

LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday

Price Threepence

FEBRUARY 25, 1944

"A Sma' Request"

WHEN Burns ploughed up a mouse he wrote it a tender poem. It was a thief, but it had to live. In any case "a daimen-icker in a thrave" was a small request (a grain of corn now and again from a whole stook). It was in much the same strain that the meat-ration was announced last week by the Minister of Supply. One chop in three would not hurt us: it might in fact help us, but anyhow it was a small enough sacrifice to make for Britain. And that of course is the truth. It is so obviously the truth, that we shall not see it unless we are hit in the eye with it. The difficulty with all our rationing so far in New Zealand has been to give it a suggestion of the heroic. If we could feel heroic over it a chop a day would be easy—almost as easy as six ounces a day of steak. But we can't feel heroic. We know that it means no hardship at all to reduce our consumption of beef and mutton to two and a-half pounds a week, and would still involve no hardship if we could not add poultry, fish, rabbits, and offals, with ham and bacon now and again. It is a joke as a war sacrifice, and because it is a joke it is going to be difficult to enforce. The Minister knows that, and everyone who has imagination knows it too. Therefore to feel serious about it we have to forget ourselves altogether—look away from New Zealand to Britain, and to the great and increasing hunger as you go east from Britain. Our sacrifice is nothing as a sacrifice, but it is something of great importance as a gift; nothing to us (unless perhaps a reduction in rheumatism), but something like a thousand tons of meat a week for others who desperately need it. Even on our reduced scale of consumption we shall have at least twice as much meat as the people of Britain will be able to buy if their present ration is maintained. We must not sink to the depths of selfishness in which that seems natural or tolerable.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

CALCIUM IN MILK

Sir,—In *The Listener* of January 21 on Page 21 is the statement that "there is a huge amount of calcium in milk as compared with other foods." May I be permitted to challenge his statement? There is only one part of calcium in 600 parts of milk, which is thus not rich in calcium. Spinach, cabbage, lettuce, onions and radishes all contain more calcium per cent of weight than milk does.

F. STONE (Epsom).

This letter was referred to Dr. Muriel Bell, who says in reply:

"The usual values given by authorities of recent date for the amount of calcium in 100 grams (approximately 3½ oz.) of the fresh foods mentioned by the writer are in the vicinity of 118 milligrams for milk, 80mg. for spinach, 40 to 60mg. for cabbage, 30 to 40mg. for onions, 17 to 54 mg. for lettuce, 31 to 43mg. for radishes. Occasionally, figures go up to 400 to 600mg. for greens e.g., the outer leaves of cabbage sometimes analyse out at over 400, and English figures for spinach are recorded at 595. But people do not usually use the outer leaves of cabbage; and as for spinach, the figures are always annotated to the effect that the calcium in spinach is not nutritionally available (the presence of oxalic acid causes precipitation of calcium oxalate in the intestine; thus, little if any of the calcium becomes absorbed). It is chiefly, however, the amounts of vegetables that we consume that makes them rank so much lower than milk; e.g., the average intake of milk in New Zealand is about 2-3 pint, or 400 grams, while the usual helpings of spinach, cabbage or onions are about 100 grams, and of lettuce or radishes, about 50 grams. It is comparatively easy to take a pint of milk (which provides you with practically all the calcium you need per day), but in order to obtain the same amount of calcium from the vegetables mentioned by the writer, it would be necessary to consume about 21lb. of spinach (even, if all the lime in it were available), or about 4lb. of onions, radishes or lettuces, or 3lb. of cabbage or 3oz. of cheese. Of these I should think that the pint of milk or even the 3oz. of cheese would be more comfortable, the alternative leading, as Drummond puts it, to a 'sensation of frustration and wind.' Figures per equal weights of foods are apt to be misleading. Moreover, the body absorbs a given amount of calcium more easily from milk than from any other food."

BURNS NIGHT

Sir,—Many people were disappointed not to be able to listen to a Scottish programme on the night of January 25. There is plenty of material recorded to make up a programme that would mean a lot to New Zealand Scots. May we appeal to the heads of Scottish societies to make representation in time next year?

"CAMERON" (Napier)

BOMBING OF GERMANY

Sir,—Mostly I agree with your leading articles, but I am sorry you had to write that one in the issue of February 18. It is a bad article, and, worse than that, it is reactionary—or, rather, it will encourage the reactionaries. What you say is that, although we may have feelings of decency (and you hope we shall have such feelings), we must not express them, because if we do we shall be helping the enemy. But it is not a far cry from expressing feelings of decency to expressing any sort of critical protest, and such a sentiment, voiced in such a journal, will be seized on with delight by our own reactionaries, who proceed on the assumption that any criticism of the war effort, and indeed any utterance of unpleasant truths, is helpful to the enemy.

Anyway, sir, I doubt your logic. You admit that it is "creditable" to be disturbed by the horror of the raids on Germany; and then you argue that it is "exceedingly dangerous" to say so (that is,

make protests). I have been brought up to believe that an individual, or a nation, should do the thing that is right (i.e., "creditable") without counting the price; as a man, seeing another drowning, should not hesitate to try to save him, even at great risk.

The other point is that your whole argument that these horrible things are necessary to shorten the war and save lives is exactly the the argument which the Nazis used, with equal force, to justify all the "frightfulness" of the blitzkrieg—the machine-gunning of civilians on the roads, the smashing of Rotterdam, and so on. Yet such methods did not shorten the war for them, and they will not shorten the war for us, or make another less likely. And what shall it profit us if we win the war but lose our soul?—AUDAX II (Wellington).

(We expressed our own feelings of horror quite frankly: three times over. If our correspondent will quote the sentence in which we said that others should not do so, we shall be grateful. If he can't, he has not read us carefully enough to say whether our article was good or bad.—Ed.).

AN INTERRUPTED SYMPHONY

Sir,—May I use your space to protest against the interruption from 4YA on Thursday evening (January 20) of Dvorak's 2nd Symphony in D Minor? This work, the finest of Dvorak's symphonies, is all too rarely put over the air, and it must have been a great disappointment to all listeners to classical music in this district who watch your programmes when the work was cut short at the opening of the fourth movement in order to give bowling tournament results. If it was really necessary to give these results promptly at 10.0 p.m. rather than 10 or 15 minutes later, surely a little foresight on the part of the programme organiser should have shown the impossibility of playing a 40-minute work in under 35 minutes. Though listeners to classical music may be a small minority in New Zealand, nevertheless they form one of the most serious listening groups here; and as such are entitled to more consideration than they receive on occasions. When a major work is advertised in *The Listener* to be played at a certain time, no interruption should be allowed.

C.L.S. (Dunedin).

LEARNING RUSSIAN

Sir,—The arresting heading to your article on the Russian alphabet startled me, for one, into something like excitement and expectancy. I therefore set my teeth into it immediately. The lesson was well written, popularly presented, and made one feel that one had mastered Russian in one lesson. But confidence soon gave way to misgivings. Without detracting from the simplicity of the article, I feel that by merely learning the alphabet you are only a shade nearer the heart of the business. Surely the tone of the article is over-ambitious in dismissing some of "the bugaboos" with a flourish. The writer has not dared mention grammar—the basic foundation of an ability to speak the tongue. Either "the bugaboos" have some foundation, or I find it difficult to reconcile the tone of the lesson with the impression given by the late Harold Williams, "The Cheerful Giver," viz., that of the 50-odd languages he had mastered he found Russian the most difficult.

SCROOGE (Christchurch).