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Courage

IT takes a good deal to rob Mr. Nash of words, but his vocabulary failed him when he had to tell eleven holders of the Victoria Cross what New Zealand felt towards them. He confessed at once that the task was beyond him. It was beyond anybody to express in words what these men had expressed in action, he said, and he wisely refused to try. Their deeds were on record, and instead of attempting to say what New Zealand owed them he asked them to believe that we were both too proud and too humble for words and could only thank them formally. It was one of the most eloquent speeches he has ever made, and if we could follow his example without cheapening it by repetition we might leave the rest of this column blank. We feel just as helpless as he did, just as conscious of the futility of spelling courage in half a dozen different ways; and just as deliberately we shall not descend to that. But white spaces on a page are white spaces and nothing else. If they suggest anything at all, it is the censor or the clumsy apprentice, whereas the blanks in a speech may be deeply moving. In Mr. Nash's case they were moving because they were necessary—because it was not possible to translate life into plat-form sounds and signs. In the case of Captain Upham and his companions, they were moving for a different reason—because words are not their weapons, and they were not able without a desperate struggle to dredge up the thoughts they wanted us to carry away: that they were not so much heroes as survivors; representatives rather than individuals; present because others could not be present to share the glory their deaths had made possible. Let us not forget that only one of this war's seven V.C. men came through unharmed—that three were killed and three grievously wounded.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

FREEDOM OF THE AIR

Sir,—It is regrettable that so many people are ready to rush into print when their religious doctrines are criticised without (1) realising what science is, (2) knowing what they are talking about. The quoting of "authorities" is a favourite ruse of these crusaders, as if in a phrase one might demolish an inconvenient theory. Scientific theories are made to be tested experimentally, not rejected on the advice of a Hebrew ancient (or modern). Atheism and mysticism are purely personal dogmas and have no place in science, but anyone acquainted with the slow, halting progress of science cannot fail to be impressed with the tragic shackling and limitation of the intellect by mysticism so painfully put aside through the centuries. This replacement of dogma by the "trial and error method," that is to say by experimental science, constitutes the most glorious adventure in man's history—and a deeply spiritual one at that. How many times has experiment triumphed over those who said, "This is so! Man cannot penetrate this mystery." These were the people whose position rested on ignorance, superstition, and terrorism of the most degrading kind. The units of heredity can be seen, measured, their combinations prophesied, and new species produced experimentally. If that eminent sceptic Bateson could know of the use to which his words were put, he would realise his scepticism was justified! In Darwin's day nothing was known of the units of inheritance, but since 1903 biology has been revolutionised and put on an equal footing with other sciences, by the enormous development of cytogenetics, especially in the last few years.

It is impossible for anyone to deliver summary judgment on these matters without a remarkably comprehensive and up-to-the minute knowledge of all cytogenetic work in progress, for this deals with the building stones of heredity and variation and hence biological evolution.

Disregard the evolutionary hypothesis as you will—ignore the contradictions which you meet with in cytogenetics—but remember experimental heredity (re the testing of Darwin's first hypothesis) is the field of the scientist, not of the revivalist.

BIOLOGIST (Christchurch).

(Abridged.—Ed.)

Sir,—The claim of your correspondents "G.H.D." and "Sincere" that Evolution is a discredited theory is plain nonsense. It never had a wider acceptance than it has to-day, and it is doubtful if, outside of a sectarian institution, a single professor of biology could be named who rejects it, although it is true that there are differences of opinion as to its causes. Among the several hundred Fellows of the Royal Society, the late Professor Ambrose Fleming (who was a physicist, not a biologist) alone opposed evolution, and he is accordingly much quoted by fundamentalist die-hards and other special-creationists as though he were the mouthpiece of science on the subject.

The controversy over evolution is now nearly a hundred years old, and although we may expect the defenders of Genesis

to carry on the fight for a long while yet, their case is hopeless. Writing as long ago as 1852 in his prophetic essay "The Development Hypothesis," Herbert Spencer said: "Those who cavalierly reject the theory of evolution as not being adequately supported by facts seem to forget that their own theory is supported by no facts at all. Like the majority of men born to a given belief they demand the most vigorous proof of any adverse belief, but assume that their own needs none."

There can be no real freedom of the air so long as the scientific viewpoints regarding man's origin are banned as broadcasting matter. In New Zealand as in Britain the churches exert an influence in directing broadcasting policy that is out of all proportion to the support accorded them by the public, and it is mainly for this reason that the present policy of

More letters from listeners will be found on page 24.

"hush-hush" exists. How long is this farcical position to continue? The cause of truth demands freedom of expression and we will continue to linger in the dark ages so long as the use of broadcasting as a medium to this end is denied us.

C.H.P. (Invercargill).

Sir,—"G.H.D." states that "evolution is on the eve of being abandoned." Nothing is further from the truth. On the contrary, it is just becoming generally accepted by the intellectually-minded. He also states that "Haldane and Huxley expound no coherent theory of evolution." They in fact point out that evolution has been traced out in fossils left in rocks. They not only state that man and the higher apes have a common simian ancestor, but also, that man has probably resembled amphibian, reptilian, and lower mammalian species at different times in his evolution. *Animal Biology*, an ideal example of Haldane's and Huxley's work, would enlighten "G.H.D."

R. LANGRIDGE (Murray's Bay).

INTERPRETING SHAKESPEARE

Sir,—When he contended that there was only one right way of presenting Hamlet—with which your Viewsreel commentator disagrees—John Drinkwater was probably speaking from the point of view of a writer. I have often wondered how many times Shakespeare has turned in his grave, and if his ghost could vie with that of Hamlet. It seems to be a question of whether an interpreter should faithfully interpret what the author intended, or whether he should allow his own personality and his own interpretation to come into it. Of course it is sometimes difficult to separate the two, since the interpreter will see from his own viewpoint what he thinks the author intended; and whether Hamlet becomes eventually a child of Shakespeare or of, say, John Gielgud, is a matter of interesting speculation.

My sympathies are with the authors. It must be very infuriating to hear one's own work, though well presented, empha-

sized where it should not be, unemphasized where it should be, and, in general, subject to the interpretation of minds that run in different directions. As for the parsing and analysing of character motive and manner of treatment that the works of Shakespeare and Dickens have been put to—it may be valuable as a study, but some of it, I am afraid, would greatly astonish those worthy gentlemen. Surely, even allowing for hard work and infinite attention to detail, much of a great man's greatness is unconscious. Is it conceivable that when he originated Hamlet, Shakespeare imagined in this man everything that everybody else has since imagined into him?

But, to be fair, there's the broader outlook which your commentator apparently favours. Does the value of any work of art lie in its origin, in its impact on the minds of those who are influenced by it and therefore contribute something towards it, or in the whole breadth of its history? In short, what is Art, in any form? Is it a conception of author, interpreter, or a balanced fusion of every mind that rubs against it?

F. (Christchurch).

DETECTIVE NOVELS

Sir,—I join with "F.H." (Wellington) in appreciation of your printing a good critical article like that of Edmund Wilson, whose indictment of detective fiction is true. Even if Lord Birkenhead was one of the "crime addicts" it does not prove the value of detective fiction other than its sedative value. The defence of detective fiction by the Editor of the *Times* does not carry much weight. Judging by the number of detective novels reviewed there must be many "crime addicts" among the subscribers of the *Times*, and it is not good policy for any editor to criticise adversely the personal tastes of their readers.

The *Listener* would have increased value to the public if action were taken on "Short Wave's" letter, specially if items in short supply locally (good drama for instance) were also included in the programme.

"CRITIC" (Pangatotara).

VARIETY MAGAZINE

Sir,—Just a line in your column to congratulate 2YA on its "Variety Magazine" heard on Saturday evenings at 8.30. But allow me to ask one favour. May we have a programme of tenors, such as Gigli, Caruso, Crooks, etc., from our Napier station? Even if it's just 15 minutes?

NBS (Napier).

APPRECIATION

Sir,—I do not wish to occupy much of your space, but just briefly to express my appreciation of the unbroken Community Sing from 4YA to-day. A treat thoroughly enjoyed by the country folk. —"OLD SHEPHERDESS" (Southland).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"Listener" (Christchurch) and "Observer" (Christchurch).—Your letters have been sent to the society responsible for the competition.

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENT

"Interested" (Greenmeadows).—We are sorry to have to say No. They are just completing their second round of all stations with only 32R still to play.