

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

O, TO BE IN ENGLAND
TO THE EDITOR,—

Sir,—May I answer "Confession of a Brain about to export itself" in your issue of March 1? Mr. Meek is not to be held responsible for his sentimental yearnings for England, the slimy Cam, one of those awful dinners in the Hall of a Cambridge College, for the chance to trudge through the icy lanes to the crammed lecture rooms to hear or talk to a celebrity or some one of The Names. He's got the British Council bug bad. But the whole fault lies with the bunkum about "Home" churned out in big chunks by the press, wireless, education, cinema, tourists, and perverted teaching of history in New Zealand.

Ten years ago I was facing Mr. Meek's English Journey with a high heart and the same sentimental dreams, but unfortunately I remained the damned colonial who jibbed at being anglicised. I soon found that the real England was not the College, Backs and green lawns along the Cam. It is to be found in the gigantic, overcrowded, black, industrial cities which sprawl over the greater part of the country. The toil-worn industrial workers of these cities are the source of England's strength. Anyhow, 90 per cent.

of Cambridge students are hard-headed youth from the industrial cities, and are on liberal scholarship allowances to read their courses, all with an elegant pretence of doing no work, but very busy climbing up the greasy pole. I found none with the naïveté of Mr. Meek, with his charming contempt for money.

His desire to see an O'Casey play in the Abbey theatre is admirable. But surely this is a strong argument for New Zealanders to turn in on themselves and their own splendid country and its life. Only last week I was in Dublin and went to the Abbey, and as I leaned over the balcony in that famous but ramshackle theatre, I kept asking myself, if they could do that sort of thing in Dublin, why couldn't they do it in Auckland or Wellington. Here was a play by Louis D'Alton portraying all the humour, pathos, and problems of an Irish family, produced and acted in a way that would put the best London theatre to shame. Mr. Meek would find it tough enough "to conform" in backward medieval Eire, but some spirited young Irishmen must be on the job there, and perhaps it is largely because they are not spending any time looking at picture postcards of King's College, Cambridge.

It is sheer nonsense for Mr. Meek to say that "New Zealand must of necessity do as best it can with a largely second-hand culture." Only the fantastic dreams about and pining after an overcrowded island 12,000 miles away could result in this statement, and add to this pining the disparagement of New Zealand. A country's claim to greatness depends upon the living standards of its people, the care and education of its children, the freedom of its citizens, and its respect for knowledge and science. New Zealand should come through this test with good marks. It is not the only country where footballers are more highly esteemed than philosophers, if one should quarrel with a pretty prevalent contempt for knowledge.

Too many men of my graduation year were unemployed, and many went abroad to find satisfactory work and hardly any returned. But a wise and good Government can easily end those bad conditions. It can do more. It can give appreciative people like Mr. Meek, *Petrouchka*, a national theatre, and a symphony orchestra better than the Halle; not, it is true, a personal appearance of Mr. Bevin speaking on foreign affairs. But he may be assured that large numbers in England would like to be as far away as he is from such a turn.

My complaint with Mr. Meek is not that he wants to go abroad to find good teachers of his subject and gain, as he will, valuable experience, but that he writes such disparaging bunkum about the necessity of a second-hand culture for New Zealand and thinks of "Home" (i.e., England), with the jaundiced sentiment of Rupert Brooke. The New Zealander should have his eyes and thoughts on Taihape or Pipiriki rather than on Grantchester, on Sargeson rather than on Sean O'Casey. He should be developing a university freed from the useless and formal ceremonial of the old world, ritual almost as complicated as many a subject taught. He should not be yearning for the way of life where the "young gentlemen" are waited on by the servants from the back slums. Let him take the good where he sees it, the lavish staffing and magnificent personal tuition which frees the student from having to listen to the stale, dreary lectures of one professor and an assistant, but leave behind the worn-out sentiment which belongs to the time before the first world war.—Yours sincerely,

M. E. BARDSLEY
(Stoke-on-Trent.)

(The fact that we print this letter does not mean that the subject is again open for discussion. It means only that *The Listener* is read in England and that this is the earliest date at which an English reader could be expected to have his reply in our office.—Ed.)



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THE UNIVERSITY

Sir,—Articles and correspondence appearing in *The Listener* have provoked this layman to give what he considers the community angle on the matter. In the spirit of the age I ask, "What do we get for our money—niggardly as the supply may be?" A number of correspondents with a prolific display of University degrees appear to be at variance as to what the functions of a University should be. One contributor says that the community owes bigger and better equipped Universities to our youth. A pertinent question might be: What does our University-educated youth owe to the community? Where are all our past Rhodes Scholars to-day?

One page of correspondents is preceded by another, all bemoaning the fact that a University graduate has decided to export his brain to England. Personally I am shedding no tears. He is getting a big boy now and I expect more for my money than a peevish complaint about a beastly World War that interrupted his studies. After he has been out in the world a bit and barked his vanity on a few jagged bits of Anno Domini he will probably look back and laugh at his present lament.

And what of the harvest? Certainly there is a small coterie of Smart Alects who know all the answers. Quite incapable of turning out anything approaching the cultural contributions of the Old Masters in Art (painting to me), music, or literature they produce an array of crudities and attribute our lack of appreciation to our lack of brains, of which of course they have a monopoly. But taken by and large, the thousands of professional people who qualify at our Universities—our doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, etc., are a good bunch of citizens, much worthier, surely, than the average citizen who has not the intestinal fortitude (guts to them)

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