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LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

THE "DARK" AGES?

Sir,—Mr. Tyndall extends the usage of the term "Dark Ages" so as to cover the entire range of the Middle Ages, the metaphor suggesting not scarcity of records, but spiritual "darkness." In belittling the Middle Ages Mr. Tyndall is, of course, in the company of the ghosts of many controversialists, who reacted against the debris of medievalism which lay in the way of their own development. The men of the Renaissance had to react in order to create. But for the modern historian the term "Middle Ages" suggests no method of approach. They are interesting, not by contrast or in comparison to the preceding or following era, but as a unique manifestation of the spirit, because they are our own past which conditions and constitutes us. Not to see their importance in moulding European destiny is for the modern historian inadmissible.

Those were the ages which realised the supernational unity of Europe, binding, guiding, shaping the new nations as members of the family of Christendom. Those were the ages in which the gaze of our ancestors turned inwards, in which their souls were softened, enriched, deepened, hoarding up treasures for generations to come. Those were the ages which conceived the ideal of the Knight (of whom the "gentleman" is the descendant), which conceived the idea of "romantic" love, of Love as Europeans have lived it and have sung it ever since.

Mr. Tyndall says that "the Church did nothing to cure ignorance," forgetting that monasteries were houses of learning. Nobody else was able or willing to teach, or cared to preserve the books salvaged from the ruins of Rome. They of course taught the knowledge of their time. They could not teach what did not yet exist—modern science, for instance.

P. J. HOFFMAN

(Runciman).

(This letter has been reduced by half.—Ed.)

Sir,—I should not have entered this correspondence as my history is hazy, if I had not recently been reading an article extolling the Middle Ages. Among other things it pointed out that all of the wonderful work in wood was not done by a few master-hands; that there must have been a large number of ordinary craftsmen who possessed enough artistic sense and skill to carry out repairs and additions.

Ruskin also is eloquent on the subject of Medieval art. In *Modern Painters* the sections devoted to Medieval art are to me the most interesting. In one place he writes:—

"... it is evident that the title 'Dark Ages' given to the medieval centuries is, respecting art, wholly inapplicable. They were, on the contrary, the bright ages; ours are the dark ones. I do not mean metaphysically but literally. They were the ages of gold; ours are the ages of amber. On the whole, these are much sadder ages than the early ones; not sadder in a noble and deep way, but in a dim wearied way, the way of ennui and faded intellect, and uncomfortableness of soul and body."

Ruskin regards the century between 1250 and 1350 as the brightest period of Medieval art.

We have only to read Chaucer, an outsider perhaps, but also the product of the Middle Ages, to find people living not so differently from ourselves, even to congested housing conditions. I admit that the arrogant Feudal Lord must have been a trial even to those born in Feudalism, but in my humble opinion it is a far more productive field culturally to a young child than the Renaissance.

Medievalism seems to be undergoing a revival, because I have before me a paper containing the following quotation:

"The 'Dark Ages,' when corn was esteemed rather as a food and even as a divine essence than as an adjunct to the scenery for the benefit of a rambling townsman's half-holiday; when gold was considered so beautiful that it was worked by the hands of inspired artists into gifts for Kings, instead of being assiduously stored in reinforced and bomb-proof vaults, where no one, not even a King, can see it at all; when the senseless folly of personal combat between professional soldiers with a zest for fighting was preferred to the more magnificent spectacle of total war; these Dark Ages are again finding a few admirers who are tempted to think that there was something in their spirit worth reviving and that they possibly were not so dark after all."

RUNNYMEDE (Dunedin).

Sir,—Mr. Tyndall knows by now that it is a grievous thing to offend historians. My salvo is from smaller guns, and is directed at the serial as broadcast. On Tuesday, April 9, the children were treated to a conversation between Erasmus and More. One of these gentlemen remarked that "the Pope and the Princes were at a new game—war with the Turks." Whereupon the other gentleman expressed the pious hope that nobody would be too hard on the poor Turks. Now sir, this is a strange new light on world history—surely Mr. Tyndall knows that the Turks at this period gravely menaced all the Western world; and if he knows this, why give a wrong impression?

Moreover, I do not like to think of our children listening to the beery chuckles of Erasmus and More during this particular broadcast, and their talk of wine, and the kisses of Grecian girls. Small things, perhaps, but children's minds are receptive.

Finally, while I am on the job, a murmur on yon sub-standard hero cyclept John Neville. Far better were it that all the records be hanged about his neck and he drowned in the depths of the sea.

PAS (Hawera).

2YC PROGRAMMES

Sir,—I should like to make use of my right of reply, although "Music Lover," Waimate, is more responsible than I am for the controversy which has arisen.

I would refer the readers back to my first letter and ask "Moron 43486," "Skyscraper," "Just Eighteen," and "J. R. Calver" if the change I advocated would be as dull as they seem to think.

The present programme needn't be done away with altogether, but must we have it week in and week out?

To give my views on swing and the classics would take up too much space.

(continued on next page)

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