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The Uncommon Common Man

A CORRESPONDENT asks us to-day why we don't give more attention to uncommon men. Common men, he argues, take their opinions from uncommon men, and instead of thinking so much of them we should, he suggests, think of those with whom everything that most people say and do begins. It is a good point up to a point, but no further. The uncommon man can, and does, look after himself if he really is uncommon. He is the man Dr. Johnson had in the back of his mind when he said that a man who is fool enough to need advice will be too foolish to take it. Giving advice is of course not our job; but if it were, the last man we should venture to advise would be the man of original and independent powers of thought. Our correspondent's real complaint, we imagine, is that we are not sufficiently high-brow. Well brows are difficult to measure. We know that our correspondent is not thinking of academic attainments or of any of the conventional indications of culture. By uncommon men he means intelligent men whether the schools know them or don't; but even from that angle appearances can be deceptive. Some of the most penetrating minds are conventional three times in four. It may be constitutional, but shocks await those who take liberties with them. But the real point is that the teacher, preacher, or journalist who asks himself who is worthy of his attention and who is not is already unworthy himself. Consciously or unconsciously he is wallowing in smugness, or soon will be. We prefer the company and the discipline of ordinary mortals.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

HISTORY AND LEGEND

Sir,—I am, I think, at fault in one respect with regard to Mrs. Andrews's *Gloriana*; I did not make it sufficiently clear that I was thinking not of Mrs. Andrews's serial alone, but of a whole series (going back to Kingsley) of imaginative presentations of the Elizabethan period. Hence the appearance of Sir Richard Grenville.

For the rest I think Mrs. Andrews misunderstood me. It is not a question of factual accuracy; I brought no complaint against her on that score and even ventured, on the strength of one episode, to praise her insight into Drake's Puritanism. My criticism was rather that popularisations of the Tudor era tend to over-concentration. It was a remarkable age, full of remarkable events and people; but that is no excuse for presenting the daily life even of the ruling classes as a succession of encounters with those events and people. It is too easy to build up a picture of a sort of exclusive club of eminent people, who associate all the time with one another who never meet anyone unimportant, go anywhere uneventful or do anything unspectacular. It is the cult of the spectacular which Kingsley began and A. L. Rowse and Arthur Bryant are continuing; the creation of a mythology, not the understanding of history. Mrs. Andrews, defending herself against a charge I have no desire to bring, of idealising the period, says she has faithfully recorded mud, smells and superstitions. But I fear her mud is glamorous mud, her smells picturesque, her superstitions colourful. My plea is that even children should not be taught history as a set of legends, conjuring up a dream-world, but as something as real and matter-of-fact as their own lives. The stories and the excitements will not be lost if their feet are placed on the ground.

VIEWSREEL COMMENTATOR.

UNCOMMON MEN

Sir,—Why does *The Listener* keep so close to the crowd? The crowd gets its ideas from individuals, and without their assistance can't think. Would it not be better to devote less attention to the common man and more to the uncommon—or if you like, the uncommon common man?

BED RIDDEN (North Auckland).

(We comment on this letter in our leading article.—Ed.)

TRUTH WILL PREVAIL

Sir,—May I draw your attention to a misprint which occurred in your issue of November 15 in your report on the performance of Douglas Lilburn's "Aotearoa" at Prague which has 1,000,000 inhabitants and not 100,000 as stated by you.

ACCURACY (Wellington).

OVERDOSE OF AUNT DAISY?

Sir,—As a regular listener to broadcast entertainment since 1926, I have never written criticising radio programmes for two reasons: (a) Because I am, more or less, a satisfied listener. (b) Because there is always a knob to turn, and one can generally satisfy one's mood of the moment. Also, I realise that programmes must be arranged to suit people of very varied tastes.

I am of the opinion, however, that the big majority of evening listeners do not wish to be surfeited with garrulous first-hand accounts of "Aunt Daisy" eating hamburgers on Fifth Avenue, hot-dogs on Forty-Second Street, or the miraculous discovery of a packet of "Soandso's" tea in an out-of-the-way Pacific store. I am basing this opinion, not only on my own personal annoyance, but on that of others with whom I have conversed.

The last thing I wish to do is to start a controversy in your pages on the pros and cons of "Aunt Daisy," but surely three times a day is an overdose of her loquacity, and we should not have

PEGGY KNIBB

The attractive portrait of Peggy Knibb, the Melbourne soprano now visiting New Zealand, which appeared on the cover of our issue last week, was the work of Spencer Digby, of Wellington.

to suffer it invading our evening entertainment. She may be acceptable to her regular followers, but for goodness sake confine her to her morning session. "LITTLE SIR ECHO" (Wellington).

SHAKESPEARE'S GHOST

Sir,—Here is the stanza your book reviewer David Hall has been trying to remember (*Listener*, October 25, Page 20):

I dreamt last night that Shakespeare's ghost
Sat for a Civil Service post
The English papers of the year
Contained a question on King Lear
Which Shakespeare answered very badly
Because he hadn't studied Bradley.

This is quoted before the notes in a school edition of *The Tempest*, edited by John Hampden and published by Nelson. Beneath it are the initials "G.B." and "Punch, 1926." There is no further information about its source.

M.D. (Epsom).

(We thank our correspondent, on Mr. Hall's behalf, for laying this ghost of a memory.—Ed.)

THE MAORI LANGUAGE

Sir,—As a student of the Maori language, and one who is keenly interested in Maori lore, traditions, music, etc., I do find that there is a marked absence of items of this nature in the Christchurch programmes, particularly on a Sunday, when one has the opportunity to be at home to enjoy them when broadcast.

As we in Christchurch have not the opportunity of meeting many Maori people who speak the Maori language it is very difficult to train the ear to distinguish, and the tongue to pronounce, the Maori language correctly. It is with great pleasure that I listen to Mr. Parker when he broadcasts from 2YA in Maori at 9.20 p.m. on Sundays; but I must confess that, as I do not know the text of his address, and he speaks very quickly, there are very often times when I am hopelessly lost.

However, there is a suggestion which I would like to bring forward: that a portion of the Scriptures be read in the Maori language each Sunday night. As a great number of people possess Maori

Bibles it would enable them to follow the reading in their own Bibles at home and so become familiar with the Maori language when correctly spoken. Also, if a corner of *The Listener* was devoted to the publication of an article printed in the Maori language it would be eagerly looked forward to each week.

Let us not forget that we have in New Zealand a very fine native people, and a splendid native language.

CYRIL E. BOOTH
(Christchurch).

Sir,—I have wondered for some years why the Maori word "Aotea" seems never to be pronounced correctly. I don't mean in the inimitable manner of the true Maori, but with the pakeha's approximation. It was shocking recently to hear of a vessel that was to berth at "Eh-oh-tee-ah" Wharf. I was inclined to blame Auckland for it, the name of the steamer Aotea being almost invariably pronounced in this atrocious manner; but Aotea Wharf is older than the steamer, so possibly Wellington is to blame after all. There should be no need to state what the pronunciation should be, as to anyone at all acquainted with Maori the errors in the first and third vowels are self-evident.

E. H. McKAY (Auckland).

Sir,—I take *The Listener* and always read the letters about pronunciation, as I wish to speak correctly. Please will C.E. (Wellington) kindly say how exactly does he pronounce "Tangi."

MAORI (Te Kuiti).

SUNDAY AFTERNOON CONCERTS

Sir,—For some months now I have been attending, as regularly as possible, the Sunday Afternoon Concerts presented in the Town Hall on the first Sunday in each month, and each time I have been appalled at the apathy of the people of Wellington.

On each afternoon an excellent programme has been presented, and especially was this so last month. On this occasion the few of us who were there were treated to a splendid programme by E. C. Jamieson at the organ, Sybil Phillips (soprano) and the augmented 2YA Concert Orchestra. How then, can one explain the meagre audience of less than 50 on this occasion, and on previous Sunday afternoons? Apparently the fault must lie in the people of the Wellington district, who would wait several hours in a queue for 10/- seats at a concert by a visiting artist, but who would rather sit in their armchairs and

More letters from listeners will be found on page 22

perhaps listen in, when for a shilling they could see and hear local artists of no mean talent in such an excellent programme. Admittedly, the weather has been against most of these concerts, but would that prevent the people from going to hear Solomon? Why can't the people of Wellington wake up, and, realising what fine entertainment they have missed, make the most of their opportunities? Not only will they give some encouragement to the artists, but also they will gain much pleasure in listening to their talent.

F.R.E. (Wellington).

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENT
A. WILLIAMS (Christchurch): Libellous.