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Better Listening

THERE is a wise woman in one of George Macdonald's novels who learns early that God is "aye agen planning." We all make the discovery sooner or later, but it is more devastating in some cases than in others. Seven years ago, and a little more, we had ambitious plans for this journal; but a war came three months after our first issue and made nonsense of nearly everything we thought we were going to do. Eight years ago, and a little more, plans were made for the kind of radio service the wise-aces now know New Zealand should have, and the war not only upset them all but made it impossible to explain to the public what the programme was. Now all these years later the plans are announced in part, but it has had to be announced simultaneously that in the interval a great deal of the technical equipment has become obsolete or obsolescent, and that much money that would normally have been available for new developments will be required for replacements. It is all a rather depressing justification of George Macdonald's wise woman; but fortunately not the whole story. The plans are almost as good today as they were eight years ago, most of the money involved in their development has, with a struggle, been saved, and the war, if it has been such a disaster in other directions, has greatly advanced the kind of knowledge on which radio engineering depends. But the first step is to give better reception to those who for eight years have not been able to hear any major programme as well as everyone in New Zealand now should. Meeting the elementary needs of those will involve delays in satisfying the more luxurious wishes of others, but it is clearly better that all should hear reasonably than that there should be lopsided development in favour of any section.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

V.A.'s IN MATERNITY HOSPITALS

Sir,—I should like to correct a misunderstanding which seems to have occurred in a recent interview with me and which appeared in your issue of September 13.

The statement that the work of the wartime St. John Ambulance Obstetric V.A. Group "will finish in September" is definitely incorrect.

Members of my Group have been on duty every week-end since the Maternity Ward opened on July 15 and they will continue to do their share of this vital public service as long as required.

T. M. PECKSTON, Hon. Organiser
(Wellington).

"DON'T LEARN THE PIANO . . ."

Sir,—I don't know if you print letters from girls of 12, but I have just read the article "Don't Learn the Piano Till You're 21," and I think it's silly. If people took that advice there would be no good music to listen to, because most people have to earn their living by then and have not time to study to be professional musicians, and would be almost middle-aged before they were good enough for concert playing. And there wouldn't be any senior teachers, as only one in thousands would get a degree after starting at 21, specially if they had to earn their living at the same time. The younger you start the better. I have just passed my fifth year exam. with distinction and hope to be through all of them and get a degree before I'm 21.

Mr. von Sturmer must have been an unfortunate child to loathe Shakespeare (I like to read him aloud) and find music meaningless. I don't think age makes any difference to music, but parents and teachers do. Unmusical children should not be made to practise, but most children only dislike practice because their parents don't understand it and can't help them to. I love practising and so do a few of my friends. That is because our parents help us with our practice, take us to the best concerts—Solomon and Lili Kraus lately—and teach us how to listen and understand good music on the radio. No child could help liking *Peter and the Wolf*, and I don't suppose many of my age know that you can dance a lively jig to music by Bach and shout with laughter over Shostakovich's "Age of Gold" polka, and several things by Haydn.

And I am not nearly so priggish as this sounds. I'm not popular with the teachers at Grammar, and if someone would suggest putting off school till 21, I might agree! But I just think—

PRACTICE CAN BE FUN
(Auckland).

Sir,—Paul von Sturmer perhaps was serious. If he was, I wish to say that if a parent has a child that shows musical ability from three onwards, and is prevented from having the chance of his music being cultivated, it seems a bad form of starvation. Many of us are grateful to our parents after we have become 21 for a musical education—and the rest of us look back, and blame those teachers who spent the lessons with those unmusical noises, five finger exercises, trying to make the child's supple fingers more supple, and those inane tunes such

as "Moonlight and Daisies" instead of starting straight with Schubert, Bach, and Beethoven, who composed for the child as well as for grown-ups. It is the same with those who remember their loathing for Shakespeare and languages—it is not Shakespeare, but the teacher who did not understand or appreciate his subject. Julius Caesar and the late Mr. Justice Alpers might have been even more famous if they had had the opportunity of beginning their careers earlier than 40. Would Solomon or any other famous pianist, painter or writer, regret the chance of starting the development of their talents during childhood?

I feel that, if children have any talent for music, the parents should encourage that talent, risking the fluke of a prodigy, because by the time most of us reach 21, there are far too many distractions and small inclination to start at that time. BOO (Riccarton).

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Sir,—I think Russell's "shocking fallacy" would be the approval of compulsory uniformity of doctrine. Perhaps G.H.D. has not given us enough of the context. All religious sects purport to make conviction a necessity of membership, a silly attempt, as no two organic

More letters from listeners will be found on page 17.

products are similar, no two leaves or sheep or persons or minds. This notion of conviction becomes farcical, and worse, when we note the frequency with which, in past ages, a conquered people would be given the choice of death or recanting, and the multitudes of the latter, received into the victor's denomination and ignorant of the new articles of faith, would make conviction an absurdity. G.H.D. closes with a boost quite open to criticism. Dubbing Russell a prater he gives his assurance that our western love of liberty is "the fruit of an age-long acceptance of a Catholic dogma." This seems to me a good example of putting the cart before the horse. The dogma, by no means exclusive to the Roman Catholic faith, asserts that each has his own eternal destiny to be worked out by his freewill. As to "eternal," what proof is there that it is so? As to "destiny" should not this include the gene pattern, biological, anti-Catholic, and anti-freewill? Or it may imply some final goal, determined (note the word and cut out freewill) by some supernatural power, whose relations with man would again demand the whole range of theology. Also the pretty picture of unrolling "destiny" would often be shattered by environmental trouble. CRITIC (Rangiora).

CONCERT REPORTING

Sir,—Two letters have appeared in this column adversely criticising the report on the Kraus concert at Auckland. May I be permitted to express entire disagreement with both? The novelty of the mode of expression was just what made the article so good. I got the impression that both Mr. Speckman and "Reverence" have become "conditioned"

To All Crossword Puzzlers

We are happy to announce that R.W.C., refreshed by a well-earned holiday, will be resuming the weekly Crossword Puzzles series as from next issue.

(terrible word!) by prolonged study of journalese to detest anything so freshly and vividly written as to be quite free from the jargon, the clichés, the common-places and the platitudes of the average professional reporter. So they were shocked and puzzled when admiration and enthusiasm aroused a writer to a heightened form of utterance seldom found in ephemeral literature. My own reading of the article produced feelings of delight and gratitude that such a rare experience could be so worthily described. G. L. LEE (Auckland).

SIR JOHN BOYD ORR

Sir,—In the latest copy of *The Listener* you printed a fine appreciation of a very fine man, Sir John Boyd Orr, whose wisdom is being applied in so many fields in the cause of humanity that it would seem hardly possible that his interests could be extended beyond the fields you mention. However, Sir John Boyd Orr has still another interest and that is Federal Union. In one of the chapters of *Federal Union* he says: "Science has made the world so small and brought the nations into such intimate connection with each other that there must be either some form of international law and order, maintained by an international police force, or continuously recurring conflict. . . . Some people have contended that wars are inevitable and, indeed, necessary to preserve the efficiency of the race. The truth is that wars are provided by spiritual degenerates and perverts. They destroy the physically fit and the young men of generous impulse willing to sacrifice themselves for their fellow-men. They tend to leave the physically unfit, the profiteers and the cowards to propagate the species. . . . The sooner we realise that the only alternative to federation is a reversion to barbarism, the sooner we will be prepared to face the difficulties and see how they can be overcome. If the peoples of the world believe that federation with the abolition of war is possible, it will come. At the present time what is most urgently needed is the widest, fullest, and freest intelligent discussion by all classes of people." Sir John Boyd Orr agrees with all federalists that we must federate or perish.

E.W.M. (Wellington).

TALKS ON MUSIC

Sir,—I have enjoyed Mr. Luscombe's series *Pageant of Musical History*, and hope we shall have more of it. His treatment of a work—briefly explaining it and familiarising listeners with the major themes before playing the whole work—is very helpful to the layman, enabling him to listen to the music and, at least partially, to understand it. I hope we shall hear him again very soon.

BLTYH CAREY (Mt. Eden).

(We understand that Mr. Luscombe will broadcast a further series of nine talks during the third school term.—Ed.)