

DECEMBER 14, 1945

Words

IF it were as easy to change people as to give them good advice we should attach great importance to the article reprinted on page 16 from the American magazine *Life*. While the influence of words in politics can be exaggerated, it is not easy to exaggerate the influence of the confused thoughts and attitudes of which confused and confusing words are the common expression. In domestic politics the evil can be overtaken before much harm is done; or before anything worse has happened than some intensification of the confusion in which most of us normally live anyhow. When, for example, everyone who asks radical questions is called a Communist and everyone who criticises the conduct of a war is a Pacifist, tolerance and wisdom have another burden to bear; but at the most we are only a fool's march nearer to domestic nonsense. When the same kind of confusion clouds international discussions we may be a day's march nearer to another war. *Life* is right in saying that neither "democracy" nor "fascism" means the same thing to an American and to a Russian; but both use them, and even write them into international documents, as if they did mean the same, and then drift into suspicion because they don't. Democracy in Russia has never meant much more than a juster distribution of economic rewards and the free discussion on farms and in factories of the methods of carrying out Government orders. Democracy in America and the several Britains is the strongest of all political traditions, but has been a mockery and a sham economically. As for fascism, it will soon mean the same in Europe as communism has so often meant out of Europe: somebody or something that those in power dislike. And just as it is a mockery to cry peace, peace when there is no peace, it is confusion to demand the same kind of democracy in London, Moscow, Belgrade, and New York, and folly to expect to get it. The beginning of wisdom in such matters is to know what we mean and say nothing else.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

FREEDOM OF THE AIR

Sir,—Most of the correspondents in this discussion have failed to notice my original protest, which was against the ban on broadcasting of any anti-religious matter.

In the House of Representatives, when the Estimates for Broadcasting were under discussion recently, a strong plea was made by more than one member for a change of policy to allow controversial subjects to be broadcast, and I did not hear exemption of religious matters asked for. The members declared that controversial subjects of all kinds were permitted by the BBC, also the ABC, therefore why not New Zealand?

To my Biblical friends I would say that I still place my confidence in modern medical science in preference to the instructions to be found in Leviticus, and feel that the theory of evolution, which fits the known facts, is more acceptable to me than the positive assertion of a miraculous six-day creation of less than 6,000 years ago.

To-day the urgent need of the world is peace and understanding between nations, and it is quite obvious that, since the Christian churches cannot agree among themselves as to the interpretation of the Bible, they cannot hope to offer a sure and sound basis for international brotherhood. I feel that superstition in any form, whether it be Hindu, Mohammedan, Jewish or Christian, must be voluntarily abolished before a true world brotherhood and permanent peace can be established. To this end I think children should not be taught subjects containing devils, angels, miracles, hell, lakes of fire, purgatory, etc. Psychologists tell us that irreparable harm is done to the young mind by such teachings and I am inclined to agree. So let's have a free discussion of this subject over the air.

R. HULBERT (Waipukurau).

(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

CANZONET OR MADRIGAL?

Sir,—W. Roy Hill interpreted my comment on his sentence about the distinction between canzonets and madrigals ("of which we can now be but dimly aware") as a disputation of fact, and he now wishes to "stick to it" and to "confound" me by quoting E. H. Fellowes. I regret that I evidently did not make myself clear. The "But" of my sentence was meant to indicate that I had no quarrel with the fact (or opinion). I merely deplored the "rich and beautiful" variety of prose he chose to state it. The announcer's own lips rebelled. Brassiere and hosiery, advertisements may be capable of being backed up with facts just as indisputable. Their prose style is nevertheless in my opinion not desirable for radio programmes on Elizabethan composers.—VIEWSREEL COMMENTATOR (Wellington).

NINE TAILORS.

Sir,—"Rob's" letter giving the derivation of "It takes nine tailors to make a man" was interesting but I am inclined to think that the saying only came into being as a joke. There are many reasons why, when tailors went from house to house to work, they should have been unpopular with the menfolk, not the least being that their tongues may often have been as cutting as their shears. One can imagine the sexton being called from

the inn to toll the death of the local tailor. (I am afraid my knowledge of campanology is derived from Hood, who probably knew even less than I do on the subject). There would probably be jocular remarks bordering on the ribald as to how many tailors should be tolled for a tailor till the sexton would declare that he'd give him 9 tailors to make a man of him. In every village whenever a tailor died there would be likely to be hilarious punning on the subject.

When we consider the valiant little tailor in Grimm and the four and twenty tailors who went to catch a snail, it looks as if "It takes 9 tailors to make a man" right from its inception was a crack at tailors.
BEN (Dunedin).

MISPRONUNCIATIONS

Sir,—I have culled the following examples of mispronunciations from last week's Broadcasts, some alas, having occurred even in Educational sessions, while others are by staff announcers, politicians, and other supposedly educated persons.

Irrelevant (irrelevant), Sekkertry (secretary), Mathematics (mathematics), Liebry (library), Mannerfackchers (manufacturers), Ekkernomics (economics), Interlood (interlude), Febry (February), Noo Zillan (New Zealand), Honoble gentleman (Honourable Gentleman).

The schools do not seem to be very successful in teaching simple English nowadays, and the general standard of grammar, spelling, and punctuation is deplorable, but surely we may expect something better than the above over the air. Is the cause ignorance, or just laziness? People who should know better are among the worst offenders. Could we not have more frequent talks on pronunciation and grammar, such as were given in the past by Professor Maxwell Walker, and more recently by Professor Arnold Wall.—"LISTENER" (Thames).

GENERATIONS.

Sir,—I have noticed several letters appearing in your pages under the nom-de-plume of "Fourth Generation New Zealander" and sometimes even "Fifth Generation New Zealander." My grandmother's grandmother arrived in this country in 1842. Am I therefore a fourth or a fifth generation Enzedder? Did my grandmother's grandmother automatically become a New Zealander when she set foot in this country and can I count her in, or must I only number from my grandmother's grandmother's daughter who was actually born here?

Apparently this "generation" stuff counts for quite a bit so I take my hat off to the Maoris. Numbering back to 1350, they must have quite a few generations to their credit.—4th but maybe a 5th generation New Zealander" (Frankton Junction).

ENGLISH PLACE NAMES

Sir,—It seems to me most presumptuous for Mr. John Price to say, in your issue of November 16 that English place names should not be pronounced the English way. Does he realise that there is a famous public school at Marlborough? The boys educated there might be supposed to have "a good grounding in the English language," and yet they call the place Mawlborough. I suppose Mr. Price thinks South Wark should be pronounced South Wark, and Maryle-

bone—Mary-le-bone. No doubt he is careful to pronounce the T in Covent Garden, and what does he say for Pall Mall, Cirencester, or Gloucester? Does he think it necessary to pronounce the "T" in Salisbury, the "W" in Norwich, and the second "W" in Warwick? To be consistent, he should do all these things. Someone has been pulling his leg about Birmingham. I admit I have heard it called Brum, but no one claims that that is the right way to pronounce it. "ANOTHER HOMEY" (Whangarei).

Sir,—John W. Price and "Argosy" quibble about dialect (which is not in the argument). But Yarmouth, like every other town ending with "mouth" in England, is pronounced as "Homey" says. I believe there is only one exception to this; but for the moment I have forgotten it (it may be Exmouth). If your two correspondents were to trip home and warble about Yahrmonth, Dartmouth, and Weymouth, etc., they would be looked upon as two very big jokes, not only by the man in the street but by the most intelligent University professor.

C.A.W. (Christchurch).

BIG SISTER

Sir,—How much longer must we suffer the radio serial, "Big Sister?" After many trials and tribulations, hair-raising adventures and compromising situations, she has at last "got her man." Surely, after that, she should be allowed to "live happily ever after," if not for her own sake, at least, for that of the listeners.

"BRIAR" (Wellington).

CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS

Sir,—Virgil Thompson in his article on modern music is attempting a difficult task when he tries to "reassure the bewildered."

It is interesting to note that modernism in poetry has been resisted, also modernism in art tolerated on account of being a good financial investment. But it looks as if modern music has been foisted on the long-suffering public; this may possibly be accounted for by the desire of many people to be in the fashion.

The techniques that were thought revolutionary 30 years ago have now (according to Virgil Thompson) become a vested interest in the schools and colleges of the U.S.A.; this can easily occur when professors in music impress their own views on helpless pupils; especially in a land where tradition is largely abandoned and the newest is considered the best. But this teaching does not prove the value of contemporary music any more than the teaching of Nazism in the German schools proved the value of that ideology.

Strauss in his "Salome" and "Electra" depicts the approach of a motorised army. Is there anything more devastating, barbarous, and inhuman in the whole history of man than mechanised warfare?

"Convalescent" in his letter on contemporary composers expresses the view of listeners who use the radio for pleasure and appreciation. The gaiety of life, also the deep religious feeling portrayed by early composers, is very satisfying compared with the restless tempo, the sense of frustration, or the spirit of mechanisation often portrayed by contemporary composers.—"ONE OF THE BEWILDERED" (Pangatotara).