

FEBRUARY 23, 1945

Awe-Inspiring

WHEN they read in their newspapers the other day that Lord Reith had spoken in Sydney about the "awful responsibility" on those who directly or indirectly control broadcasting, some people probably wondered at his use of that adjective. "Awful" has been so often applied loosely to women's hats, or meals in restaurants, or crowds on trams, that the terror has gone out of it—an awful example of how words become weakened and banal by popular misuse. But although, in fact, this word does not occur in the Bible (if Cruden is a reliable guide) and once only in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, everybody knows what it meant originally, and anybody who pauses to think for one moment will realise that Lord Reith was not using it frivolously or colloquially. He is not that kind of person.

What he said has, of course, been said before, but it is specially noteworthy when said by the man who made the BBC what it is and who in himself inspired such awe in his colleagues that one of them (R. S. Lambert, then Editor of the *BBC Listener*) has confessed that whenever he received a summons to the Director-General's room he "had to go apart for a minute in order to control his heart beats and allow the mist which arose in his brain to clear away." And Lord Reith's Sydney statement has a peculiar significance also when it is read alongside his opinion, expressed in a talk for the NBS last Sunday (see Page 9), that "it is often better not to speak even when one knows what one thinks and is inclined to say." He himself stands in such awe of the broadcast word that this was one of the very few occasions on which he has ever broken his radio silence. That is perhaps to go almost as much to one extreme of reticence as some people before the microphone go to the other extreme of loquacity; and it is of course much easier to talk about the "awful responsibility" of radio than it is to translate that sense of awe into effective action. Lord Reith found that out in his years at the BBC. Yet this kind of fear is at least the beginning of wisdom.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

Sir,—Your correspondent "Argosy" appears to agree with the "general understanding" that the question of religion in schools was "settled" by the majority "long ago," but there are many legal arrangements "settled long ago" which have since had to be modified and this may prove to be one of them. The question at issue is precisely what features of our present Education Act are worth preserving, and what may and should be altered.

Without sharing his fancy for proportional representation, I agree with your correspondent that "majority rule" needs checks; and quite often, both rightly and wrongly, it gets them. The hard facts of our productive needs set limits to what majority rule can do with the miners; and the hard facts of our educational needs set limits also to what it can do with the teachers.

I agree with him also about the unsatisfactory character of arrangements whereby some pupils attend religious classes and others "find themselves outside in the playground." For this reason I am not quite happy about A.M.R.'s defence of religious observances in State schools. But "Argosy" himself, in his statement that "Bible reading ought to be one solution for all," makes a partial admission that teaching about religion is not open to the same objection as the teaching of religion, and I would simply suggest that he apply this distinction in a more liberal way. The exclusion of all "interpretations" is an impossible demand. Let the pupils instead learn about different possible interpretations, including anti-supernatural ones, and then when they are able they can make up their own minds, with such help as their homes and their churches give them. What is guarded against in our present Education Act, and needs to be guarded against in any modification of it, is the State's imposition of a particular decision on this point upon either teachers or pupils.

I doubt whether the difficulties of adding the study of religion to our training college curricula are as great as "Argosy" fears. The London University already offers a Certificate of Religious Knowledge for mastery of a course which could quite easily be adapted to our needs here.—ARTHUR N. PRIOR (on active service).

CLASSICAL MUSIC.

Sir,—What right has "Arco" to call jazz, swing, crooners, and serials, tripe? They may be tripe in his opinion, but he has a nerve to use this more-or-less vulgar term after himself admitting that this is the most popular type of music.

I would also like to know why your correspondent is complaining about certain classical programmes being replaced by very much lighter, and more popular, music. Surely his receiving set is capable of getting more stations than just 3YA and 3YL. A survey of programmes in *The Listener* will show that each evening from at least one station comes a session of Classical Music, of Symphonic Music, of Chamber Music or of other such types of music which "Arco" seems to delight in.

It is no use attacking programme organisers. They have their job to do and they must give each type of music

a fair trial. Too much of one and not enough of another would result in almost a riot. "Arco" says also that without classics we can have no progress. What rot! If this correspondent is going to stand by this statement all that I can say is that he is one or two centuries after his time.—LEVEL WITH THE TIMES (Riversdale).

PHILIP OF SPAIN.

Sir,—In reading as usual your thoughtful editorial "Hitler's Last Words," I was surprised at the incongruous association of Philip of Spain with Attila. The latter, a squat and swarthy Hun, brought the horrors of Asiatic invasion upon Christendom. Philip, by his labours, his seamen, his ships, and his money, largely contributed to repel a like invasion at the Battle of Lepanto. To point the incongruity, Philip was tall with a golden beard and of partly English descent (House of Lancaster).

I thought Professor Walsh's recent scholarly biography had dispelled the unhistorical myth of the "spider of the Escorial" and that well-read men knew that, though an enemy of England, Philip lived a life worthy in many respects of emulation and in dying showed a nobility by no means unworthy of an English king or of his heroic age.

VINCENT COUNTY (Eastbourne).

RACE BROADCASTS

Sir,—It is quite apparent to me that even after five years of total war the Home Front here in New Zealand has no conception, generally speaking, of the seriousness of the present gigantic struggle. Everywhere I have been I have heard nothing but continual belly-aching about trivialities of which the sample displayed by your correspondent T.C. is a first-class example. To T.C. I would say that it would, no doubt, be most gratifying to the people in the Home Country to know that we are able to spend Saturday afternoons gathered in groups to listen to racing results; again, I have no doubt, people at Home would grieve with T.C. if they knew that his precious racing broadcasts had to give pride of place to war news, of all things. I wonder how T.C. would react if his pet races had to be curtailed or even abandoned due to enemy action?

I consider that both divisions of our broadcasting service are doing a very good job in trying to please everyone, a well-nigh impossible task. My only minor cause for complaint is, perhaps, that the war is not brought home strongly enough. Additional rebroadcasts from the BBC would be welcome, for example, recordings of the four talks given by the Radio Padre.

The success achieved by the two branches of the service here is a credit to those responsible. The programmes available to listeners in New Zealand compare more than favourably with similar services overseas. I, for one, am as satisfied as it is possible to be in this most unsatisfactory world.

R.A.F. (Dunedin).

Sir,—I read the letter from T.C. on this subject, and then read it again to make sure I had understood it correctly. Within an hour, I had a call from a young friend of mine who had landed

five hours earlier in the day from a troopship from the Middle East, so took the opportunity to show him the letter. It is a pity T.C. could not have heard this young soldier's description of him.

The letter in question is very fine support for the oft-expressed opinion that we in New Zealand do not know there is a war on. People like T.C. can have no idea that we are engaged in a terrific struggle against a relentless and merciless enemy, and that many fine young New Zealanders are giving their lives in the cause. They would feel well rewarded to know that the struggle they are engaged in is of less importance to 75 per cent of the people in the Dominion than racing. I think T.C. understates the percentage—it should be 100 per cent, but not 100 per cent of the people of the Dominion, but 100 per cent of his friends. Like attracts like, and no doubt he is basing his statement on the views of his friends.

Racing has far too many privileges in wartime. It serves no good purpose, and is only permitted in wartime because of the powerful influence of a small section of the community. I know that there are what is known as patriotic meetings, but when carefully examined, there is very little patriotism in them, and they certainly would not be held if a few people did not stand to make a bit off them. This statement could be easily proved by holding a race meeting where no betting—tote or otherwise—was permitted. The meeting would not pay five per cent of the expenses. Patriotism covers a multitude of sins, and racing is one of them.

M.E.R. (Wellington).

(This letter has been slightly abridged. We have received several others in the same strain.—Ed.).

"HERE'S TO LIFE"

Sir,—Your reviewer's comments on Mr. H. Hayward's book, *Here's to Life*, are unfavourable and from one side. May I be permitted to offer comments that are favourable and from the other side? I am not a Rationalist as Mr. Hayward is, but am a Roman Catholic. But we are mutual friends and Nature lovers. "Nature calls me and consoles" me, just as it does him. After reading his book, I wrote to Mr. Hayward to say how impressed I was and edified—and that I should like to write my own autobiography in similar vein.

I can assure Mr. Hayward that he has no reason to apologise for his "disordered thoughts" and for their "almost incredible lack of arrangement," to use the reviewer's expressions concerning them. Nature, in her methods, exhibits the same disorder and lack of arrangement. There are no straight lines—a hill here, a valley there—and beyond, a plain with a river wriggling along and scattered among them, are trees, flowers, birds and beasts and so forth. Yet all this disordered variety blends together to form a harmonious whole that delights the nature lover. So it is with Mr. Hayward's book. The great variety of the episodes therein related, and their very detachment and disorderliness, constitute the charm of the book, and give an insight into the character and individuality of Mr. Hayward himself, and make his book a true autobiography. Is not variety the spice of life?

A biography, written by some distinguished author, even if he knew Mr. Hayward well, would be, so to speak, "second-hand," for it would lack the personal touch.—THOMAS A. F. STONE, B.E., A.M.I.M.E. (Auckland).