

DECEMBER 22, 1944

Our Sixth Christmas

IT is a sobering thought that we have not yet been able to offer our readers Christmas greetings without reservations and some absurdity. This is our sixth Christmas number, and in every case we have had to talk about goodwill in a world of bad will; to discuss peace in an atmosphere of war; to hope that our readers will contrive to be happy though the earth is fuller of unhappiness than at any period of which we have knowledge. Nor can we use the conventional language of Christmas in this issue. We can, and do, hope that many will find it possible to lay aside care for a few hours, and even feel festive and gay; especially men and women who have been working to exhaustion point in the full and bitter knowledge that all their efforts have been destructive. If Christmas brings relief to them, either of body or of spirit, it will to that extent be happy. But to the great majority all over the world it can bring little this year but a nearer and surer hope. To the millions of our enemies it can bring no hope at all; and this is one of the days on which we should remember them in charity. If we can't do more we can be sorry for them, and for all that lies ahead of them; but it would be hypocrisy to pretend that we are anywhere shedding tears for them. Christmas makes no such demands on us. It speaks to our goodwill if we have it. It is the enemy of meanness and of coldness. It encourages benevolence if we are capable of benevolence; asks for warmth and neighbourliness and the sharing of good things of all kinds. But it most of all invites us to lay down our burdens; to forgive; to forget; to cast away care. It is peace without conditions, magic without rules or a formula, but it rests with ourselves whether the magic works. We can't make it work by doing something; we may by being something. But the sure way to end everything—to spoil our own day and that of everybody about us—is to be emotional cowards. If we will not trust our emotions, let goodwill well up and overflow, we do not deserve a happy Christmas and will assuredly not have one.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

"MISSION TO MOSCOW"

Sir,—In Quentin Reynolds's book, *The Curtain Rises*, he quotes a member of the Diplomatic Corps in Russia as saying that during the showing of the film *Mission to Moscow*, Stalin was fine, he kept a straight face and did not laugh once! Reynolds says the film was a beautiful technical job, and the acting was magnificent, but it portrayed a Russia which none of them had ever seen, which, as it was supposed to be factual, was wrong. He says: "The film had telescoped two purge trials into one and had not presented them with any degree of accuracy. . . . We all had copies (in English) of the testimony given at the trials, and it varied considerably from what was shown on the screen. . . . In the film Radek is condemned to death. Actually he was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment." The character of the British Ambassador was misrepresented. According to Litvinov, he and the German Ambassador to Moscow were the only two diplomats for whom he had any respect. Reynolds gives pages to the subject in his book, and shows deep regret that no one with real knowledge of Russia had been called in to advise on the film. He adds: "We were all frankly embarrassed by the picture." I do not think anyone will deny his personal knowledge of this subject.—M.D. (Rotorua).

OUR CROSSWORDS

Sir,—With your kind permission, I should like, on behalf of my own household and the many scores of households up and down our islands who have week by week enjoyed *The Listener* crossword puzzles, to wish your indefatigable contributor, R.W.C., a happy Christmas and a bright New Year. No doubt many of us could, with some little trouble, construct a crossword and even with some little further effort write a set of passable clues, but few indeed could go on doing so week by week throughout the year. For the unflinching service, for the never trivial and often brilliant clues, the witty anagrams, your contributor is almost unrivalled. Solvers or would-be solvers of these puzzles get many a hearty laugh no less than at times a fit of desperation.—GRATEFUL (Dunedin).

"WORLD OF PLENTY"

Sir,—Your review of *World of Plenty* proved particularly interesting to me in that the Internal Marketing Division has two 16 m.m. sound copies in circulation, the demand on which partly bears out your estimate of the film's public interest. However, as these become free of present engagements, we shall be glad to make them available to organisations that are interested.—R. P. FRASER (Acting-Director, I.M.D.)

NEW ZEALAND SPEECH

Sir,—A. J. Henderson's ideas about the evolution of Standard English are highly original, but no more accurate for being that. A standard language does not appear until centralised government

or economic power is established, and then it is the language spoken by educated people in the area of the seat of government. If Winchester had added to its influence through the centuries, Standard English would sound very different to-day from Mr. Henderson's variety. His naive acceptance of the belief that Standard English of 1944 differs from that of previous centuries in its greater freedom from unpleasant features is reminiscent of the philosophies of the 18th century, before the great discoveries of comparative philology were made. No doubt Shakespeare's greatest handicap was that he lived more than three centuries too soon, and the Shakespearean actors' most difficult obstacle to-day is to protect his author from being seen as the boor he really was.—W. J. M. EIDOWNEY (Christchurch).

FREEDOM OF THE AIR

Sir,—I heartily endorse the timely and sensible remarks of W. K. McLroy upon this subject. Thanks to you for publishing them. In these days the protesting citizen gets little or no quarter. He is the "groucher," the "immoralist," the "free-thinker," who must be barred at all costs, for silence is the safest and shrewdest weapon against all forms of social and political conspiracy. Sixty years ago, my first impression from reading lessons was gained from: "Speak the truth and speak it ever, cost it what it will. He who hides the wrong begun does the wrong thing still." This to-day is particularly applicable to our daily newspapers and Parliament, and the radio services, which institutions surely have the greatest responsibilities, the most need of sound sense, and the greatest of all facilities for revealing wrongs

and upholding rights. The churches rely upon blind faith for their following, and declare that that is more important than analysis or reason. The citizen fully realises this, but confesses himself impotent to deal with it. Now the worm is beginning to turn.—J. KNIGHT (Blockhouse Bay).

WARRING WAVE-LENGTHS

Sir,—Might I, as a constant reader of your valuable journal and as a keen listener to 12B, suggest that that station's wave-length be altered so that listeners can hear the programmes that are coming over. It is quite a common occurrence in this district, particularly after dark, for an Australian station (which is apparently on the same wave-length) to drown and spoil the whole programme. As 12B is practically the only Commercial station that suits this district, would it not be possible to change the wave-length slightly to ensure listeners a reasonable reception?

DISTORTION (New Plymouth).

[“The allocation of station frequencies,” we are informed, “is determined very carefully in collaboration with the Australian broadcasting authorities in order to reduce mutual interference to a minimum. Owing to the large number of stations operating it is sometimes impossible to prevent a little interference in some localities. Being of relatively low power, Station 12B cannot be expected to give a first-grade service in New Plymouth.”—Ed.]

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

“Peter,” Hawke's Bay.—Gigli, “O Sole Mio.”

“H.M.,” Hawera.—4YA, January 21.

S. F. G. Williams (Runciman).—“Morse stations are usually allotted frequencies outside of the broadcast band, but it is possible that you are located in close proximity to a morse station, or perhaps your receiving set may require some adjustment. You should consult a radio serviceman, who will be able to advise you on any re-tuning or alternation required to your set to enable this interference to be cut down to a minimum.”

MISTAKEN JOURNEY

Through South America for 3d a Week

IF you were not living in the best country in the world, where would you go to find it? Yesterday perhaps to the United States. To-day to Canada. To-morrow?

Well, it depends on your needs, your aims, your moods; but many would say South America. More than any other part of the world at the present time it offers the kind of opportunities most of us want in a setting in which all of us could feel at home; mountains, forests, rivers, plains, winds and waving tussocks, sheep, cattle, horses, and barking dogs.

But to-day we can't go there. We are not free to leave our own country, and we would not be admitted if we arrived without authority in Rio or Montevideo or Buenos Aires. The most we can do is travel vicariously, and the opportunity to do that will be presented to all our readers after the New Year.

It will be an opportunity to do more than that. It will be a chance to travel adventurously. Week by week till they get arrested as spies—it actually happens—our readers will go further and further into the interior, by rail, by steamboat, by horse, by canoe, and then wake up one day to find themselves swapping horses, and yarns, and experiences with the cattle ranchers and Indians of the Matto Grosso—a vast swamp in the very heart of the continent where the water and the land fight for possession year in and year out, and you are likely to surprise an alligator if you splash across country on a horse, or a 15-foot water snake if you pole your way through by canoe.

This journey, and this series of adventures, will cost you 3d a week; and every adventure is true. The journey took place as it is described, though it was a mistaken journey from the first land-mile. Something else had been planned, but this is what happened. We have read the manuscript: we have talked to the author—and you, if you are interested in cricket, have seen him in gloves and pads. He is Roy Sheffield, wicket-keeper and first man in for Essex, and to-day a member of the staff of Wellington College.

Watch this page for a further announcement.