

JULY 14, 1944

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China

IT has been plain for some time that whatever is happening in Burma the war not going well in China itself, and that the reasons lie deeper than exhaustion and isolation. Those are part of the story; at present the biggest part; but certainly not all of it. The Japanese are winning victories—far more critical victories than most people realise—not merely because they are better trained and better equipped than the Chinese but because they are united. The Chinese have never been united since the war started. It is not many days since Chungking reported the flat refusal of the Communist armies to attack the enemy in the north in order to relieve the pressure in the centre and south; and it is probable, but not certain, that the Chungking story was true. It is not certain, because all news is suspect when the news agencies are under control; but it is likely, because the Communists have no more faith in Chungking than Chungking, now, has in them. They control nearly a quarter of China on a population basis, and their army is believed to contain nearly as many front-line troops as the Generalissimo himself commands. They in fact claim that it is a better army than the Central Government's because it is better educated politically, and they argue that its superior discipline more than balances its indifferent equipment. But instead of tying up Japanese divisions it is immobilising a large body of Government troops who are watching it when they should be attacking the enemy. It is not a pleasant picture, but until we face it and accept its implications we shall not begin to understand the military situation. As for the political and economic problems of China, they are comparable with those of Russia in 1917—not insoluble, if friends help, but complicated by the threat of civil war.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, JULY 14

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

THE "WISDOM" OF VAN LOON

Sir,—I have read with amazement *The Listener's* review of the wisdom of Van Loon. How ridiculous is the extravagant figure of the enduring rock! What an unfortunate exposition of the colossal ignorance of one who has essayed to instruct others! Under the conditions prevailing on this earth all rocks, all surface forms, are ephemeral. In but an instant of the eternity which Van Loon has tried to picture, his rock will have wilted away even if one allows for it the absurd dimensions postulated. His little bird after, let us say, its thousandth visit, will no longer find rock to whet its bill upon; nothing will remain but a mound, soil-covered, forest-clad. The bird, considered not as an individual, but as a species or variety, may still be in the flower of its youth when the last trace of such a rock has vanished—the last trace even of the mound that marks its site. The birds of that species will outlast, and whet their bills upon, an endless procession of new rock outcrops, each ephemeral as its predecessors, exposed by the hypogene and epigene machinery of the earth's activity. If this is a representative sample of Van Loon's wisecracks, it makes one tremble to think of the mentality of his host of readers. Do they furnish a fair cross-section of the population of a continent?—C. A. COTTON (Wellington).

AN EARLY "MOVIE" CRITIC

Sir,—Possibly your film critic "G.M." may be interested to read what must be one of the earliest criticisms of the Movies extant. It was written by Jonathan Swift, D.D., in one of his voluminous letters to his friend Mrs. Johnson ("Stella"), London March 22, 1713. "I went afterwards to see a famous moving picture, and I never saw anything so pretty. You see a sea 10 inches wide, a town at the other end, and ships sailing in the sea and discharging their cannon. You see a great sky, with moon and stars, etc. I am a fool. Night, dear M.D."

Several pictures were exhibited about this time, on a similar principle. One with "many curious and wonderfully pleasing and surprising motions in it, all natural" is advertised to be seen at the "Grecian's Head" Coffee House. There are in Bagford's collection in the British Museum several curious original handbills, minutely describing exhibitions of this nature.

G.F. (King Country).

SALUTE TO SOLDIERS

Sir,—I write this to say "Thank you" for what you write in your leaders each week. There is always food for thought, sometimes for self-reproach—I wish you could be spared a double-column. I refer specially now to the leader of June 16, "Salute the Soldiers." Aye, the real salute comes from the heart, dedicated to service for one's fellows—not from noisy clapping. So often when listening to the tales of bravery and endurance, one is smitten with the thought, "We here in New Zealand are not worthy of such blood and tears." The least we can do surely is to strain every nerve to make the country—and its workers of all grades—above reproach. I've taught in country and city schools for over 35 years, and I've seen the names of so many of my old scholars fallen in action or coming home maimed. Have some of

our New Zealanders no imagination, no spiritual, or even mental discernment to assess the heroism of these young lives, so freely given, while here we live luxuriously, and take it as a matter of course?—W. M. YOUNG (Onehunga).

"THE MAN BORN TO BE KING"

Sir,—I have now listened to all the plays in *The Man Born to Be King*, and my objection to them is simply that they are not true. Dorothy Sayers takes great liberties with the New Testament version and draws on her imagination for matter, "human interest" I think it would be called, to round out the plays. She has certainly not improved on the Authorised Version, and her manner of presentation is dangerous. As propaganda, which is the real reason for the plays, the result will be about nil, and to the great mass who are indifferent, it will not prove convincing. Unfortunately, Dorothy Sayers had to draw on four separate authors who repeatedly contradict each other, even after their stories had been carefully edited over 300 years. To those who already believe the New Testament story and have no doubts, the plays can add nothing except the pleasure of listening. So unless she can convince and convert unbelievers (myself, for instance), her labour must be in vain.—ARGOSY (Te Awamutu).

Sir,—Our gratitude to Diana Fussell, aged eight, for her sweet wisdom. My humble opinion is that Dorothy Sayers, through the medium of her plays, has revealed Our Lord Christ as the Great Brother of Mankind—perhaps in a manner that no one else has had sufficient courage to do.—PHYLLIS M. HAWLEY (Auckland).

Sir,—I have just read Diana Fussell's letter about "The Man Born to Be King." I also saw the opinions on the plays in *The Listener*. I want to say that all our family listen to these plays regularly every Sunday night. My brothers and I enjoy them, and I also understand these plays better than by the stories in the Bible, but I can understand the Bible. I am 13 years old.

"LISTENER."

Sir,—After reading a letter written by a little girl of eight, Diana Fussell, on "The Man Born to Be King," I would like to say that I am a grandmother, and my family and myself looked forward very much indeed to these broadcasts. The plays are beautiful to listen to, and the children understand every word. It also makes them feel that Jesus was alive like themselves once, and therefore He seems much more real to them. Dorothy Sayers has certainly written a great work.—"A GRATEFUL LISTENER" (Tauranga).

Sir,—I have been listening with interest to Dorothy Sayers' play each Sunday. Last Sunday, Christ's advice to the rich young man and His comments on rich men generally, made me wonder what Dorothy Sayers does with the royalties from these plays, whose theme was not her creation? The answer would show whether she wrote with an eye to business or in a reverent and humble Christian spirit.

K. ANNABELL (Upper Waitotara).