

OCTOBER 6, 1944

## Radio Serials

WE print to-day some further comments on the influence of radio serials. The subject was discussed recently in Parliament and some of the points raised made it seem desirable to get additional opinions. We have therefore seen one or two educationists, a city missionary, and a psychiatrist, and are indebted to them for some interesting remarks; but the problem is how to enforce a policy of wisdom even if one could be arrived at. It is not sufficient to decide whether exciting serials are a good or a bad influence in the lives of the young. We must begin there, and get the answer if we can. But we must decide also how far good and bad influences can be controlled by law or by any kind of central authority in a democracy. There is no doubt a point in vulgarity beyond which all would agree that it is dangerous to go; but who fixes the starting and stopping points before that extreme limit is reached? In short, is there wisdom or safety in coercive morality? If there is, then democracy is a failure and a menace. The best government would be that which interfered most drastically with all our wayward impulses; which prescribed our reading, our pictures, our music, and our plays; and started on young people before the Old Adam who is in us all had been given time to establish himself. In the political sphere that means fascism; in the moral, puritanism; and the world has had rather painful experiences of both of those philosophies. Complete liberty on the other hand does sometimes spell demoralisation, but there is very little evidence yet that we are running that risk in New Zealand. We are running the risk that the world always runs when it discovers something new; in other words, we have reached a point in education and entertainment at which we must be observant and careful. But it is one thing to send children to bed to make sure that they get sleep and rest, and another thing altogether to say that if they stay up and listen to the things their parents are listening to they will be started on the road to ruin.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## LITERARY HOAXES

Sir,—Having read *The Cruise of the Kawa*, I agree with your recent correspondent that it is difficult to believe that people were fooled by it. The absurd illustrations would seem to be enough to give the game away. However, my authority for the statement that the National Geographic Society wrote to "Dr. Traprock" asking for a conference is *Hoaxes*, a well-documented book by C. D. MacDougall (Macmillan, 1941). On pages 273 and 274 is given a complete account of the hoax and its effects, based partly on material supplied by Chappell himself, and including not only the National Geographic story but also the information that the Boards of Trade of Derby and Shelton, Connecticut, where Traprock was supposed to hail from, invited the "doctor" to deliver an address in his home town. Your correspondent is also referred to *Books in Black and Red*, by Edmund Lester Pearson (himself the author of the successful "Old Librarian's Almanac, 1773" hoax) in which the author (certainly with exaggeration) calls *The Cruise of the Kawa* "the most influential hoax of history." He further states that it dealt such a death-blow to romantic travel-books that "nobody dared to write in that vein afterwards." The statement in my article was decidedly very moderate. In view of this, something more than the personal incredulity of your correspondent is required to convince me that, absurd and all, *The Cruise of the Kawa* did not deceive a great number of the public and not a few of the elect.

J.C.R. (Auckland).

## THE STAGE

Sir,—I have read your stimulating article on the subject of the theatre. The present activity in drama in all parts of New Zealand is one of the healthiest signs for cultural development in the post-war world. In Hamilton there is much activity. The Borough Council is very sympathetic and has let an E.P.S. hut to the drama groups for their own uses. Recently a semi-production of Sean O'Casey's *Silver Tassie* was given and at the end of this month *They Came to a City* will be publicly produced.

There is also a play reading group which among its many readings has numbered *Flare Path* and plays locally written. I was very interested to see that *The Moon Is Down* is being broadcast by 2YD. Unfortunately this station is out of our ken, and I hope this play will be rebroadcast from a stronger station.

R. K. PARKES (Hamilton).

## THE BACHS

Sir,—Your footnote to H. H. Fountain's letter is disillusioning. Does the NBS always rely on the labels of gramophone records for its musical knowledge? Nothing the announcers (with one or two exceptions) can say or do surprises me any longer, but I still nurtured a vague notion that on the programme arranging staff there might be people who, without prompting from the titles of the records themselves, could distinguish one Bach from another. And especially in a programme specifically entitled "Music by Bach"! But to them also it now appears all Bachs are alike.

The NBS goes on to say that it has only three excerpts from the B Minor Mass.

Why? Maybe the complete work is not available in New Zealand now (though I am inclined to doubt that too), but a full and fine recording was certainly made some years ago. Since then the NBS has obtained from overseas probably many thousands of records—good, bad and inexcusable—and it certainly should not have overlooked such an outstanding work as this.

A. M. FINDLAY (Auckland).

## STANDARD ENGLISH

Sir,—In *The Listener* for September 1 you had an exceedingly fine article on Standard English. Professor Gordon asks: Do we want to speak Standard English? This, he says, "is a regional dialect. It is also a class dialect," and "if we were to say that it is Public School English we should not be far wrong." Then I say, "Most certainly not. We don't want to speak in that way." Besides being the mark of a very small class, copied intentionally chiefly by snobs, it is also slovenly, vague, and indefinite. Speech should be clear and definite so that any trained ear could write down a record of the sounds heard. In ordinary "good English" you have to judge by the context whether, for instance, the speaker said "ah" or "are," "birth" or "berth." The Oxford Concise Dictionary admits this, speaking of "a vague, indeterminate sound, which is almost identical for all vowels." The speech of an educated Scot or Irishman is on this point much superior, and the old Maoris were or should have been a lesson to the young New Zealanders. Their articulation was perfect. Unfortunately that has been corrupted by their mixing with the slovenly, inaccurate pakeha. The speech I'd like to set up as the standard is that of the BBC announcers. They speak clearly and accurately. Good English undoubtedly, but where did they learn it? In very few cases could you say where. That is what we should aim at: English definite and clear, free from the affectations of the upper-class English, and also from the traces of Cockney accent which, strangely enough, tend to re-appear in our school playgrounds.

THOS. TODD (Gisborne).

Sir,—With all deference to the Professor of English at the University of Oxford it would be interesting to know which public school he is going to take as a standard for English. Because it is only necessary to listen to a conversation between, say, an Etonian and a Harrovian to realise that the difference in accent (I nearly wrote dialect) is distinctly perceptible. Both accent and delivery as a matter of fact could be easily distinguished without even a glance at the respective hats, waistcoat buttons and ties of the wearers. Apparently it is not Standard English that we are after but a Standard Accent. Well, why? There are millions of people who speak reasonably grammatical and entirely accentless English, and this, I take it, whether "standard" or not, is the best.

P. H. D. MORANT (Greymouth).

## NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. G. Hartley (Dunedin): Thank you. Letter passed on.  
E. McQuarrie (Parnell): No space, but letter appreciated.