head, neck & shoulders, and of the spinal cord above the heart, do not need valves because of the downward flow of blood to the heart. They have none. b: Veins of the arms & legs need valves because of the upward flow of the blood contained in them, it being against gravity. They have valves. (2)a: Veins of the spinal cord below the heart need valves because of the resistance caused by gravity's influence. They have none. b: Veins of the portal system & other veins of the trunk need valves, as the flow of blood within them is upwards. They have none. * * * The first two statements are very reasonable, but the two latter are obviously unreasonable. See if you can explain this." ...And if Harry Kay or some other embryo medicine-man has nothing to say for himself, in this respect, an immediate vote of censure will be passed on him (them). E.J. Carnoll, (11:3:40): "Strange that you should have the idea that McCann was Campbell. I have been convinced about it ever since John W suddenly dropped the Solar System series

My reasoning was this: at the 10th. article "Atomic Generator" (Nov. 1937), JWC had not then exhausted the series. He was just tapping his favorite theme, atomic power. McCann has carried that theme on with "Ignition Point", July 1938; "Stored Power", Dec. '38; "Atomic Ringmaster", March '40; "Hot Pilgrimage", May, & now "Shhhh! Don't Mention It!" August. All these / plus umpteen letters & signed & unsigned 'fillers' by McCann, & editorials by Campbell / are on the atomic principal. The only snag, if it can be called such, is that McCann's first article was in June 1937 when when JWC was still writing. At that, I'm still convinced that they are one and the same." ...The two of us, separately, seem to have entertained this idea for more than 5 years now, & though I've never seen any other mention of it we can hardly be the only ones, since it's so obviously true. Of course, "Stress-Fluid" in June '37 was under McCann's name because JWC already had an article & a Stuart story in the same issue. The old, old question of pseudonyms. DRETTI, coming to his senses after writing the following, remarks to his own amazement: "And that, it suddenly seems to me, will do, solace my conscience [?] with the thought that I have tried to produce some argumentative subject for you." ...To wit---

"I sing the song of the great clean guns, that belch forth death at will, Ah, but the wailing mothers, the lifeless forms and still."

(Quoted in "World's End" by Upton Sinclair. Well worth reading, by far his best novel I think.) In these lines is demonstrated my theoretical attitude to warfare, the attraction for the "cold impassioned beauty of a great machine" outweighing the pathos of the second line. When Mussolini made his widely-quoted crack that "Words are very beautiful things, but bombs, aeroplanes, machine-guns are more beautiful still" he was unconsciously giving voice to an attitude which is one of the most potent anti-peace reasons of our mechanical civilization, the fascination that a powerful machine holds for many of us. A fighting aeroplane, a destroyer, a battleship or a gun are instances of the harnessing by men of enormous natural forces, of enslaving to their will giants which could destroy him with unimaginable ease. I have seen a rotating bar in a machine driven by perhaps five horsepower mangle a boy's arm without faltering in its rotation until the flying hand of the operator cut off the power. When there are forces a thousand times greater bound up in a few tons of man-shaped metal, completely obedient to the whim of the controller, the man himself is intoxicated with a sense of his own power, soberly, unconsciously intoxicated, but the feeling is there. And as for the slaughter and shambles that is the purpose of these machines, they are reduced to puffs of smoke miles away, or even in infantry engagements to the cessation of movement of a small distant moving object, matters easily eliminated from any disposition to dwell on them by a training intended to eliminate the effects of personal risk & discomfort. Couple with this the urge of every man to be better than his fellow, even if it is at dumb endurance of agony, and the prospect for a universal pacifist outlook and hatred of warfare is slight." * * * And prefacing this - if a sibilantly careless mind may turn everything upside-down - we find:- "In your remarks on your status as a conscientious objector you seem to dwell on the bayonet-sticking aspect of war, but I can hardly see this as a basic reason, though I once knew a chap who fainted at the mere mention of blood. / Boy! He'd have curled up in a hole & passed away if he'd set eyes upon the gore-bespattered hunk of flesh that was Webster after yesterday's match! / I have little enthusiasm for cold steel work myself even in theory, but the impersonal mechanical perfection of modern weapons seems to me quite different."I don't know if other minds, unused as I am to resisting basic impulses, think of this as I do; but it should make interesting controversy: I'm sorry, Smith, that it's emerged so chopped-up from the mill.

ENCORE THE HOLLANDER: "Incidentally, I'm a non-swinger these days. Find myself hypnotised by the genius of Sibelius, Chopin & Beethoven. Also Scriabin - whose music possesses an alien, bizarre, orchid-in-hothouse quality that makes my spine do things it didn't order. Swing is predominantly technical flashiness & extemporised brilliance superimposed upon a monotonous 4-in-a-bar. It is devoid of any meaning as far as I can see - apart from certain sexual significances which one can rake out with psycho-analysis. But it can be good fun."

By a stroke of luck, a certain proud possessor of an L.R.A. & sophisticated acquaintance of Dylan Thomas obligingly tears this to bits - there's service for you! Thus---
"Even if I agreed with your friend's opinion I would maintain that he cannot establish it on such reasons as he has given. Briefly the use of jazz is functional - it is good to dance to & sing to, & I think he ought to have discovered this. We use it to relax on - & it does well to relax on. There is no alternative in this case except the tea-shop music you might hear in Lyon's Corner House. And Heaven help him if he prefers that."
"Least of all does jazz have technical brilliance. Surely his ears have let him down badly here, & his imagination got well out of hand. The only jazz I have ever heard with technical brilliance was the Hot Club's playing in Paris. They record their extemporization & they are extremely fine artists. But extremely rare too. Jazz doesn't need technical brilliance to justify its existence. And its sexual significance is in my mind a virtue rather than a vice. Has he ever thought of & felt the sexual significance of Scriabin, Chopin & the rest - & stranger still - of Bach & Schubert. All art is connected with this most strong of human instincts & to condemn jazz because of its more apparent connection is taking the wind out of his own sails. Bach etc. are more than sexual but the fact that they are - and deeply so - makes his condemnation on that ground utterly fatuous."Wow!--As sweet an uppercut as I ever did see! I think Julian Parr will appreciate it if I take time off to laugh gently up my sleeve; but who will join the fray? - the Burke, perhaps? the Smith, who used to be interested in swing? or Eric the Hop, who, I'm told, recently converted me to swing?....

JFBURKE: "The sentiments expressed in the town today /after the ghastly dow had rained from heaven in L'pool's worst raid/are much on the same lines as those on which you commended - why don't we do this to the Germans, etc.? I'm sick & fed up of my countrymen, & become more & more certain that the British race is one of the most conceited & decadent in the world."

DRSMITH (that man again): "I fear I regard psycho-analysis as purely & simply a matter for satire".

The long-awaited letter from ERIC HOPKINS was all that one could wish a letter to be, despite a lack of the fashionable political lampoonings (that's asking for it!) How to be found - as certain old friends down Hampshire way might do well to note - at 75 Pondfield Road, Dagenham, Essex, says Yorick cheerfully:-

" 'There's no place like Home' they say,
How lovely is the bricks and paint!
'There's no place like Home' they say;
And Damme, now there Ain't!

On October 8th., 1940, at the early & even unearthly hour of 1.45 a.m., in the course of the usual German visitation upon London, a ruddy great product of Krupps, or our erstwhile Allied pet, Skoda, landed top close to the back of my house/R.I.P.../ which instantly registered its indignation at the disturbance by dropping its ceilings, knocking out its windows &, partly, frames, lifting the doors from their customary attitude upon the hinges & door-frames to a more or less recumbent posture, and by acting the poltergeist in general with the more nobile of the family's property. Even the shelter was in a lousy mood for it batted myself & companion in peril with its firmly fixed door. The net result of this, admirably recorded a la communique as an 'incident', is the somewhat homeless condition of yours truly & his pater & mater, big bruvver being in the Middle East (quite probably now learning the words that the Greeks have for everything), and the dawg having been elevated unto the canine Nirvana on the day of the incident, it being impractical to trot him with us from pillar to post. Just when we wuz making the shelter comfortable, too!"

READERS' SECTION (given over to letters from our public): E.g. Julian Parr--"Personally, I still think a leading article, if you can get one, would be better, each issue being divided into three portions - article, comments upon last issues' article, and extracts from letters. Say two pages for the first, & a page each for the other two." And R.G. McDhurst--"Quite a sound scheme, if you can find your controversionists. So many of the old bickerers who made the fan-mags ring, like Harry Kay, seem to have just disappeared off the face of the earth." /Well? If I were an o.b. I should resent that noisily..../