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## To The Editor

### THE WAY WE SPEAK

SIR,—I am sure readers of *The Listener* will feel deeply grateful to Professor Gordon for his admirable historic survey of the origins of "Standard English" and its bearing on New Zealand speech. Definitely its origin is recent, perhaps within the memory of people still alive. As a boy in England, over 50 years ago, I recall listening in to a conversation of a group of elders who were discussing the effect of universal education, then showing its first fruits among the masses of the people, and one rather Blimpish type of person was pleased to say that he thought the upper classes would soon have to do like the Russians and speak French to distinguish themselves from the lower classes. My recollection of the English spoken at one of the older universities a few years later is that it was by no means so "advanced" as the Standard English we hear from the BBC and some New Zealanders to-day.

As Professor Gordon points out, Standard English is the language of the English ruling class, and as such, it is virtually a *sine qua non* to acceptance and preferment in the charmed circle of London Society and high office, just like French to Russians of the Tsarist aristocracy, and as difficult as a foreign language to master. Any man may, of course, speak as he likes; the trouble begins when he tries to impose his particular form of speech on others. It may be possible and, perhaps, desirable, for English to become an international language, of wider scope than French in the last century, but Standard English can never become universal, or even international. It is irritating to most Americans and distasteful to most of the peoples of the Dominions, not only from its sound, but from its association with persons high and low, whose pretensions are usually found to exceed their performance. From this point of view, its adoption by the BBC as standard for overseas broadcasts of news and comment is seen to be a mistake which has done serious injury to the cause of better relations between the English-speaking peoples. This is not to advocate any particular form of spoken English, but many of the people who have listened to Mr. Leonard Brockington's broadcasts here and from Britain will recognise in his enunciation a far better model than Standard English as it is often spoken.

ARTHUR CHORLTON (Wellington).

### "Give Us More Books"

THOUSANDS of books have been given by New Zealanders to the National Patriotic Fund Board since the war began. "Yet more urgently than ever comes an appeal from the Middle East—Give us more books," states an appeal issued to the Director of the Country Library Service (G. T. Alley) on behalf of the National Patriotic Fund Board.

"It is no longer any use asking many people for the books they can spare," the statement continues. "Those have been given long ago. It is the books now that people would like to keep, perhaps

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