

LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD.

Every Friday

Price Threepence

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Elbow Room

WITH this issue, but a little anxiously, we return to 48 pages. For six years we have been trying to make 48 go into 40, into 32, occasionally even into 24, and the task has of course been impossible. Now we are giving ourselves a possible task mathematically, but a slightly worrying one at the source of supply. It is still far from true that paper is arriving regularly in New Zealand, or in sufficient quantity, and we feel therefore like the small boy who ventures further and further out on a branch, hoping that it will not break, but afraid all the time that it may. Nor do we, by taking this risk, overtake all our space problems. We overtake some, and get ourselves into a better position for dealing with others, but we do not even pretend that we have removed all justification for complaint or criticism. We have, however, gone a long way to meet those listeners who want more programme space. Some day we shall go further still, and return to the three pages a day displays of our first reckless three months; but in the meantime we have given the stations 33½ per cent. more space every day, and when the war really does end, and the ships now on the bottom of the sea all start visiting us again, we shall add more pages still in all sections (and then of course everybody will be happy). But we are not waiting for that day before adding another feature that has been lying in the back of our mind for many months. We add that today: "Wild Life and Ways" by Dr. R. S. Falla, Director of the Canterbury Museum. Dr. Falla is known to many of our readers as a broadcaster, and it has not been easy to get him into print as well, since his days are as inelastic as our pages. But here he is at last, and it will not be his fault if he makes us arm-chair naturalists only. He gives us a clear enough warning.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

WHAT-HO!

Sir,—The dearth of intellectual fare so consistently manifested in your tabulated programmes has at last provoked a slightly tolerant person to a protestation of fundamental concepts.

In a very liberal calculation, taking a recent *Listener* as typical, the following results were obtained. The conspectus for the four YA stations reveals that for an aggregate of 450 hours of broadcasting, 20 hours or 4.5 per cent. were devoted to music of a generally accepted classical nature, and 536 hours, with 32 hours of classics (5.9 per cent.), for contemporary national stations. The "Commercials" are, of course, negligible.

I have no hesitancy in stating that a drastic curtailment of the extraneous matter at present cluttering up New Zealand frequencies, and the substitution of a bit more of "silly old Bach" would, educationally and culturally, constitute a first-night curtain for New Zealand art history. I would submit that, if the 4.5 per cent. which just manages to exist in unstable equilibrium with the monopolising influence of virore factions—if 4.5 per cent., in the future, represented the felonious surfeit of servile sophistry, with which a depraved taste is being soothed at present, an immense elevation of moral and cultural standards would result.

Some day classicism will come into its own. Of that, I have no doubt. But the road, which is of necessity fraught with trials and disappointment, thus proffering a triumph of a more piquant semblance; that traverse could be rendered more facile by the conversion of classicism's bitterest antagonists at this juncture—and they will have to listen to far more good music than is apparent at present, in order that they may appreciate it. Finally, a classic regime, once inaugurated, would, through virtue of its ever-satisfying nature, resolve into a national institution.

ANTOINE WATTEAU (Mosgiel).

OR WOULD YOU RATHER . . .

Sir,—May I submit the following additional verse for one of our better-known classics:

Or would you like to swing on a star,
Carry moonbeams home in a jar
And be better off than you are,
Or would you rather be a "Bing?"
A "Bing" is an animal that snorts,
squawks, and groans
With queer vocal cadences and moans;
He's got no volume, and his timbre's weak,
His low notes gurgle and his high notes squeak,
So would you like to learn to sing?
Or would you rather be a Bing!

"THE RUSTLE OF BING"
(New Brighton).

ALICE IN RADIOLAND

Sir,—It seems to me that your commentator is a little harsh with the Carrol-Slaughter version of *Alice in Wonderland*. Of course, we all know how we would like Alice done, but after all my years of radio listening I shudder to think what could have been done to her.

To young people the chief attraction was hearing their favourite comedians all together and, from my experience it

did nothing to detract from the love and appreciation they have for the "Straight Alice." The youngsters heard it with the glee that all children take in adults unbending and playing the fool.

I agree that Askey was badly cast. I should have dispensed with the children's voices altogether and cast Askey as Alice. I found the Cheshire Cat disappointing. But after all, the glory of a classic is that it can be mangled, misquoted, and parodied and yet remain firm as a rock. In fact, a classic only weaves itself into its native fabric when it is taken liberties with; or shall we say that being taken liberties with is a sign that it has been absorbed?

I hope to see my youngsters enjoy many more presentations of the Carrol-Slaughter Presentation.

CHESSY (Dunedin).

"BIG SISTER"

Sir,—Like "Nelsonian" I have long since ceased to be interested in "Big Sister," but I have never ceased to be amazed. I exercise my prerogative to "turn the knob," but sheer fascination forces me now and again to turn it back to see if she is still indulging in her amazing adventures. She never fails me

More letters from listeners will be found on page 22

and I have long regretted that in all the 30-odd years I have lived in the land of my birth I never realised that such a romantic and thrilling life was possible. Or was it? To think what might have been just around the corner had I just waited a little longer! But alas, never could I have emulated the faculty for getting myself and my friends and relatives out of all sorts of predicaments as Big Sister does. Never could I have announced with such soulfulness and such naïveté that I must refrain from doing such-and-such even at great cost to myself, because so-and-so "needs me." Ah me, I'd have been "done in" at the first adventure!

But not Big Sister; no, she goes serenely through the world hither and thither, from hamlet to city and back, at disconcerting intervals, organising people's lives, righting people's wrongs, fighting people's battles, converting wrongdoers, and in her spare moments warding off all the males who fall at her feet. The last time I turned the knob back I found that still another man had been so overcome by his hopeless passion that he had attempted suicide. Incidentally, since when have doctors' wives been allowed to haunt their husbands' hospitals and have their fingers in all the pies?

It occurs to me that if we could only find Big Sister's prototype and pop her into power somewhere, the country would be saved an enormous expense, as Ruth would have everything put right in two ticks and all politicians could be pensioned off. And if only she and Ma Perkins could get together, well why bother with UNO? There is just one snag. If Ruth were let loose like that, we would just have to pack all

the menfolk off to some lonely isle; and who knows, perhaps there wouldn't be any problems to solve then!

But to come back to earth; it is a pity some better vehicle is not found for the really excellent cast of actors. It is certainly one of the best and most naturally-acted serials we have had and it is hardly fair to the players that the foolish vehicle puts one off listening to the original of Ruth when heard in other plays. A bright new spot has come in the last few episodes with the advent of Aunt Mamie, a delightful nit-wit with her unexpected epigrams, excellently portrayed.—AUSTRALIAN—AN ORDINARY ONE (Waiuku).

(Abridged.—Ed.)

LETTERS TO THE PAPER

Sir,—Like D.F.T., I am occasionally moved to write a letter to the paper and then have prayed that it will not be printed. I have for some time been collecting an anthology of newspaper correspondence with the idea of writing an article on the subject; but, having come to the conclusion that to be a successful writer of light articles one must not be too tied down by facts, I yield up some of my anthology for the comfort of D.F.T.

In the *Illustrated London News* was a weekly column entitled "Nothing in the Papers." The author was obviously chafing at the necessity of writing paragraphs on Home interests when there was a perfectly good war going on. So we correspondents needn't be too hurt by his remarks. He writes:

It occurs to me that people who write to the papers (and what people who write for the papers think of the others need not be set down here) will rightly consider that they have had a bad time lately. The Autumn, during which the amateurs are accustomed to refresh the journals with lubrications which caused an uncivil critic to name that time "The Silly Season," was entirely devoted to war and the "outsiders" were cruelly kept outside. The war holds on, the columns of the journals are still proof against volunteers, and the last hopes of the latter are now finished off, for the *Gazette* of Tuesday fixed October 9 for the meeting of Parliament. Between the special correspondents and the reports, there will be no sort of chance for the people who write "without being obliged"—may one add "without obliging"? Why do they not set up a paper of their own and write to one another?

The other extract was written by Walter Besant in 1892:

"If, for instance, we now went to know what the great mass of respectable people think about all sorts of subjects, it would be from their letters to the papers that we should get their information. It would be invidious to select papers, but the student of London middle-class opinions in the year 1892 can best learn them from the daily correspondence of two London papers."

Besant goes on to discuss correspondence in an 18th Century paper:

We can here read the very language they used. Neither in Defoe, nor in Addison, nor in Tom Brown can be found the language of the citizen. But it is there.

These two quotations have filled too much space, so I shall close by thanking D.F.T. for another contribution to my anthology. I, too, ponder on the mystery of the docking of dates from letters to *The Listener*.

SECRETAN JONES (Dunedin).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

"Disgusted" (Dunedin): Expenses are being paid by a commercial firm, not by the Government. Your first question is therefore irrelevant.

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENT.

"One Who Wants to Run Away" (Auckland): Please send us your name and address again and we will forward you a letter.