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The Maori Battalion

AS we write this article the members of the Maori Battalion are being honoured by the people of Wellington on behalf of the people of the whole Dominion. When they went away no one doubted that the Maoris would fight well—very well if conditions were favourable. But no one supposed that they would become one of the most famous fighting battalions of the war. Yet that has been their achievement. It is the opinion of some of the best judges—Major-General Kippenberger, for example, whose considerable estimate was printed in our own columns—that with equality in equipment and position the Maori Battalion would have overwhelmed any other battalion on any of the Mediterranean fronts. But New Zealand is acknowledging more to-day than Maori prowess in battle. It is honouring that first, since the first duty of a soldier is to fight. But it is acknowledging at the same time that all New Zealanders are one, that the last line separating Maori and Pakeha has been obliterated, and that the Maoris in a single century have travelled all the way from the stone age to the age of the atomic bomb. Necessarily they have suffered some loss and show some signs to-day of weariness and maladjustment. It would be blindness not to see what the social cost has been of having to crowd a thousand political centuries into one. Supports have been knocked away in a generation or two that took hundreds of years to build, but while it is proper to acknowledge such things it is not for any Pakeha to dwell on them. It might be permissible to say more about them if we had done everything that we ought to have done ourselves—even in social and economic matters, where the Maori is most vulnerable. It will be time to complain of the Maori's reluctance to make a good economic machine of himself when the Pakeha has abolished slums and shown that the machine is safe.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

FREE VERSE

Sir,—I read the appeal by your correspondent on the subject of Free Verse. Some of the so-called "intellectual" modern poets have adopted as an affectation a studied aversion to anything conventional in the writing of poetry. Several of them have (as "Really Interested" says) abandoned metre, rhyme and—occasionally—punctuation. Take, for example, this stanza of T. S. Eliot's "Marina" (Faber & Faber's edition).

"What seas what shores what granite islands
towards my timbers
And woodthrush calling through the fog
My daughter."

But these lines have force and beauty in spite of their unusual form.

I think the reasons for this poetic revolt are the disillusionment resulting from the two World Wars, and a reaction from all that can be typified by the suburban prettiness of some of Tennyson's poems. The ultra-modern school of poetry is struggling to free itself of what it considers the hampering shackles of rhyme and metre. It has done this, but has not replaced the former conventions with anything stable, and the result is the number of formless poems which have been written lately.

Several poets of the ultra-modern school have done some fine work—I am thinking in particular of T. S. Eliot, but even his work is sometimes morbid and disillusioned. There is, of course, no set form in Free Verse, which is a revolt against former ideas of poetry, but poetry must always have a certain lilt, even if it is not regular. Wordsworth said that all poetry should be "simple, sensuous and passionate"; the writers of "vers libre" have chosen to go against these stipulations, and we must judge for ourselves whether Wordsworth's ideas or theirs will triumph in the end.

J.P.M. (Marton).

Sir,—“Really Interested” would have been interested in an article I read recently on the obscurity of modern verse. While giving both sides of the case it nevertheless thoroughly debunked the modern school. Also, after agreeing with St. John Adcock (author and critic) that “It is as futile to define poetry as it would be to define the Kingdom of Heaven,” the writer of the article, after elaboration, goes on to say that “Poets should be the seers and prophets and teachers of humanity; they should enable us to comprehend the height and depth, the breadth and the circumference and the mystery of life.” That such a goal cannot be fully achieved does not matter: the aim does.

The aimlessness of modern verse was proved recently by four young men, two in England, and two in Australia, with the same humorous results. The English book was favourably received by critics and reviewers, and one Australian editor in particular fell even more heavily for the hoax engineered by the two Australian poets. He actually hailed the “new poet” as one of “the two giants of Australian literature.”

“SUBSCRIBER” (Morrinsville).

Sir,—Your correspondent “Really Interested” is to be commended for his timely and pointed protest against the formless and erratic stuff which, for lack of a better name, we call Free Verse. The designation is all too generous; it

is indeed a contradiction of terms, since “verse” with no semblance of form or structure is not verse at all. We do not call a handful of wheels and springs a watch, nor a pile of bricks a church. And a collection of words, however well chosen, and however expressive of great ideas, has no claim to be called verse until it has been fashioned into the rhythmic form that distinguishes poetry from prose.

The free verse writer, whatever his motive, escapes the labour—and misses the joy—of shaping his message with that regard for measure and rhythm and accent, to say nothing of rhyme, that might make his effort poetry. And yet it would appear that he is able, by the simple expedient of capriciously cutting up his work into a jumble of unequal lines, to win recognition for what, if submitted as the prose it is, might receive

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hardly a moment's consideration. What proud distinction might be yours, sir, if your excellent editorials, which really have something worthy to say, and say it worthily, were similarly chopped up!

I wonder if some of our modern poets would condescend to tell us just wherein (apart from this playful indulgence in the game of cleavage) their work differs from plain prose. They might reveal the principles of operation that your correspondent enquires about, and so help to allay the suspicion that perhaps the dominant motive is the urge to exploit what is new and different merely because it is new and different, and regardless of whether the results are for better or for worse.

Meanwhile we should not take too seriously the comfortable suggestion that “Heaven knows” anything about the rules of this irritating cult. There is little about free verse that reflects the rest and order and sanity of the Celestial regions. Rather does it hint at the benighted and futile groupings of the denizens of “another place.” I hope we shall hear a good deal more about it.

—J.W.B. (Wellington).

FILMS AND THE TRUTH.

Sir,—Mostly I can resist the urge to write to newspapers about all the things which madden me. But this time your correspondent “Abuse is no criticism” has brought me through the ropes into the arena to deliver this one stroke—not on behalf of “G.M.”—not against “A.I.N.C.”—but for the sake of truth—just plain truth as an object worth fighting for.

Films as a cause of conflict are worthless. The world could get along nicely without them. But the world gets along only badly because there is not enough truth among its hot-headed inhabitants; and unless there is some more truth soon, it won't get along at all. So if we have an idea that civilisation as we know it is worth trying to save for improvement, then obvious untruths which are allowed to get around should be attacked on principle, without regard to subject matter.

How does “A.I.N.C.” get the idea that “G.M.” supports British films against American? If “A.I.N.C.” has read *The*

Listener for as long as I have (and he could not have read it for longer) he would have noticed, if he chose, that “G.M.” has frequently lauded to the skies some mediocre and even rubbishy American films. Suppose “A.I.N.C.” tries to explain away the “stand up” claps awarded to the noisy *Meet Me in St. Louis* (with a clutch of dreadful ditties) and to *Going My Way* with its appalling namesake song, while *Colonel Blimp*—British made and one of the finest pictures of all time—received only secondary honours?

The *Listener* files are accessible to “A.I.N.C.”—let him look them up, and if he has any justice in him, he will see the pattern as above immeasurably extended. Easier still, let him look at Page 14—issue January 4.

F. E. GEE (Gisborne).

(Abridged.—Ed.)

PROGRAMME ARRANGEMENTS

Sir,—There has been much discussion in your columns in connection with radio programmes. And I think many of your correspondents are voicing the feelings of quite a few listeners in New Zealand. My family and I have been getting dissatisfied over recent years. And the reason has been exactly what one correspondent stated: poor programme arrangement, presentation, and the repetition of the same old records. Why is every record announced one by one, for instance? One correspondent was right about a “dreary medley” of records all day. First we hear, say, Richard Tauber, then Charlie Kunz, then the Mills Brothers (old records at that), then some other performer, and so on. Now why don't the NBS give us a quarter of an hour of Tauber, a quarter of an hour or 10 minutes of Kunz, etc., and present the daily programmes that way? These half-hour, quarter-hour or 10-minute presentations want to be woven together and put over in an interesting and entertaining manner. After about an hour or two like this, there should be a talk, or play, then go back to, say, classical music presented in decent-sized amounts of one orchestra, or performer. The programmes wouldn't seem so many “bits and pieces,” and lack coherence, as they do now. Even the main Australian stations make their programmes up as I have suggested, as do America and England. I am waiting hopefully for an announcement that the NBS is going to overhaul the whole of the country's radio listening soon.

GEO. F. RITCHIE (Merivale).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

K. E. Crompton, M.B. (Havelock North).—We are advised that the interruption was due to a misunderstanding of signals between player and technician, and that the player afterwards accepted the responsibility.

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENT

Mrs. G. A. Lambert (Auckland).—The Service originally contracted for the feature to run 208 episodes. The producer later decided to extend the series and through an oversight the Station was not advised. A closing announcement was broadcast at the conclusion of the 208 episodes. Immediately it was realised something was amiss the Station went on the air with an explanation but as the remaining discs were not in the country a further feature was provided. Steps are now being taken to secure the remaining episodes. The advertiser is in no way to blame.

OURSELVES.

Several correspondents have sent us letters supporting the tribute by “Enthusiast” in our issue of January 4. For these we are sincerely grateful, but to print them would be unbecoming.—Ed.