

DECEMBER 21, 1945

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## Christmas Now

IT has called for a good deal of courage for six years to offer one another the usual Christmas greetings, but never for so much as this year. It was always in our minds during the bleakest days of the war that a day would come on which the fighting would cease; and it did come. To-day we have peace—a peace so strange that no one knows what to think about it. It is doubtful if civilisation since the Stone Age has ever been so completely bewildered. Hiroshima's bomb may have blown war for ever from the earth, and if it has, history will call Christmas 1945 the most memorable since the first. If war comes back, and the atomic bomb with it, there may be no history to write in another generation, and no one to write it. Nor are these mere rhetorical flourishes. They are everywhere accepted as possibilities, and by an increasing number as probabilities. We are all looking into an abyss which the dullest know may suddenly engulf us; will engulf us if we go blindly on. It is there that our first peace Christmas finds us, and the thoughts and feelings that we would normally circulate at such a season are conditioned by the darkness ahead of us. It is still possible to wish one another well; to do it sincerely and with some heartiness; but it is not possible to do it with the old abandon. Good-will is now nuclear nonsense unless we already have new hearts and minds; and that is very near to saying that there are now only two ways of celebrating Christmas without humbug—the Christian way and the way of *carpe diem*. If we have seen the folly of war, the sin and shame of it as well as the danger, we may rejoice because we have repented. If we have learnt nothing and regretted nothing, we may still eat, drink, and make merry, but it will be in fear of that to-morrow on which we know we shall die.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## DEBUSSY'S "FAUN"

Sir,—In your footnote to a recent letter of mine you state: "We might employ Mr. Austin (i.e., as proof-reader) if we did not remember a paragraph he once wrote for us in which Debussy's faun had four legs." To have a finger in the pie is a common expression, but this is the first time I have heard of a faun having four legs in a paragraph.

However, ambiguity apart, I cannot recall having written the paragraph in question, though, even if I did write it, there does not seem to be any good reason why a faun—mythologically already endowed with horns and tail—should not be four-legged. It is notorious that during the course of centuries legends tend to accumulate—a fact which cannot escape the notice of the satyr-ist.

Apropos of this subject, perhaps you will allow me, Sir, to quote a paragraph that I wrote for another publication. It ran as follows:

"Debussy used to show an almost child-like delight in new inventions. The story goes that when the telephone was first installed in his house he spent an entire afternoon ringing up all his friends. Quite possibly this inspired him to compose 'L'après-midi d'un phone.'"

With the compliments of the season,

—L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

## THANKSGIVING FOR VICTORY

Sir,—Mr. Sibson is quite right to take me to task for misquoting Kipling ("strings" instead of "springs.") My explanation, not excuse, is that I copied the incorrect version in *The Listener*. Here are the lines corrected:

*"Teach us Delight in simple things,  
The Mirth that has no bitter springs;  
Forgiveness free of evil done,  
And Love to all men 'neath the sun!"*

Now, Sir, all I said was that these particular lines are doggerel and should not have formed part of "Thanksgiving for Victory." Your readers can judge for themselves. I deprecate Mr. Sibson's hot attack on me for decrying Kipling, for I never did any such thing. I certainly did not say or think that it was "a sort of hall-mark of intelligence" to do so.

I am not prepared to debate the rest of Mr. Sibson's propositions. I might indeed agree with them.

VINCENT COUNTY (Wellington).

(This letter would have appeared sooner if it had not been mislaid. We apologise for the delay.—Ed.)

## GREETINGS TO R.W.C.

Sir,—With your kind permission I would again, on behalf of the hundreds who up and down New Zealand have enjoyed the weekly Crossword, wish R.W.C. a cheerful Christmas and the happiest of New Years. We are indeed grateful to your contributor for many an interesting and amusing evening and many of us are well aware what crossword building and clues fashioning entail. To you, Sir, also without whose approval of the item no crossword puzzle would appear in the pages of your admirable weekly we owe and offer heartfelt thanks and wish you a delightful Christmas and a prosperous Forty-six.

GRATEFUL (Dunedin).

## ORCHESTRAS AND OPERA

Sir,—I was very interested in some comments in a recent issue dealing with the poor quality of the local Y.A. Orchestras. As was pointed out, to gloss over their performances in silence or mistaken politeness is hardly playing fair with the public. Surely we have better talent in the country, or if we haven't, let us go outside our own borders. Obviously we need a high-grade conductor who could weld our players into a team, as was done in a very short time by Dr. Malcolm Sargent some years ago in Wellington. With the huge reserves at our disposal we should be in a position to offer quite attractive terms to the right man, and we should not be asked to tolerate the present pitiful state of affairs any longer.

Is it not time that we re-introduced the Wagner Operas into our operatic sessions? I freely admit that there were some valid reasons for these being

## The King's Broadcast

### HIS MAJESTY THE KING'S

Christmas message will be recorded if conditions are suitable and will be broadcast from the main National and Commercial stations at 7.0 a.m., 1.15 and 6.15 p.m. on Wednesday, December 26.

dropped in war-time, but I don't think we should deprive ourselves of such masterpieces any longer. Occasionally we have a few excerpts, but in general our fare has come from the operatic catacombs.

On the subject of Opera, could we not have more frequent sessions? For some years each local station has given us one a month and a half-hour every Friday night. I would like to see one a week, or as a compromise say a whole act per week. In any event, more attention should be paid to operatic periods.

But for heaven's sake let us have done with the intrusive voice of the commentator who merely succeeds in ruining—only too frequently—several vital bars of music; as for a typical instance the brief but lovely funeral march in *Tosca* is reduced to a mere murmur for narrative purposes. I would also like to see the childish and unnecessary applause at the end of every act scrapped, as surely no one is deceived, or has its appreciation heightened thereby.

TRISTAN (Christchurch).

## ENGLISH PLACE NAMES.

Sir,—"Phonetics" misquotes my letter three times and double challenges on something I did not write—and why all the needless repetition? On the top of all he carefully avoids giving his own version of the pronunciation of Yarmouth. My pronunciation represented as "Yahrmouth" (not Yahrmouth) was simply my method of expressing the proper sound, but I also pointed a warning about the method. When one comes to think about it, there is something

ludicrous in the very idea of a pronouncing Dictionary and it would be more correct to look on Daniel Jones as a collector of pronunciations. New arrivals to New Zealand could well be pardoned for pronouncing Onehunga as Wunhunga, but it is nonsense to suggest that they pronounce it as Wunhunger. Why should they? Any liberty they do take is all the more excusable when we know that very few people born in the country can pronounce it correctly, but usually say Oneh-hun-ga instead of the pleasing O-nu-hu-nga. I remember meeting at Leeds a manufacturer from Slaitwhaite and on my saying the name of the town, he informed me that although I had called it by the name it was originally intended to have, everybody called it Slow-eight, at least that is as near as I can give the spelling. This state of affairs prevails all over Britain with place names, and Yarmouth is no exception.

—"ARGOSY" (Te Awamutu).

Sir,—Immediately after reading Miss Ngaio Marsh's letter supporting the "Mawlborough" pronunciation, I heard an announcer on the BBC report that the "Indefatigable" was about to visit the Marlborough Sounds (pronounced as spelt). It appears possible therefore that this pronunciation of the place name is not regarded as "eccentric or ignorant" in its country of origin. Most New Zealanders, ignorant or not, call it Marlborough, and this is a better argument still.

But I would like to complain of the Cabinet Minister who in a single speech said: *ineligible, statuf'ory, industy, equit'able* and *yerr* for year; and of the radio play actor who recently called the King's Justiciar his "Justice Seer."

YUMPTH (Wellington).

## THE POST-PRIMARY CURRICULUM

Sir,—In a recent article on the new post-primary curriculum, it was stated that the view "that the relegation of the classics to the role of options and the simpler prescriptions suggested for those subjects, implied a lowering of educational standards" did not "seem to be generally shared by school principals."

However, the statement does not seem to be accurate. On March 28 this year, a meeting of Auckland headmasters, headmistresses, and teachers of Latin, convened by Professor Cooper, unanimously resolved that the following communication be sent to the Minister of Education:

"We believe that we speak for a majority of Secondary School Headmasters, Headmistresses and Teachers of Latin in asserting our conviction (a) that the proposed syllabus is both unwise and impracticable, being based on a grave misconception of the proper reasons for teaching Latin, (b) that to enforce such a syllabus would take most, if not all, the virtue out of the teaching of Latin, (c) that the general character of secondary education would in consequence be debased.

"Latin has a legitimate and important place in secondary education. We have no desire that Latin should be imposed as a compulsory subject upon all or upon any pupils. We do, however, assert the rights of those who have both the wish and the ability to learn it. We claim for these that they should be allowed to take such a course in Latin as will realise the true values of the subject, allow full scope for ability, and provide commensurate rewards for effort. The course proposed in the Post-Primary School Curriculum Report is not of this kind."

R. I. F. PATTISON (Havelock North).

## ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

"Greenink" (Menzie's Ferry).—At 4YA in three or four weeks' time on Sunday afternoons, and later at 2YD.