

MARCH 15, 1946

Food

SIR HENRY FRENCH, whom we interview on Page 9, did not come here in the role of an official Oliver Twist. The express purpose of his visit is to thank us, on behalf of the British Ministry of Food, for New Zealand's wartime productive effort. This is indeed a courteous gesture and one which will be appreciated, but Sir Henry would be carrying courtesy unreasonably far if, while thanking us for the first helping, he did not use the occasion to remind us politely that Britain's plate is now almost empty and the people still hungry. And not only the people of Britain, but also the people of the Continent, who are, in fact, even hungrier. Sir Henry recognises that it is natural for New Zealand to want to help the United Kingdom before anyone else, and he is grateful for that attitude; but though he does not say as much in so many words he plainly has little sympathy for those who think that our responsibility extends only to feeding Britain, and that if this were done it would not greatly matter if other countries were to starve. Among other countries Germany is included, and it should be noticed that Sir Henry discounts the suggestion that the Germans are better off than the British. The problem of food is a world problem, the immediate significance of which is perhaps best summed up in the words of the Czechoslovak peasant woman who told an UNRRA worker, "We don't need much, but we need a little quickly." Peace can never be secure for the people of Britain or of any other country so long as the bellies of other people, even of Germans, are empty. So, although Britain desperately needs food and is looking to us for help, she is, according to Sir Henry, not asking for more than her reasonable share when available supplies are allocated. This is, of course, nothing but plain common-sense—but it is also altruism at the heroic level. We in this well-fed country are poor creatures indeed if we are unmoved by the fact that the people of Britain, with their belts tightened and their larders almost empty, are nevertheless quite willing to recognise the claims of their even less fortunate neighbours.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

SPY STORY.

Sir,—What's the big idea? Yesterday I opened my newspaper and read that the report of the Royal Commission into the spy ring in Canada has established that there has been a lot of dirty work going on. To-day I get my *Listener* dated March 8 and read in your editorial a warning that "the only official details released at the time of writing are notably sober and meagre." Surely something is wrong somewhere.

PUZZLED (Lower Hutt).

(All that is wrong is that the interval which inevitably occurs with a journal such as ours between preparing material and getting it into subscribers' hands, for once proved embarrassingly long. But what we said was perfectly true: at the time of writing that article, the only official details were still "notably sober and meagre" by comparison with unofficial newspaper speculations—amounting in fact to little more than the bare announcement that a Royal Commission of Inquiry had been set up. However, the Royal Commission worked faster than such bodies usually do and faster than we expected.—Ed.)

NEWTON PREDICTED IT.

Sir,—Your writer in "Radio Views-reel" continues to amaze us all. His cunningly constructed analogy between Newton's Second Law of Thermodynamics and the increase in unclassified programmes suggests that some music critic (equally well read in science) may be able to detect even more suggestive links between science and music. Two examples occurred to me which may be of interest. Aristotle's Quantum Theory has an obvious parallel in the use of the semitone as a unit of pitch. Would Bach's introduction of quarter tones necessitate halving the constant, h ? Again, Bechstein's famous theory of relativity which denies the validity of anything involving the concept of absolute rest surely finds its musical analogue in Mozart's atonal works.

R.O.D. (Dunedin).

(Our correspondent has omitted to mention the even more fundamental case of the Magdeburg Concertos (Bach-Guericke) which first demonstrated the Parallelogram of Forces, or sixty-four-fold leg-pull.—Ed.)

EISENHOWER AND TOLSTOY

Sir,—As one who has also "just accomplished the not-inconsiderable feat of reading Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, might I be permitted to say a few words in reply to G.M.'s interesting and provocative article on Eisenhower and Tolstoy?

First point: Although Tolstoy appears to put the "ultimate responsibility for military success or failure squarely on the man behind the gun," one cannot help but feel that, in the last analysis, he comes to the conclusion (implied rather than expressed) that there is no responsibility at all—unless we trace the "ultimate responsibility" to Tolstoy's "one cause of all causes" which he places outside of history. Take these quotations for example: "Every human being is inevitably conditioned by what surrounds him and by his own body." "The responsibility appears greater or lesser according to our knowledge of the circumstances." "Man lives consciously for himself, but is an unconscious instrument in the attainment of the historic universal aims of humanity." And finally: "It is necessary to renounce a freedom which does not exist and to recognise a dependence of which we are

not conscious." (G.M. will recall that these are the culminating ideas of *War and Peace*). Where is the "man behind the gun" now?

Second point: A large number of historians still believe that generalship is a vital factor in warfare, and that "the absence of a general plan of concerted action can be made good by no compensating advantages" (Egerton). While we do not expect G.M. to defend Tolstoy's philosophy of history in toto (however interesting and romantic and perhaps convincing may be its applications), I think that we should expect him to tell us how *The True Glory* (which apparently disregards these factors of generalship and planning) can be regarded as anything but a falsification of history—that is to say, in so far

More letters from listeners will be found on page 15.

as it claims to give a comprehensive picture of the war. — "HISTORY STUDENT" (Victoria College).

(G.M. replies: The points raised are interesting, but if this correspondent has seen the film, or even had read the review carefully, I doubt if he would have bothered to raise them, for he would know that the film does not "apparently disregard" the factors mentioned.)

O, TO BE IN ENGLAND!

Sir,—How would English besiegers of New Zealand House react to Ronald L. Meek's languishings for Lord Keynes and archaic cloisters? Would they quote Auden's

"You may be a little genius,
You may be doing your best
To tell us about yours truly
But where is the interest,
It's just a world that has had its day?"

ME TOO (Auckland).

THE UNIVERSITY

Sir,—It is indeed time that the community became aware and took stock of its University. The Chancellor says that it is third-rate, meaning presumably that its degrees are of easy acquisition and its graduates, mostly mediocrities. That is probably quite true, whether one's standard is absolute or relative to other universities. Professor Gordon puts the blame on lack of finance resulting in understaffing and overcrowding. Suppose we rectify this? Would we really inject a new vitality or would we merely make the "secondary school" more efficient? I agree with you that the cause of our dissatisfaction lies much deeper.

I am a graduate of the New Zealand University and so are my four children, from three different colleges. We agree that nowhere in our courses has there been a hint of any need or desirability of probing into the question of what are the ultimate values of life. Such things might be discussed between students in their leisure hours; in my memory these discussions remain the most stimulating part of my university education. But so they will be discussed among ardent

young spirits anywhere. Nowadays the time, apparently, is so much more thoroughly taken up with exercises and examinations that such leisure hours are few indeed.

The fact is that, from whatever causes, the accepted idea in New Zealand of a satisfactory life consists of professional and social success and plenty of money; on the "working man" level, high wages and short hours; and for both, above all, untroubled physical comfort.

I have long cherished a plan for giving an opportunity at any rate to those—there must be some—who desire to find truth not only for its own sake, but for the sake of humanity. Already in the honours classes in the various sciences and perhaps Philosophy and Political Science (we have no Social Science) there are students inspired by this idea, but they work at a great disadvantage. I should like to see such disinterested work separated altogether from the professional schools which constitute the great bulk of our University. I would have it called the University, and the schools would remain schools; but names do not much signify.

It would be devoted solely to research, scientific and philosophic (in the grandest sense of the word) and to literature, (active not passive). Only the pick of our graduates would be admitted, and they would be offered only plain living and high thinking, "blood, sweat, toil, and tears." I hardly think that any professors would be needed, only a first-class librarian; "for the true university is a collection of books," and an intelligent and eager spirit is best left to the influence of ideas free from personal influence. So it would be cheap as far as buildings and salaries are concerned, and expensive equipment, apart from the library, would be confined to the laboratories.

In such a way we might produce the ideas and the men who could re-vitalize our conditions and put us on a dynamic path of progress. "Conflict" is the keyword to humanity's dissatisfactions, conflict of opposing interests within the individual, within the nation, between the nations. Yet the everyday notions of us all betray a faith in the ultimate goodness of life. On the dialectic principle this contradiction is soluble on a higher plane of thought and consequent action. What is that plane and how are we to reach it? That is what we need to know, both as individuals and as citizens, and that knowledge will constitute progress.

—BERTHA BOGLE (Heretaunga).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

"Speed Fiend" (Hamilton): The Technical Officers of the NBS make this comment on your letter: "The record reproducing turntables used in our stations are designed to operate at standard fixed speeds of 78 r.p.m. and 33 1-3 r.p.m. They do not have a variable speed control such as on ordinary gramophones. Only a very abnormal fluctuation in the electric power supply could cause them to run at slightly higher speeds than the designed speed and any such variations would certainly not be to the extent mentioned by this correspondent."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS

"Australian—An Ordinary One" (Waiuku): We are enquiring about Aunt Mamie.

"Dissatisfied" (Wellington), "Student" (Wellington), "Listener" (Sandringham), A.B. (Auckland), O.R. (Lower Hutt): It is necessary to remind you, and several others, that correspondents must give their names and addresses, even when it is their wish that these should not be published.