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## On the Platform

**T**HE sensationalists were wrong about the election campaign, and deserved to be. Although there is time yet for a change, the speeches of most candidates have been almost as decorous as addresses from the pulpit. Mud-slinging, as most candidates know, captures no votes. Neither do personal feuds and inside stories. We enjoy the diversion, but don't usually support the man who provides it. In any case this is 1946 — three generations and two wars too late for appeals to passion. The shrewd candidate knows better to-day than to try to thump his way through on a tub, and the average elector knows what to do with him if he does try. It is in fact astonishing that it was ever different—that the kind of oratory we reproduce on page 18 not only put men into Parliament but kept them there, off and on, for the rest of their lives. Disraeli's eloquence was no more, often, than calculated vindictiveness. O'Connell's was more wholesome and honest, but no one who laid about him in that manner to-day would keep out of jail. It is not so much that the age of oratory has passed, but that we are no longer interested in the inflated oratory that smells of the lamp. Not even radio will re-establish that, and it is possible that it was radio which finally killed it. It is almost certain that one reason why most candidates have not really got going during this election has been that so many of them have been talking to the public for three years. Only the new candidates, the men and women whose voices had not been heard before, have been able to arouse curiosity about themselves, and it may be that what we have been seeing this month has been a return from speech-making in Parliament to debate and quiet discussion. The most serious criticism so far made of Parliamentary broadcasting is that it changes the House from a committee to a public meeting. Perhaps that lesson has now been learnt.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## CREATIVE WRITING

Sir,—May I add a footnote to my letter published in your issue of November 1? In trying to compress many ideas into a small space I have omitted nearly all reference to the positive achievement of M. H. Holcroft, who has earned respect for grappling earnestly with a difficult complex of problems. The original writer has a harder task than his critics. However mistaken we may consider some of the theories in this trilogy to be, there are fine passages which have a value of their own. I imagine that Mr. Holcroft, who writes with sincerity, care and restraint, will recognise in criticism (even caustic criticism) a more constructive tribute than in the fulsome praise which obscures his own injunction to "hard thinking."

ELSIE LOCKE (Christchurch.)

Sir,—In a sceptical age it is a pleasure to turn to essays which disclose a transcendental outlook. I doubt if any of M. H. Holcroft's admirers regard him as the "unassailable mentor of our literature" (Elsie Locke) inasmuch as his work invites us to use our critical intelligence. It is interesting and good that these essays should receive a challenge, but his critics seem to forget that this trilogy marks a promontory in our country's literature. If it rises "judiciously" (Ian Hamilton) to mystical heights, and if at certain peaks the argument is obscured by the clouds of subjectivity, nevertheless the solid base and the general structure remains.

Creative work differs with circumstance and temperament. It is not hard to discover in the field of art other men and women who have worked beneath the kind of compulsion Holcroft describes. In fact "Pervasive Daemonism" is supported through facts drawn from the lives of Katherine Mansfield, Shelley, and Dante. Also it would seem that of those authors mentioned in "Writing is Difficult," Somerset Maugham, sceptical though he is, would understand Mr. Holcroft's thesis.

Yes, I think we are odd men out in New Zealand. Our land has not been made over to our imagination as yet, and our customs have not yet been moulded from within. As to the importance of geography, it has found expression elsewhere and frequently: most notably in T. E. Lawrence's writings. It would be unreasonable to suppose that human beings, so suggestible in every other way, were not radically moulded by the type of country and the latitude in which they developed. Our own reaction so far has been to cling to the safety of the time-honoured and humanised grooves of the European imagination rather than to cut the new ones our own landscape suggests.

Lastly, if there is a better writer along these channels of thought in New Zealand, let his adversaries lead me to him.  
J.S. (Hororata.)

Sir,—Having just finished M. H. Holcroft's *Encircling Seas*, and feeling that here at any rate was a refutation of the remarks periodically made by visitors to these shores; anent our lack of literary ability, our smugness and our deadly sameness, I was amazed to read Elsie Locke's letter in a recent *Listener*. She criticises the paucity of humour and the involved mysticism of some of Mr. Holcroft's essays, particularly his summing up in the last page. She compares his work of creative writing of man's

innermost thoughts with fiction writing of such as Sinclair Lewis; admittedly she also adds such names as Thomas Mann's and Ernest Hemingway's; but they also are more noted for their fiction writing than for their essays. Mr. Holcroft has written fiction, which unfortunately I have not been able to read; but his essays as each looked-for volume arrives have been well read and pondered over.

A book such as *Encircling Seas* takes two or three years to write. Surely in even this small ill-educated community there are sufficient thinking people to appreciate the thoughts embedded in such tranquil prose, so rarely produced. Must we always be made to laugh? Must

More letters from listeners will be found on page 14

we always be entertained in our reading? Must we always read fiction? Can we never afford to stop our hurrying from one place to another and back again to consider our inner life and thoughts?

Such a letter makes me despair that we will ever grow up and become something more than a stalwart pioneer wrestling a living from the soil or out of the office; that we will never produce a real civilisation where man gains more than bread.

O New Zealand, amidst your encircling seas, your deepening streams and your waiting hills, can you not snatch a brief hour to consider your immortality?

J. WILLIAMS

(Lower Hutt).

## NATIONAL FILM UNIT

Sir,—The remarks of "Progress," Hastings, are very appropriate. The tune is ghastly. Every time we hear it we think of that decrepit squad of troopers led by the strutting sergeant (or whatever rank it was he held).

Please, oh please, when will they change this uninspiring march?

MARJORIE AND GERALDINE

(Napier).

## "ASTONISHING STATEMENT"

Sir,—In your issue for October 11, G. Kemble Welch makes the astonishing statement that Socrates, Plato, and Buddha did not believe the "dogmas" of the Christian Church. This is a miscalculation of only four to five centuries. As well argue that because Columbus did not report his discovery by wireless, that wireless is a failure.

Socrates was born about 469 B.C., and his disciple Plato in 429 B.C., while Buddha lived in the same century.

These "great minds" were great because they sought the truth, but they lived before the Christian revelation.

L. M. HUNTER-BROWN

(Nelson).

## SCHOLA CANTORUM

Sir,—Recently, while on a visit to Wellington, I had for the first time the privilege of hearing the Schola Cantorum in a programme of choral music.

In 1938 and 1939, while in England and the United States, I heard the Huddersfield Choral Union, the London Philharmonic Choir, and some of the finest choirs in the United States. With these standards still fresh in my mind I would unhesitatingly place the Schola Cantorum amongst the great choirs of the world. Under the inspired guidance of Stanley Oliver they have attained to a

standard of such technical efficiency, of such beautiful and varied tone colour, of such vital interpretation, that they would speedily become famous in any of the world's great cities.

Music lovers throughout New Zealand have very much appreciated the opportunity of hearing some of the world's greatest artists through tours sponsored by the Broadcasting Service. I would suggest that a tour of New Zealand under the auspices of the NZBS by this really outstanding choir would be most keenly appreciated by music lovers throughout the Dominion and would prove a tremendous stimulus to the development of choral music in New Zealand.

I sincerely hope that such a tour can and will be arranged in the near future, and I feel confident that the NZBS will have the co-operation of all music organisations in making the necessary arrangements.

V. E. GALWAY

(Blair Professor of Music in the University of Otago).

## WE TAKE A BOW

Sir,—The greatest accomplishment of the NZBS is *The Listener*, informative, instructive, and interesting, to say nothing of its woodcuts and black-and-white sketches. A Scotsman cannot help being educative. But, gentlemen, the greatest among you must see that the opportunity of the day is the education of youth. *The Listener* has a tale to tell and a job to do in this direction, has it not?

E. C. McLAREN (Christchurch.)

(It has; but if we are "informative, instructive, and interesting," we are trying to do it, are we not?—Ed.)

## "A SPLASH OF COLOUR"

Sir,—May I heartily endorse "One Listener's" opinion on *A Splash of Colour* in your issue of November 8. I can assure him (or her) that he (she) is not the only one who disapproves of this shoddy series which is neither entertaining nor instructive, but just downright bad in every respect.

ARS (Wellington).

## WITCHCRAFT

Sir,—Your article does not acknowledge the great work done by the Society for Psychic Research. It is not that communication with the dead is any new discovery, for all religion is based on it, but for lack of verification people look upon it as superstition, witchcraft, and demonism. It has been proved by investigation into psychic phenomena that the miracles of the Bible and the Resurrection are veridical phenomena in the true sense of the word, which in no wise violate either the laws of nature or the order of natural phenomena, but are capable of scientific explanation. One of New Zealand's own scientists, the late R. M. Laing, M.A., M.Sc., F.R.S., testified that man can communicate with another sphere of existence. By all means clean out the charlatans; genuine seekers of truth will not object, but let us appreciate the painstaking efforts of many brilliant scientists of our time.

"AWAKE" (Wellington.)

## ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

John May (Auckland) and A. P. Young (Auckland): Party-political and therefore inadmissible to these columns.

## NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

ARS (Wellington): The second paragraph is a little too obvious. We cannot help remembering that you have more than once tried to persuade us to publish your own articles about art.

Dennis McEldowney (Christchurch): The *New Zealand Herald* devoted a special four-page supplement to Hersey's "Report of Hiroshima" on October 26.