

FEBRUARY 18, 1944

The Price

IT is natural that the violence of our air-raids on Germany should be disturbing sensitive minds in Britain. In itself it is creditable. Not to feel how horrible a thing it is that we are compelled to do would be inhuman, and to gloat over it would dishonour and disgrace us. But it is one thing to feel the horror of it and another thing to protest against it. The protests have now begun, and they are exceedingly dangerous. They are one of the aids that the enemy has been waiting for. They help his propagandists, and they lengthen the war. They make it easier for him to say that the British are a race of barbarians, blind to culture, and deaf to the cries of women and children. They make it harder for our air-leaders to plan, and for our air-fighters to carry out, the speedy destruction of the enemy's power to resist. Obviously too they put a strain on the patience—the already dangerously tried patience—of thousands of parents whose sons have given their lives to bring this war to an end at the earliest possible date and push the next one, if it should come, as far away as their courage can push it with the assistance they are entitled to expect from their elders. The purpose of the air offensive is, first, to disarm Germany as quickly as possible, and second, to remove for as long a period as possible her power to re-arm. The two ends can not be separated, but the first, merely because it is first, in time and in necessity, is at this stage all-important. It is the desire of the overwhelming majority of the British people; and the only purpose the protesters can achieve is a slower but in the end more horrible and more complete devastation. At the worst, air-bombing destroys cities, factories, roads, and railways, and a proportion of the civilians located in and near them. Fighting mile by mile and yard by yard leaves the whole countryside blasted and blackened and burnt out.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED PROGRAMMES

Sir,—Your reply to "Yasdnil" re more complete programmes is a real classic in evasion. You state "that the number of people who buy any journal for one feature alone is never enough to keep it alive; and the number of people who buy *The Listener* for programmes alone may be one in ten, we do not know." Well, I know, and I should like you to know, that everyone down here, for instance, buys *The Listener* for the programmes alone. The rest is mere shaving paper. You seem to have lost sight of the fact that *The Listener* was primarily a weekly containing a comprehensive survey of the programmes, whereas now it seems that this is of secondary consideration. Look at this issue: 14 pages of film and book reviews and various junk, and five pages of radio programmes. You cannot put forward the argument that there is a shortage of paper, as *The Listener* now is bigger than ever.

L. A. DOYLE (Jackson's Bay).

(Our correspondent congratulates us on our powers of evasion. We are sorry we can't congratulate him on his powers of calculation. He complains that we have only "five pages of radio programmes." We have never had fewer than 14 pages of programmes and have often had 21 pages. As for being "bigger than ever," if "ever" means any recent date, we are eight columns smaller than ever (40 pages of three columns each in place of 32 pages of four columns). If it means what it usually means, the truth is that we have 120 columns in place of from 192 to 224 columns.—Ed.)

SOUNDING BRASS?

Sir,—A most delightful contrast is provided in *The Listener* of January 21 by the story "The Sangro Valley—at Peace," by John Compton, and the talk to schoolboys, by G. B. Shaw. After reading these two articles many readers may recall the words of an even more widely-read author than the redoubtable G.B.S.:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

Perhaps 18-year-old schoolboys, and girls also, will find it worth while to read further. If so, they should turn to the 13th Chapter of 1 Corinthians in the *New Testament*.

WILLIAM ABERDEEN (Nelson).

BOWLERS OR BEETHOVEN

Sir,—Can 3YA justify the interruption of the Finale of Beethoven's "Pastoral Symphony" on Wednesday evening without a word of warning or apology to allow a male voice to begin announcing bowling results? Was the suspense of the bowlers of New Zealand so great they couldn't wait another five minutes till the Symphony ended? Let the bowling fraternity have extra petrol for their harmless sport, but allow those who don't get extra petrol, but have to stop at home, to enjoy a Symphony to the end.

"LISTENER" (Tolaga Bay).

VOCABULARIES

Sir,—Some weeks ago *The Listener* published an interesting article on Basic English and, quoting an English paper, stated that Mr. Churchill's vocabulary was composed of 250,000 words. Remembering from my student days that Shakespeare, who is generally credited

with a vocabulary far above the "normal," used about 15,000 words, this claim worried me.

Even admitting that since his days we have certainly added a vast amount of words to the bulk of our language (scientific, technical, and general), the figure of a quarter of a million words at a single man's command seemed too much. Then, while I was pondering about this question without having a means of properly checking up on it, I came by chance across a letter addressed to the (London) *Listener* (October 7, 1943) by Compton Mackenzie, who, as a writer, should know about the use of words. He bears out the point I have been hesitating to put forward. Here is what he says:

"Mr. Tom Harrison has allowed me to get the better of observation when he suggests that the Prime Minister has a quarter-million-word vocabulary. If he divided that by ten he might be nearer the mark, and at the same time put Mr. Churchill on a level with Shakespeare. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* gives about 60,000 words, but the books of no Englishman alive or dead would provide quotations to illustrate many more than half of them. To test that remark I have just opened the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* at random. There are 64 words on one page and 57 on the other. Of these I may have used in writing 37 from the first page and 22 from the second. I should have had to turn to the dictionary to make perfectly sure what 11 of the words meant. Mr. Churchill might be able to guess the meaning of 120,000 English words, but I think it is highly improbable, and anyway that is not the same thing, thank heaven, as having a vocabulary of 120,000, for if it were he would be unreadable. As for the statement that there are now a million words in the English language, I do not believe it. All the embussing and debussing of military English, all the triphibian operations of exuberant oratory, and all the jargon of science and sciolism has not been able to add half a million words to the O.E.D. since 1928."

LINGUIST (Wellington)

RACING AND THE REST

Sir,—I have read with interest the numerous letters to *The Listener* about the first race from Riccarton clashing (I am sure that is the right word) with the non-important War News, or so it seems to these horse-racing fiends. Perhaps the racing clubs could be approached to have the racing time-table altered so as to have the race over before the War News comes on, or wouldn't "Talmagundi" and "Average Listener" be home from their "essential work" in time to hear it? It's just a suggestion.—VONK (Bay of Islands).

"BEGGAR'S OPERA"

Sir,—In the 2YA programme for Sunday, February 13, *The Beggar's Opera* appears to have been composed by John Gay. The music found in the ballad opera is the vehicle of the libretto, and not vice versa. As the name ballad opera implies, this music is culled from ballads, popular songs, dances, and operas. For instance, in *The Beggar's Opera* the air 44, "The modes of Court so common are grown . . ." is set to the music of "Lillibullero," the air 20 "Let us take the road . . ." is the march in "Rinaldo," and "Since Laws were made for ev'ry Degree" (air 67) is the tune of "Green Sleeves." *The Beggar's Opera* then is not, as stated in the programme, composed by John Gay, but written by him, whereas the only two original airs and the overture are composed by Pepusch.

H. S. K. KENT (Otago University).