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LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

M. H. HOLCROFT

Sir,—The provocative nine-column review of *Encircling Seas* in a *Listener* of some weeks back has caused me to read the book. I agree with most of Mr. McCormick's comments, but the remarks of some of your unofficial reviewers, especially J.S., and J. Williams, have given me a bad night. I am going to be dogmatic. All Mr. Holcroft's views on politics, religion and secular education, also on creative writing and national consciousness, have been well thrashed in previous New Zealand literature. *Encircling Seas* has its groove in our literature, and so attempts to lose it in

grooves too large or, as Ian Hamilton tried to do, fit it into grooves too small, should be resisted. Mr. Holcroft has written a good essay in times when the essay is commonly supposed to be a dead art. But he has given his subject no original twist.

Now what does J.S. say? "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." He continues, "... and if at certain peaks the argument is obscured by clouds of subjectivity, nevertheless the solid base and general structure remains." Quite fair; but the following sentences about

"creative work" with reference to Shelley, Dante and Katherine Mansfield are surely not justified. Mr. Holcroft, as his book explains, is a journalist; he is also a good writer; and he has written down his opinions on several important matters with the intention that his readers might be persuaded to discuss these thoughts. But he is not a Shelley, neither is he a Dante nor a Katherine Mansfield.

J. Williams's plaintive cry, "Must we always laugh? Must we always read fiction?" is harder to understand; for anyone who has read much New Zealand literature will agree, I think, that most of it has been designed to make us reflect seriously on life and that it is often highly personal. New Zealand has produced little fiction, in the normal sense; although autobiography frequently masquerades as fiction. The Works of Katherine Mansfield, our poets (see Caxton's 1923-45 anthology), the "Angry Penguin" school and the short stories in our magazines (see *Listener* and student publications) prove my point. I see Holcroft's essays as a reaction against a tendency, strong in modern New Zealand writers, to morbidity and pettiness.

P.O.C. (Auckland).

Sir,—It would appear that Elsie Locke now wishes to save face. I consider she was caught up in her own words. Criticism should be constructive not destructive. We cannot deny that as a writer M. H. Holcroft has arrived. He has a flowing grace like Galsworthy. He finds a mysticism and a quietude in our countryside and writes so. I contend that the screaming cacophony of the world to-day could do with more of it. Wordsworth and Ruskin found that mysticism—they were great writers with hidden meanings, yet all for their fellow-men. I go so far as to say that mysticism is the very breath of life itself—a little nearer and we would have its meaning. In this mechanised world nobody stops to listen. We have got away. Darwin said—to cut his words short—that he was too busy with the workings of his own mind to pause and listen, and had he done so he might have come nearer the truth.

L.C.L.H. (Merivale).

STUDIO RECITALS

Sir,—I think H. E. Gunter in his letter to your paper voiced the opinion of the majority of listeners when he protested against all this amateur singing, especially the women who seem to come on on every station every few minutes, even when not listed. Can't all this take place in the morning and let the good stuff come on at 8.0 p.m.—good music, interesting talks and subjects of the day told by people who have really done something—the sort of thing stodgy people like when they have done the washing up and put the children to bed and the young are either at lessons or gone out to amusements? The best stuff comes on when no one has time to listen, from 6.45 to 7.30 when parents and others are still busy finishing up their work. Appeals for food for Europe—tales of distress and hunger—come on when those who would help are not there to listen and those who have time to listen at that hour are looking for crooners and jazz and so switch off.

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