

Being some fragments from the letters on controversial subjects received from YOU (I hope) by Douglas Webster, "Idlewild", Fountainhall Road, Aberdeen; per the courtesy of JMR.

I had thought of saying some nicely chosen words here, about the snow and fan life in general, and the letters which have been arriving from the UK, and the letters and magazines which have not been arriving from the USA, and that useful game, rugby, which has allowed me to stay at home for three weeks on end, and so on; but it would all take up too much space, and one much better qualified to hold your attention is---

MAURICE K. HANSON, who says: "I can't say that I sympathise with Johnny B's denunciation of the British people. I was once as indignant as he that the common herd should be interested in beer & football to the exclusion of most other things. No doubt it would be better if they paid more attention to sociology & culture but after eighteen months of knocking about in a fantastic variety of situations with the British male I can't seriously grumble about him as a person. A few of my associates I positively detest, the majority I find tolerable in reasonable doses, & a few I like a lot. From what I see of him on the screen & in the fan-mags I've no reason to believe I should appreciate the American bunch any more, nor from personal experience do I think appreciably higher of the French variety. Beyond that I have no personal experience & can make no practical comments - but does Johnny think that French, German, American or Japanese politicians are any more sincere & reputable than our own He does not! Here I definitely side with him against DRS - we hold that politicians as a whole do not work for peace, security and friendship, & I think that though they are doubtless only human, they might do a much better job than they always have done, by showing some desire for co-operation. /, does he think that America is any more broad-minded than this country when it passes the Eighteenth Amendment, turns up its nose at Bertrand Russell & shudders at the sound of the word "Radical", & does he know that if the Germans have produced Goethe, Nietzsche, Beethoven etc. we have produced Elgar, Purcell, Locke, Hume, Shakespeare, Stuart Mills, Newton, Turner, Keats, Swift...(and Stapledon!)"

... Which is most reasonable & most reasonably stated. However, I think that (as is inevitable when I quote only parts of letters), you have misunderstood one or two of JFB's points - Smith managed to misunderstand most of them, so I've chosen to miss out his remarks. I wrote Johnny along these lines: result---

JFBurke: "Agree completely with your views on British people. They are not rogues; I sometimes wonder if I don't prefer rogues to fools - at least the rogues know what they're doing, and most of them are working in accordance with an obscure but sincere moral code of their own. It is the tendency to "go with the crowd" that has produced the type of unconstructive, lazy mind that is now associated with the British. We have had great men, and there is no reason why we shouldn't have more, but so long as the people are so apathetic and so antagonistic to anything that may shake them out of their apathy (and even in fighting a war, however strenuously, they seem apathetic) we aren't likely to see very much of value coming out of these islands. It isn't really antagonism, since antagonism is a positive feeling, and people who are only half-awake can't be positive about anything except that they don't feel like getting up."

... Another point which was perhaps not made clear is that the Burke does not belittle English men of science & the arts as compared with the German samples, but considers the Germans, having produced the latter, are not simply a race of barbarians. Which they aren't.

J. MICHAEL ROSENBLUM (subtitled, British fans look the other way - this is for American eyes): "How about you slipping a couple of lines in the next G.A. asking American fan editors if they would be so good as to send you a copy of their mag - either direct to you or with mine (& I'll send it on). At a guess, Bob Tucker, F.J. Ackerman & M. Manning will be most likely to oblige." Well, US editors, what about it? You receive The G.A., & if you slipped another copy of your magazine into JMR's envelope it wouldn't cost you extra postage; if also you included a short note sometime, I'd be glad to do you any favour I can. I remember writing a number of you last year, asking for terms, & the reason I haven't heard from you may be the same as the reason no promags have been arriving for the

last couple of months. In which case I can but weep....and hope.

And now comes the conclusion of ANTON RAGATZY's problem in the first issue. Turn back to the Dec. G.A. - if you still have it around - and see how well Theory fits the facts. Thereafter - why not try disproving it?

"First step: Arms & legs are quite normal, and are correctly supplied with veins equipped with valves suitable for their upright position. Therefore---Arms & legs must be vertical. Second step: Head, neck & shoulders are also suited to vertical position, as, although veins contain no valves, the blood flows downwards. Third step: The portal system, the spinal cord & other internal veins are not supplied with valves, & are not suitable (to the best advantage) for the vertical position. Therefore---These veins must be placed either in an upside down position (which is obviously impractical), or horizontal. The horizontal position would solve the problem of the lower trunk, while not out of order with the absence of valves in the veins of the head, neck & shoulders, as the blood within them just as well flow horizontally as downwards. The limbs will still be vertical, & the human figure would be in a crouching position, on all fours. This is the only conclusion that can be drawn from the facts presented. * * *

At first, one will take this statement just as a matter of fact, but wait -- here we have a machine, or an instrument, equipped for a natural position of crouching, with no provisions for a vertical, upright position. If I came across an instrument, say a microscope, which worked best in one certain position, and, in all other positions it may be placed in, although it still performed its duties, suffered from various complaints, & it had no provisions for the alleviation of the complaints (although such provisions would not interfere with its intended position, & would be quite simple to install), I should come to the conclusion that the maker of the instrument, whoever he was, had intended it for use in the first position -- wouldn't you? One or two more conclusions which may be drawn from the above, with regard to complaints of the veins, namely Piles, Varicose veins, & others. All these are produced by distention of the veins, produced by the weight of the column of blood in the body! Also: "...if a man stands quite still the blood tends to accumulate in the veins of the legs & he is liable to faint from failure of the supply to his brain..." (Animal Biology, Haldane & Huxley, p. 100) * * * You want further proof? All right then, listen to this:- The position of the ribs in a man standing upright is horizontal. The veins between the ribs (intercostal veins) are not rising, against gravity, when they travel from breast bone to spinal vertebrae. If you take my advice, & place the man on all fours, his ribs will be vertical & the blood will flow up the veins between the ribs, & the veins will need valves. Extract from Dent's Medical Dictionary, p.590:- "...and the intercostal veins of man, as in animals, are well equipped with valves..." "

In the midst of a postcard which contains, besides date & two addresses (his & mine), no less than 152 words, quoth GEORGE MEDHORST: "Thanks immensely for your huge letter, which must have left you pretty thoroughly exhausted. Wild disagreement on numerous points, but that must be for the future. Hurrah! It's coming, gentlemen, it's coming -- wait for it! /my first & last fan-mag, a gentle little sheet called 'The Snag', whose production is dependent on two circumstances: (a) whether Michael will duplicate it, (b) whether Michael can duplicate it. If it does appear, that Youd will probably burst. Other people infuriated and/or mortally wounded should include Johnny, Michael, yourself & The Smith. Quite a good bag, what? . . . London's a filthy mess. View from our window alone is heart-breaking." Boycott the Snag - an awful rag! (JFB collapses, foaming at the mouth.)

And why! here he is again - THE BURKE produces out of his hat one of these analyses I like to see, comparing two of the arts. It wasn't meant for the G.A. at all, but who cares? -- "It occurs to me that Dave's pal Sibelius could take some lessons from T.S.Eliot. What I mean is that he should appreciate the value of tradition, and realise that progress can only be made with the backing of a good knowledge of what has gone before. Eliot, as a poet, has made startling experiments, but never loses his dignity; most of his imitators produce nothing but unmusical nonsense, being unable to appreciate that mere newness is not worth achieving on its own. Sibelius as a musician is in the same position - he is trying so hard to be "different" that he is illogical and rather vulgar. I hope that future generations will be able to appreciate

his flashiness (for that's all it is) at its true worth. You can't drag the material for experiment out of thin air and hope to construct something solid and reasonable. Modern poetry is stabilising because the younger poets are realising that they must understand their place in a progressive scheme, but there are still many modern musicians who think that mere production of unusual noises is justifiable for the sake of novelty. . . . Perhaps any Sibelius-addict, named or unnamed, would care to contest this. Of course, whether or not it is true in the case of Sibelius is of little consequence - it's when you consider the wider significance that you see its truth.

And now the Turkish arch-enemy, D.R. SMITH (but you should have seen the things he says about JFB & intellectuals! Very hot. I suppress 'em.): "I used to have a feeling that there might be something in the spiritualist movement until I read 'The Road to Endor', which was very destructive to my credibility on the subject. [Bek! I can't resist pointing out, Smith, that whether credulous or incredulous, you are quite incredible.] In case you have not read it, the theme is the efforts of two British officers to escape from a Turkish prison camp during the last war, their plot depending on convincing the camp commandant that one of them was a medium guided by a spirit to knowledge of some treasure buried in the vicinity. They had all sorts of seances with ouija boards & with trances, convincing everyone in the camp that they were the genuine article by supplying fellow-officers with communications from the dear departed & with telepathic messages from persons far away, and for a side-line did a "mind-reading" act for a concert - "What is this that I have in my hand, come tell me quickly if you please?" as Arthur Askey and his friend parodied it. When they started they were absolute novices, but they did remarkably well at it, & now I doubt gravely most of the more obvious "spirit messages". Fie, sir - one thing you forget, that you are dealing with mathematics-student RGHedhurst & not a Turkish army officer. I hope I'm not doing an injustice to "The R. to E." (which I haven't read); but after all, RGH was just giving us the facts of an investigation he was conducting, as scientifically as is possible for an amateur, & his conclusions were frank & honest enough.

O.S. YOUNG: ". . . one excellent piece of advice:- never take DRSmith seriously. I am speechless with admiration at the tactics he has adopted against the pacifist element. Never will I call myself subtle again!"

The Sage of Ilkington

The Thyme of Warwickshire

The Midland Herb

"Corporal Christopher Samuel Youd

May well - and does - feel proud.

A pacifist he? Ah no,

Mens sana in corpore sano.

Now work out whether that's a crack at Youd's militarism or your pacifism!" [Umm! What say, Sam, we'll get together & say something really nasty about DRS?] DAVE MOILWAIN

Protesting unhappily that "I see you are trying to drag me into some sort of low argument on swing. I refuse to participate - all my days of controversy are past", DAVE MOILWAIN enters the arena. I can hardly do him justice in such a small space, but extracts follow: "The most painful error your S-A-of-D-T is the statement 'least of all does jazz have technical brilliance'. He [She], of course, is talking of jazz, & I of swing, and I say without hesitation that the technical standard of swing musicians is without a doubt higher, on the average, than that of symf. musicians. One has only to listen to a Basie or a Goodman recording to realise this. Symphony trumpet playing is on the whole rather poor, & does not even equal the lowly stand ard of the dance-band exponents. But the swing musicians are masters of their own respective instruments, & can usually improvise or extemporise in a manner that leaves the symf. men standing. After all, any fairly competent musician can play a piece of Bach or Beethoven on his instrument if he practises enough, but not everyone can improvise a satisfactory chorus of the "Pagan Love Song" at 60 bars a minute and keep in tempo & key. [That's nothing - anyone can kick a man when he's down, but not everyone can forgive an injury.] No, Mr S-A-of-D-T is wrong. [Miss, I tell you, not Mr. But say, I must tell you about her someday, but not out here in the open. Most marvelous wench - her hair changes colour!] Swing musicians are maestros. But I speak not for the jazz pluggers - they're not worth defending, if they're defensible at all. . . . The effects of the ragtime bands of twenty years back

are already buried & mouldering, but Sibelius uses exactly the same musical palette as Beethoven, & produces something entirely fresh & exciting, because he succeeds in using his music as a means to an end - self expression, instead of allowing himself to be side-tracked into the mere search for novelty and the unusual." But JFB says...ah, well....

Anxious friends may have noticed lately that the Hermit of the North has not all his frivolity of old - deposed, poor fellow, as the northern outpost of civilisation by MURIN MACDONALD: of the I.R.A. (Oh no! Don't misunderstand me - the Inverness Royal Academy), who says, on being advised to stack his stf. magazines in piles--- "Where do you think I should stile them in packs anyway? In whatever room is left under the bed? or in the bed with me? or perhaps I could put them in the fireplace behind a firescreen and pile them up the chimney? - plenty room then. ...Another idea, tho' perhaps not so good, has just struck me! - There is the possibility of ripping open an end of one's mattress, & shoving one's s-f in there, taking out the original stuffing as one puts in more mags." ...Fans who read Paul Freshafer's account of his 'overflowing' in a copy of VOM last year will note that while Paularis excels in getting out of hand, he cannot hold a candle to the Hermit of the Highlands when it comes to ingenuity. Vive l'Ecosse!

D. WEBSTER: "I think only two people - Hanson & Smith - gave me a reply this month to the "God Save The King" question. Please co-operate, gentlemen, for I am interested, & the statistics may be not without value to the simple-minded like myself."

D.R. SMITH: "Passing on to Burke again, & you too if you agree with him, the ignorant me proposes to abuse the intelligent you.... I agree that politics are artificial & not inherent in man, but they are necessary for the cooperation of men in groups. I restrain myself manfully from saying something very sarcastic...nay, cynical, and that is the only reason why Burke is not picking fleas off himself in a tree & jabbering to the rest of the intellectual Banderlog." ... Ah, sweet slash! Who said English fandom was dead?

J.F. BURKE: "Smith is interesting, and puts forward a theory that should make Wollheim and Co. start to froth. I hope copies of the G.A. reach USA, as I should be very interested to see what Lowndes can make of this. Medhurst speaks truth. (In his brief interview, that is)." ... Comments:- I, too, hope the Futurist gang have noted Smith's satire, & I'd like to have Doc's reactions if he's still at liberty. In fact, it seems to me it's about time the Americans were breaking into G.A., & RWL & others will be most welcome Re RGM. This was the matter of fans arguing about books. Well, of the fans who have written me so far this month (1st. half of Jan.), Turner, Rosenblum, Burke (ha!), Hanson, I think Macdonald & Smith, Ragatzy, & perhaps others have discussed books; Clarke, Doughty, Youd, Rennison &c. have not (short letters, anyway). So--- . Of course, quarrelling is another matter...but not so far removed.

ANTON RAGATZY: "An extract from a book on psychology - which might interest you with regard to Smith's monologue on pacifism [1st. G.A., not 2nd.] - "...this goal, in every human individual, is one of superiority...to assert our individuality, to tower above others...thus arise jealousy, envy, avarice, intolerance, dogmatism, brutality, patronage, and all the pomps and struttings of one half of the world, and the complacent saintliness, admiring self-pity, arrogant humility, boastful suffering of the other half..." (Troubled Mind by Roberts)" ... M'yess... A neat sketch; but while agreeing that the human tendency is towards superiority, I've always thought (perhaps because I've wanted to think it) that it is a superiority over all that has gone before, a superiority over environment and the forces and mysteries of the universe. Anyone agree?

JULIAN P. PARR: "I'd love to see something like Smith's 'In Defense of Tea-Cup Reading' in GA -- just the thing!" This is my sentiment as well - please note, Messrs. Smith, Clarke, Williams & anyone-else-who-can-do-that-sort-of-thing. Please -- note.

YE EDITOR: "An important matter this time. Despite the solemn warning of the Bard, Webster feels that The G.A. will have to develop a nickname. It may not trouble you people, but I just can't go on, every time I write anyone, repeating - Capital-T-small-h-e-space-comes me, & I groan. RGM's 'Gert' is fiendishly logical, but reminds me hideously of two 'comedienne' sisters. Ugh! Suggestions considered, but no rejection-slips issued." PS. Late news - very welcome 4-pager from Dorset, ending: "Remember me to all the boys as you write them, please. Cordially, Ted." Welcome home, old man!--full-fledged Gunner!