

JANUARY 7, 1944

New Schools for New Worlds

IT is not the fault of anyone in New Zealand that a cable message from London on December 17, though it was one of the most sensational cables of the century, attracted very little notice and excited no comment. It is not easy in wartime to think of anything but the progress of battles, and not easy to believe, whoever says it, that the best defence against another war is a more civilised generation carrying out the peace. It certainly requires some hardihood to suggest that the Education Bill now before the House of Commons, and summarised on Pages 4 and 5, means more to Great Britain to-day, and many times more to the Britain of the next half-century, than the sinking of the Scharnhorst. But to suggest anything else would be cowardly or blind. Even if the Bill does not pass the House its principles and possibilities are now fermenting in the public mind. Sooner or later therefore the proposals we have outlined, or proposals very much like those, will be the law. Already they are the goal, and not merely the splendid vision. And they mean, to begin with, that England will at last have an educational system and not merely an educational muddle; something planned and not merely improvised; a plan for a nation and not for some privileged sections. England will have these things if it pays for them; and it will pay for them—in cash, in concessions (political and social), and in hard work and hard thought—once the possibilities get a firm enough hold of the popular imagination. They have in fact a firm enough hold already to guarantee a new England if England wins its war. But we are by no means suggesting that the Bill will be passed this month or this year. It will be resisted by intelligence as well as by stupidity and selfishness; by religion as well as by irreligion; by bare necks as stoutly as by old-school ties. But it will win in the end because it levels England up instead of levelling her down, and does not attempt to exalt her to the moon.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, JANUARY 7

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

CRITICISM AND LETTERS IN NEW ZEALAND.

Sir,—As a critic who has complained of some modern verse that it doesn't sing, I qualify for Mr. Fairburn's dunce's corner. (Both of us might ask "What do you mean by 'sing'"?). Nevertheless, I applaud his article on criticism of New Zealand books. It confirms my conviction that he is an excellent critic as well as an excellent poet. Tennyson remarked that the poet was rare, but the critic rarer still. Mr. Fairburn's principle is unassailable. There is only one standard of literary criticism, and it should be applied to New Zealand writing. Criticism and writing react on each other just as batting and bowling do in cricket. When wickets and batting improve the bowler has to think and work harder. When bowling improves the batsman has to take more care with his technique. Good criticism is constructive and creative. The critic's job is difficult. He must know his subject and he must be scrupulously honest. To allow personal likes and dislikes to affect his judgment is as immoral as robbing a till. But the practical difficulties in the way of putting Mr. Fairburn's principle into operation in this country are well known to all critics. I have reviewed hundreds of New Zealand books and I know the

been for 3YL to broadcast the news and 3YA to continue with the racing? Canterbury listeners could hear the news through 3YL and Otago and Southland listeners would be served by 4YA and 4YZ, and the racing broadcast from 3YA would have a wider coverage. I think listeners are entitled to consideration when any changing over is necessary. TALMAGUNDI (Invercargill).

(This letter was submitted to the Director of Broadcasting, whose reply follows:

"The correspondent's suggestion is quite a reasonable one from the point of view of listeners who wish to hear the racing broadcasts, but what is to be done about the listeners who prefer to hear the war news, and can only get this satisfactorily in the daytime from 3YA? The matter is one of those many cases of conflicting interests with which programme organisers have to deal, and which have to be settled on a basis that can best be justified.")

OUR SOLDIERS AND OTHERS.

Sir,—National pride is no doubt a good thing, but excessive self-conceit makes a nation look ridiculous. It is about time New Zealanders stopped claiming that their troops are the best in the world. I am a returned soldier from this war and, personally, do not think the New Zealand soldiers have put up as good a show as the Chinese, for instance.

Do you think you could publish Alan Mulgan's poem "The English of the Line"? It might help the New Zealanders to make a New Year Resolution.

EX.-2nd N.Z.E.F. (Wellington).

The poem is too long to be quoted in full, but we reproduce about 30 lines:
*We've fought the war again to-night, we men from overseas,
From Anzac Cove to Messines Ridge, from Ypres to Galilee.*

*We've drunk our meed of British praise, and praps a little more;
The British folk (and some of ours) suggest we won the war;
But we know well, for all our record, long and clean and bright,
That Tommy bore the heavier weight all through that long, long night.
Why, ere we'd put a foot on ship, he'd fought from Mons to Aisne,
And, out-gunn'd, fighting one to five, in a miracle of strain,
He'd held the line in Flanders, while we, who did not know,
Were wondering if the war would end before we'd strike a blow!
And if our job was long and tough, where would we be to-day,
If the Worcesters hadn't made that charge, or the Kents had given way?
We'd years of work to do, but half the war was won by then,
And those who broke the German line were three parts Englishmen,
Not Scots or Welsh or Irish men, but bred on English ground,
The land that holds the golden cords that bind the whole world round.
It's "Anzac" this and "Anzac" that, and "Canada's brave sons,"
And "fiery Irish valour,"—you all know how it runs,
But not so much for Tommy, poor Tommy of the Line,
Of the unromantic regiment whose blood is yours and mine,
That doesn't wear a broad-brimmed hat, and doesn't swing in kilts,
Our world-wide army's rank and file—Yorks, Middlesex and Wilts,
With Staffordshires and Devonshires, Berks, Cornwalls and West Kents,
Bucks, Lancashires and Hampshires, all the homely regiments.
They're dowdy Cinderellas in their countrymen's slow eyes,
They lack the Celtic glamour, and they do not advertise.
They leave their story to be found by him who cares to read,
From Minden on past Waterloo—a pantheon of dead;
Corunna, Albuera's clash—from sea to Pyrenees,
Was it only Scots and Irishmen who won these victories?*

"The English of the Line" was written shortly after the Great War. The author, who is a New Zealander of Irish blood, and had never seen England, felt that of the praise showered upon the armies of the Empire too little was given to English units, and especially to the line regiments.

TO ALL READERS

IF this issue arrives late—we have done our best to arrange that it should not—readers still have a day in hand. Our last issue carried programmes for eight days—January 3 to January 10—and the programmes in this issue do not therefore begin till Tuesday, January 11. They run for six days only instead of seven, but don't worry. That is to help you. With our next issue we return to a seven-day week.

temptation to let writers down easily. One very important factor that Mr. Fairburn does not mention is the smallness of our population. Generally speaking, the larger the society (given a basis of general freedom) the more elbow room for the critic. We all know how circumspect we must be socially in a small community. That opinion is a good deal freer in England than in New Zealand is due partly to tradition and partly to the size of the nation. The writing circle in New Zealand is small. Many writers are critics. They know one another, often very well. It takes some moral courage to say of a good friend, whose salt you may be eating to-morrow, that he is a damned bad poet or a regrettably inaccurate historian. This is one of the many reasons why we must have more population. More people means more demand for books. It also means more freedom for the critic.

—VETERAN (Wellington).

RACING AND THE REST.

Sir,—It was New Zealand Cup Day. The horses for the first race were being brought into line. Far south in Invercargill I sat by my radio. Some of the horses were a bit fractious and the starter was having trouble in lining them up. They were just about ready to go when a voice cut in to say that 3YA would now broadcast the news and that 3YL would take over the racing commentary. Well, that cut Invercargill listeners out because we can't get 3YL in the daytime. Would not the more sensible arrangement have