

DECEMBER 13, 1946

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES:  
115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.I.  
G.P.O. Box 1707.  
Wellington, C.I.  
Telephone 46-520.  
Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

## The University

**A** POINT made by all those who contributed last week to our discussion on the University was that professors are human beings. If they did not say it in so many words they all said it in effect, and it is always a part of the answer to such questions whoever asks them. Whatever makes a professor less human makes him less effective and in general less wise, whether it is external examinations or internal uniformity or mere distance and space. It is not true however that professors can't do good work in the conditions in which most of them find themselves in New Zealand—much good work has been done in our University every session since it started; but it has always been true that better work might have been done in better conditions. It is only when they are asked how soon and how fast changes should be made that university administrators arrange themselves in two camps, and even then no one recommends going slow for educational reasons only. It is the administrative and financial problems of change that arouse anxiety, but no one is anxious enough about them to advise going on indefinitely as we are. What is happening is rather that the conservatives are sheltering behind the fact that the system has never broken down completely in the experience of any student or teacher. It no doubt seems a hopeless situation when 300 students enrol in a subject taught by one professor and one lecturer; but it has never proved quite hopeless when put to the test. Somehow or other most of the things that can be said with truth about our University theoretically are made to sound thin and hollow when our graduates mingle with those from other universities. Professor von Zedlitz explains it as a case of good material to begin with. That is generous; but if there had not been good treatment of the material, a far greater proportion of it would have been spoiled, and then we would all have been reformers.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## GREAT MINDS

Sir,—It appears that L. M. Hunter-Brown has missed the point of my argument.

In a discussion of religious beliefs people often say "So many people with great minds have believed in Christianity that it must be true."

Now, if a philosophical concept is held by some great thinker of course it may be true. But if at any time minds of equal ability have held different beliefs, then obviously none of them can be said to be true merely because of the greatness of the minds which have believed in them. Hence the times when Plato, Socrates, Buddha and Christ lived are immaterial.

Incidentally Thomas Aquinas in his exposition and defence of Christianity has two sources of reference for authority—firstly Scripture, and then "The Philosopher" (who is Aristotle) for scientific matter.

G. KEMBLE WELCH

(Kohu Kohu).

## WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

Sir,—When Barbara Harper in her most interesting and informative article speaks of 1946 as the Silver Jubilee of the Women's Institute movement it seems to me that she expresses only a half-truth. When I was a youth in Canterbury in the nineties of the last century Women's Institutes flourished in that province. It was, I think, in 1896 that I listened in the Old Provincial Council Chamber in Christchurch to the opening of the Annual Conference of nearly 400 delegates.

If my memory is not at fault and the movement started about 1893 then New Zealand led the world in this matter. After about a decade of enthusiastic activity round about 1895—the year in which commodity prices, falling continuously all over the world for 20 years reached their lowest level for half a century—the movement died out, partly because the radical nature of the Government and increasing prosperity removed much of the mental irritation that caused this remarkable outburst of intellectual activity.

Unfortunately I am no longer in Canterbury and thus have no access to the files of the local dailies of that decade. Perhaps someone (and who better than Barbara Harper?) would do a little research in this matter and thus complete the picture of the Women's Institute movement in New Zealand.

J.W.M. (Auckland).

## REWARDS OF AUTHORSHIP

Sir,—The article in the *Listener* recently in which a number of American writers placed their calling somewhere between slave labour and death raises again the question of whether writers get an adequate return for their labours. The answer is obviously no, but I don't intend going over the whole argument here. It has all been said before. I only want to point out some aspects which apply particularly to this country. With the exception of a very few best-sellers the average sale of a book in Britain is about 1000. Therefore in New Zealand we are doing well when with a population one-thirtieth as great our average is perhaps 200. We can pat ourselves on the back and tell ourselves that we

are great readers. But whereas the financial return for the British author from his 1000 copies is hopelessly inadequate, especially for a scholarly work that may have taken years of research, the financial reward of the New Zealander with his 200 copies is nothing at all. With the higher cost of production even 1,000 copies, which is reaching best-seller standards here, will return him less than they would in Britain, and unfortunately we can't scale down an author's wants in proportion to his sales. The New Zealander needs just as much food and clothing and housing as the Englishman. Therefore the writer is giving the fruit of months of hard work for nothing, for charity; and at the same time he must work for his living, or starve—and both will lessen the quality of his work. The question arises also whether we are morally justified in criticising the quality when it arrives; whether we can question its worth when it is given as free. Only when you pay the piper can you call the tune, and we cannot expect to see any great improvement in our writing unless we are prepared to pay for

More letters from listeners will be found on page 20

it. This is where the pundits start, talking about subsidising uneconomic industries, not remembering that roads, for instance, are not expected to pay for themselves, or that if newspapers confined their activities to collecting and printing news alone they couldn't exist. They have to be subsidised in huge amounts by advertising—indirectly by the consumer. A start has been made with a State Literary Fund. Why shouldn't the fund pay the whole production expenses of a few selected books, at first, leaving the proceeds of sale for the author; which would ensure a fairly good return while leaving enough to chance and the public to keep the writer up to the mark.

DENNIS McELDOWNNEY,  
Christchurch.

## PROBLEM CHILD

Sir,—It is interesting to parents to hear what is being done for these extreme cases of neglect. But I don't think Mr. Nixon quite understands the difficulties we all have to face in bringing up our children. He should try looking up children from their infancy and adding to that all the washing, cooking, nursing, doctoring, and housekeeping that is the ordinary life of a mother. To take and give affection is an ordinary human necessity. When we are overtaxed we are "sub" and can get "ratty"—more so if the children are our own and we can't do our best for them. Children need robust people about them. Girls can go further on affection alone, but boys have a greater need for some expression of virility. With our wars and slumps and ordinary householders' troubles, they grow restive at seeing their elders mere pawns in life. They are rightly critical of their elders and ambitious for the best in life. Perhaps some can forget their future and live purely in their hobbies and games, but we shall never get all-round development in our children till we can give

them an example of a balanced, co-operative human society where they can see a picture of the life they want to lead in the lives of the adults about them.

I haven't a friend who is looking after young children who is not in need of a holiday. But they don't squeal because they know that if they drop out the whole family will be the worse for it.

K.M. (Havelock North).

## "SUNDOWNER'S" ARTICLES

Sir,—I hope the articles on country life which have been appearing in *The Listener* will be continued indefinitely. The style is accurate and sinewy. They recall "Rural Rides" in their vigour, absence of trimmings and direct simplicity; but without, of course, the invective of that classic work. They possess that indefinable something which can only be described as charm. Is this (do you think?) heightened by a faint but pervasive melancholy which seems to say: I have studied the Problem of Evil but have failed to convince myself that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds; or even that the sum of good outweighs the evil?

I hope "Sundowner's" modesty permits him to accept this small tribute; that we may long enjoy the fruits of his experience, his insight, and his detachment in lucid English prose.

VINCENT COUNTY (Wellington).

## RADIO PLAY COMPETITION

Sir,—John Gundry's co-winning play in the recent radio play Competition was excellently acted and presented, but what a spotlight on what the NZBS considers worth a prize—a murder to the square inch, including matricide, all American characters and environment. Here in New Zealand there is a country rich in dramatic possibilities and characterisation, but that is given no consideration, apparently, by any author considered worthy of winning a prize. Let us compliment Mr. Gundry, however, on his courage and confidence in submitting his work in a competition in which the contestants are told that no prize may be awarded if the entries are not considered of a sufficiently high standard, but that the ideas submitted by them become the property of the NZBS with no promise of any reward to themselves. Did he omit to read the competition conditions? They were enough to make this correspondent think the competition unworthy of consideration.

M.D. (Whakatane).

(The rules of the competition stated, inter alia: "The play may deal with any subject. The right is reserved not to award a prize or prizes if in the opinion of the judges the entries do not merit such award. The award of a prize gives the NZBS exclusive New Zealand broadcasting rights in the play concerned. The NZBS shall have the right to purchase the same rights in any non-prize-winning play submitted." The submission of a script did not, in any way, give the NZBS automatic broadcasting rights. The correspondent is also incorrect in assuming that a New Zealand setting and New Zealand characters were given no consideration by an author considered worthy of winning a prize. While there are several prize-winning plays still to be produced, the play "The Man Who Phoned," written by E. N. Taylor and having a New Zealand setting, has already been broadcast.—Ed.)

## NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

*Integrity* (Nelson), Old Tom (Southland), J. S. Sinclair (Maheno), Sensitive (Christchurch): Correspondence closed.

*Working Woman* (Wairoa): Not related to any subject discussed in our columns.