

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

H. G. WELLS

Sir,—Your correspondent G.H.D. (Greenmeadows) has been using coloured terms in an argument. Here is an extract from his letter discussing H. G. Wells, which contains two of them:

"Unfortunately he went much further and attacked the Christian faith, the source of all that is best in our western civilisation. Some, of course, may accept Mr. Wells' thesis, that Christianity is superstition. They will find it difficult to explain why many of the best minds in every age, such as Maritain in our own day, have embraced the Christian faith."

The author of this error in reasoning has recently been criticising Bertrand Russell for deficient logic.

B. BELL (Palmerston North).

Sir,—I confess that I was somewhat disappointed in your leading article on H. G. Wells. However, contrary to the opinion of G.H.D. I prefer to believe that you intended "Homo Sapiens" to mean "wise man." Certainly the name is futile when applied to the human race as a whole. It is sometimes wise to be violent. Jesus, for example, did not suffer fools gladly; even he drove the jackals from the Temple before the whip lash. It is perhaps because the restrained, scholarly eremite is too ineffectual, too aloof, to influence the common run of man, that G.H.D. prefers this type of "wise man." Certainly Wells' enemies are mostly those who hoped that their "omnipotent God" would humble this disturbing iconoclast, but were disappointed.

Wells, almost from his teens, was a man with a mission, a mission to produce World Order from World Chaos; equality and universal plenty from the horrors of class and monetary distinction; to do this without authoritarianism, by combining individual freedom with co-ordinated intelligent resourcefulness which he labelled Collective Mind. To achieve this for men he toiled through his life. His attacks on religion, snobbery, outworn conventions, and other humbug were incidental to this greater aim. These impeded those advances which the prophet believed could make mankind happier. He abominated the hypocritical sanctity of commercialised Christendom, a view shared to-day by notable English clerics; even more, he detested the inflexibility of obsolete rituals in Church and State.

To describe Wells' fight for "the unlimited right . . . to think, discuss and suggest" as a "battering down of open doors" is wilful myopia. It was no thug whom Anatole France described as "the greatest intellectual force in the English-Speaking World." It was no fool who at the dawn of this century predicted the horror of Atomic Warfare; nor was there any meanness of spirit in the man who said "For the greater part of my life I have given most of my working time to the problem of the human future."

G. A. McCRACKEN (Auckland).

Sir,—Surely it is an exercise of wisdom to pass by an obituary in silence and to forgo criticism of it; but G.H.D. will have none of this niceness; he must take the occasion of the obituary to H. G. Wells to parade his own particular values. The better to depreciate

those qualities which H. G. Wells typifies, he says the author did not mellow with his years but was petulant and was not calm. For ineptness this can be likened to the charge that Socrates was an inattentive husband. To turn a prayer wheel, to extol the pearl in the lotus flower, may induce calm and humility, even as it puts to sleep dangerous thought but habits more enterprising could, I suggest, tolerate an occasional cry of impatience.

The real purpose of G.H.D.'s letter was to advance his own spiritual diet. And we can excuse him, as we hope to be excused who share this human fault. But G.H.D. is more clamorous than good argument requires. Claiming for his faith "many of the best minds in every age" (with their private thought, doubts and vacillations!), he also claims "all that is best in our western civilization." Thus he ignores our indebtedness to the non-Christian scientist, to the pagan ancient, and to the Arab, Hindu, Chinese, and Jew. The "best" he would put under a Christian monopoly. Then he must be at some pains to ignore the evidence that dominant Christianity was not always the "best," and was not a quintessential goodness unchanged in all time. The history of Christianity is not a record of unmixed goodness. It is a technique fabricated and grown complex out of the needy exuberance of the human mind. And unless it forsakes its mysteries and becomes a conscious working method for social good, it shows itself as blind to its responsibilities and will be left in the discard, or will be a factor in the frustration of the human potential.

V. WASMUTH (Onehunga).

CORWIN OR BEETHOVEN?

Sir,—This is a protest against the manner in which advertised radio programmes are mutilated to make way for talks of "topical" interest. On Sunday evening, October 6, a certain Mr. Norman Corwin gave a talk in which was a statement to the effect that we in New Zealand should develop our cultural life. When these words of wisdom had been uttered, listeners to 2YA were blandly informed by the announcer that the advertised symphonic work (Beethoven's 9th Symphony) would not be played. As programme organisers do not include this work with any degree of frequency in the programmes, its presentation on one of the rare occasions on which it is advertised should not be interfered with by any other item of merely topical interest.

FREUDE (Auckland).

CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC.

Sir,—Surely something can be done about a Conservatorium for New Zealand in the near future. I myself am a young violinist with hopes of joining the National Symphony Orchestra. I, like hundreds of other New Zealanders, would like to attend lessons at a Conservatorium, but I find the nearest is in Australia. Not so good for a child of poor parents, is it? I consider that New Zealanders on the whole enjoy classical music, and I think musical New Zealanders should be able to study a full course of music right here in New Zealand. Of course a Conservatorium could not be built in a day, but between one way and another something could be done. "MUSIC LOVER" (Dunedin.)

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