

JANUARY 12, 1945

Report And Facts

THE hardest thing we have had to endure in the Rundstedt offensive has been the sacrifice of thousands of men. After that has come the loss of ground and material, with the boost to enemy morale and the blow to our own. These things were our Christmas box and the sooner we adjust ourselves to them the better. If the weather, the country, the long nights and the co-operation of the civil population all conspired to help Rundstedt, it is for soldiers and not for civilians to decide whether the precautions taken against him were reasonable. They were certainly not adequate. But civilians may ask why the possibility of a counter-offensive on such a bold scale was a mental shock to them. If we had all given up hope of victory in a week or two, most of us still believed that the enemy was on his final run, that he might delay us for a little at the Rhine, but that our margin of power was overwhelming everywhere. Then in a few days he drove us back farther and faster than we had been able to drive him in as many weeks, and we are still not sure that he is stopped. We are entitled to ask why such a shock to our minds was possible, and one of the reasons is our encouragement of the purveyors of pap. We have not had the truth from our correspondents, and we have frequently not wanted it. We have listened to every reporter who has announced crushing victories without analysing the facts on which his rhetorical victories have been based. The more accurate his facts have been the more dangerous he has often become the moment he has moved on to interpretation. He has then had no guide but his exuberant imagination, no check but the elusiveness of his victories, no discouragement but an occasional cold douche from an army commander. The people who should have combined to help him, ourselves his readers, have usually lapped up his nonsense and asked for more. We don't pause to analyse absurdities. We want victories, and we thank the correspondents who provide them.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS**RELIGION IN SCHOOLS**

Sir,—A.M.R. contends that "the people who own the schools" should decide this question, and he quotes "the actively pro-religious minority" and "the passive pro-religious majority" in support of this contention. He evidently believes in majority rule, but the general understanding is that the majority settled this question long ago, and thus we have what is called "secular schools." Ministers of all denominations are always bewailing the sparse attendance at church on Sundays, and we are given to understand that barely 10 per cent of the people attend regularly. If this gives the true picture then such a small proportion as 10 per cent do not possess the right to demand that religion be taught in schools. There is no virtue in majority rule, on the contrary, it is a pernicious rule, the only democratic way is proportional representation. A referendum might be suggested, but no "first past the post" solution is just or stable, and a three-fifths majority should at least be insisted on. Under our system of secular schools it would be superfluous for the training college and university to include the subject of religion for prospective teachers, and "A.M.R." underestimates the difficulties involved. Religion is not a science, as it depends largely on supernaturalism for its authority, and it cannot be taught like chemistry. Because of its miraculous claims, the Bible cannot be treated as history. We all know that Henry VIII. was a rascal, but after all, it does not matter; whether history gives us the correct story, it will make no difference to us. This is not so with the history of the Bible, where an infallible claim is made.

When I attended school, religion was taught, and when the hour for religious instruction arrived, many of us found ourselves outside in the playground, because our parents objected to the brand of religion taught. To make up for non-attendance at religious instruction we had to take poetry in its place, and when the weather was not favourable, we could remain in the classroom, although treated as absent. All the fundamentalists, including Roman Catholics, were in this dissenting group, and for different reasons. Apart from religious instruction we had also Bible reading, treated as an ordinary lesson, when all denominations joined in, there being no objection so long as no interpretation of religion was forthcoming. Bible reading ought to be the solution for all, but to many this has also its objections.

ARGOSY (Te Awamutu).

PRONUNCIATION

Sir,—Since I regard *The Listener* as one of the few critical publications in the Dominion, I wish to protest against the distortion of our language by wrongful or corrupt pronunciation. The words which give a key to my complaint all end in "sume," and are given a deal of publicity over the NBS.

I do not know how conshume, preshume, reshume, etcetera, came into being, and can find no foundation in the basics from which they derive. Fortunately experience teaches that these corruptions will not pass into common use; naice, lurve, the Oxford accent and the curates' affectation still prevail with those who wish to be different from and superior to their fellow humans, but

thank goodness they have not become part and parcel of our heritage. However, the danger is there; the power of broadcast has yet to bear fruit on custom, so I would pray the "would-bes" to stop muckin' abaht with "the richest language in the world."

B. S. BARNETT (Napier).

"WORLD OF PLENTY"

Sir,—If it is true that this film is not going to be shown in New Zealand, I wish to protest. As stated by your excellent film critic "G.M.," the British newspaper *The Times* insisted editorially that it should be shown in British theatres. Produced by the British Ministry of Information and showing the destruction of food to keep up the price, it is the type of film which audiences in this country have too often been denied the right of seeing. The wilful destruction of food is one cause of war, and any official information should be made available, especially by the powerful influence of the film.

P. C. McNEILL (Waitoa).

[We have had other letters in the same strain.—Ed.]

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Sir,—There seems to be a tendency in some quarters to lay at the door of Science the blame for the present ills of the world. Apart from the fact that the usage of the term in general sense is loose and inexact—in fact meaningless—we must at all times recognise the fact that wars and violence are no new visitants on earth. They have been, and are, unfortunately, an integral part of life in all its forms as it exists on this planet. It is indisputable that the history of the human species is largely a record of war, fanaticism, and violence.

In a world where the verdicts of the various relevant sciences were adopted, megalomaniacs could never rise to dictators. Nor could fundamentally unethical doctrines such as Fascism and Dictatorism rear their ugly heads. The truth is that human society except in a limited and sporadic manner has not yet consciously adopted as a social imperative the vast amount of empirical knowledge made available by science. It is true that some few departments of scientific knowledge—chiefly technology and chemistry—have been employed in furthering and facilitating death and destruction, but Science in its entirety cannot be blamed for this state of affairs.

There should be no need to employ so obscurantist a term as "spiritual" to oppose the reality of Materialism. The word ethical used in the subjective sense is much more applicable and correct.

LIONEL COONEY (Christchurch).

POETRY ON THE AIR

Sir,—I am writing to ask if the Broadcasting Service could do more to bring before its listeners the work of its own people in poetry and prose. New Zealanders have taken their place in the world in many branches of science, art, sport, etc. Our music and drama is represented and given a share of time, prominence, and publicity on the air, but the poets and writers are neglected almost completely. A session devoted entirely to this branch of art could help to establish a literature of our own, and be a medium through which those gifted among us could find expression and inspiration through reading their own works aloud. If a precedent is needed we have it in the ancient Greeks, who

read their writings to groups in the streets and countryside. The time has surely come when the radio could be used to open the door to our own poets, and at the same time give listeners the opportunity to enjoy the genius of their own countrymen.—"A CHANCE FOR POETS" (Wellington).

FREEDOM OF THE AIR

Sir,—The letter of J.F. on this subject can be said to present the typically Christian egotistical outlook.

It is not unusual to find all stations occupied in disseminating Christian beliefs, and, of course, all licensees bear the expense. The Christian arrogates to himself all that is noble, ethical and good; it is the wicked who hath said in his heart "There is no God."

I have heard one of the "guardians of the people's morals" in sermonising declare over the air that parents who do not bring their children up in religion run the risk of turning out a population of murderers, thieves, etc., notwithstanding that statistics show this completely the reverse of truth. Yet the radio "does not include in its functions the opportunity of scoffing at other people." Why then should it include the privilege to slander? Likewise, the radio has been used in a twelve months' campaign to boost the Bible in Schools, even if mainly by innuendo and inference, but supporters of the legal secular order have been conspicuous by their absence.

The Churches may tell us what they believe. Does that entitle them to a monopoly of the air? When some of the ideas they propound are considered harmful by other members of the community, then, in all fairness, the right to protest should be granted them. Certainly it would be disastrous for the Churches to abuse their watertight privileges in attacking one another. The urge of self-preservation would prevent them doing this. By force of circumstances they to-day consider economics and sociology as coming within their sphere, which they certainly did not in my youth, a factor which was one of the main reasons for my dissociating myself from them.

G. B. Shaw is right in declaring that New Zealand is well behind the times. The more controversial subjects are discussed, the greater will be the wisdom and understanding of the people.

I would also point out that when a man disbelieves anything he does so because of a counter "belief," e.g. the earth is no longer flat "because we believe it to be globular," a person disbelieves the story of creation "because he believes evolution to be an established fact" and so with every other disbelief.

Our grandmothers firmly believed in devils, witches, fairies, hobgoblins, water sprites and the like, and as bitterly resented criticism and opposition as apparently does J.F.

FREETHINKER (Milford).

Sir,—In a democracy it is absurd that only the majority should be allowed to voice their opinions. Although a Rationalist myself, I say unhesitatingly that Christian Scientists, Christadelphians, British Israelites, and Spiritualists, as well as Rationalists, should have radio time. What about a petition to Parliament? I wonder if people will be big enough to say with Voltaire "I disagree with every word you say, but would defend with my last breath your right to say it"? Progress demands freedom even for obnoxious opinions.

"RATIONALIST" (Christchurch).