

JANUARY 3, 1947

## In Japan

IT is easy to forget that New Zealand still has an army overseas. Relatives will not forget, and the Government certainly has not done so, but those who have neither blood reasons nor official reasons for remembering the men in Japan should now and again be reminded of them by other agencies than earthquakes. They are soldiers on the most tedious task an army is ever called on to carry out—the occupation of a completely conquered country. We must not assume, because they happen to be in no physical danger, that everything is well with them. Physical danger after all brings its own safeguards. It draws men close together; braces them to endure hardship; keeps them close in spirit to relatives and friends. But tedium demoralises every army that feels itself neglected. Though discipline will hold it together for a time, the day comes when discipline itself seems a part of the neglect, and a provocation. That has not happened yet in Japan. But it could happen, and when we leave it to the Government to do all the morale-building, or to chaplains and lecturers and radio officials, we are forgetting that soldiers are men and not machines, human beings, usually young, with all the restlessness and stubborn questionings of youth, and that every New Zealand soldier in Japan is there for the benefit of every New Zealander at home. It is dangerous as well as shabby to take everything and give nothing. Nor is it enough, though it is good, to remember them materially. Gifts mean a lot, but friendship and understanding mean more, and no one is too poor to give those. We must remember too that the New Zealander who goes to Japan, for any one of the hundred reasons that take young men on such adventures, is coming back again. If we want him to come back a better and wiser New Zealander, and not merely older and shrewder, we must make him feel throughout his period of service that we are interested in him, devoted to him, and mean it when we say that we are glad to be represented by him in that very difficult corner of the world.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## DO THRILLERS CORRUPT US?

Sir,—In the article published in your issue of December 6, W. J. Scott seems to have expressed a few essentially simple criticisms in somewhat pretentious language. If he means that the best literature would be expected to contain a true picture of men and women and their social relationships, one can hardly disagree with him; but it should be noticed while admitting this premiss that many of the recognised classics do not fulfill this condition. For instance, the many historical inaccuracies of Shakespeare, particularly the burlesque treatment of Jack Cade's rebellion, or Dickens's extravagantly villainously villains. It is obvious that many factors contribute to the worth of literature and that it is risky to attempt to pare off one hypothetical category, such as "thrillers" or "detective stories" and condemn them absolutely. Will Mr. Scott include Wells's *Invisible Man* or Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* as "thrillers"? Will he claim the Sherlock Holmes novels inferior to *The White Company*? Will he say that the mass-produced slush of Jeffrey Farnol, Donn Byrne, or Baroness Orczy is better than the mass-produced "thrillers" of Edgar Wallace? I do not think so, nor do I think he can suggest any method of eradicating the rubbish from our literary diet while the profit motive determines what books shall be printed and in what quantity, and while the majority of mankind are so busy with the details of scratching a crust for self and dependants in a driving and merciless society which affords little time for adequate education.

Finally I doubt if reading "thrillers" as a recreation is any more indicative of a "shocking" deterioration of taste and reason than are such pastimes as chess, solitaire, or cross-word puzzling. In the past fortnight I have read King Lear, *Some Modern Maoris* by the Beagleholes, *State and Revolution* by Lenin, and a "thriller" by Freeman Wills Crofts called *The Pit Prop Syndicate*. I enjoyed each during the reading and while *The Pit Prop Syndicate* did not cause me much deep thought I cannot feel that I have surrendered either my taste or my reason to Freeman Wills Crofts. In point of fact Shakespeare is far more hypnotic—and if his output is accepted as one man's work, as great a mass-producer as any modern.

MAX BOLLINGER (Upper Hutt).

Sir,—W. J. Scott says that he expects educated people to accept the following statement among others.

"It does not matter what additional information about this or that a novel may give us; if its picture of human nature in action is distorted or defective, the quality cannot be good."

Unless educated people are defined as those whose opinions coincide with Mr. Scott's, this is pure baloney. Plenty of what is regarded as the best literature, even by educated people, consists principally of "distortions of human nature." *Macbeth* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, for instance, contain some of the most unnatural characters I have ever met, yet, although Mr. Scott would probably class them as thrillers and therefore unworthy of the notice of the educated, these are frequently read in

schools, the very centres of education. As for his question whether a mystery tale trains the mind for Tolstoy, Milton, Fielding, and Eliot, he might as well ask whether Tolstoy, Milton, Fielding, and Eliot train the mind for mystery tales. Indeed, most of Mr. Scott's arguments work the other way, especially if we substitute for his dogmatic assumption the truth that it is dullness, not perversion, that is the hallmark of bad literature.

J. S. D. PATTERSON (Gisborne).

## PUBLIC OPINION AND MODERN ART

Sir,—And why, if the modern generation chooses to go and live in poky little rooms, should the painters all have to pander to them there? There are plenty who do and will, and "Brown Sable" (*Listener*, November 15), likes them, and he does not like the others; but why should he make a morality out of his dislike?

It is indeed the sign of a disease—and of a deficiency disease at that—the way "the red spots break out" in art society exhibitions. The deficiency is in any sense at all of greatness in painting. If we accept it as inevitable that we should live in poky little rooms, it is because we have forgotten how good for us a big space indoors is. That is a kind of malnutrition, too. I should like to see, in all houses, one big living room, no matter how small any other rooms may have to be.

But if a man wants a big picture, and can get no other sort of house, he can knock out a wall between two rooms, or he can hang it where he can look at it through the door from another room—there will be something he can do, if he wants it.

The shops exist for people who want to buy a picture to suit their room. That function ought not to invade the art gallery at the time of the annual exhibition.

The artist's business (and this is well appreciated by the Rutland Group) is to do his utmost to paint what he needs to paint, how it needs to be painted. And that is what the public also needs to see, however unconscious it may be of its deep need. And for this need and this only should the art galleries be used. All the rest is abuse.

The real artist is above price. The chaser of markets ought to be in the shop.—"A GOOD STIFF HOGS-HAIR" (Mapua).

## NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Sir,—May I express thanks and good wishes to the NZBS upon the establishment of the National Symphony Orchestra. I also repeat the hope, expressed in one of your recent editorials, that firmness will be shown in resisting demands for the premature appearance of the orchestra before it has had time to be welded into a cohesive unit. It will take a lot of hard work and many, many combined practices before first-class performances can be expected. But it is difficult to see how successful rehearsals can be held when, for the greater part of the year, the orchestra is dispersed into one large and three smaller sections in cities miles apart. No doubt this arrangement has been made because of a claim that players taken for the orchestra might "denude" some centres of

players. That claim is shortsighted. What really happens is that players being transferred to the National Orchestra leave behind them openings and opportunities which will be a stimulus for other musicians.

UNITY (Christchurch).

## "JOURNEY TO ROMANCE"

Sir,—I should like to voice my appreciation of the sessions *Journey to Romance* which have been broadcast from 3YA and 4YA. The lovely English voices, fine music of Mantovani's orchestra and romantic episodes have made them most enjoyable. May they continue. I speak to many people who say that nothing but rubbish comes over the air, but I usually find they do not take

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The *Listener*, which I think is invaluable, as one can choose what one enjoys and reject what one dislikes. Mr. Singer's talks on *Great Figures of the Bar* and Dr. Guy Harris's *Science at Your Service* have been both very enjoyable and informative. LISTENER OF 70 (South Canterbury).

## UNDER AND OVER

Sir,—"Sundowner" should check his facts. On page 13 of your issue of November 22, he said Feilding had a population of under 5,000. Last Census established that the town had a population of just over 5,000.

K. M. LITTLE (Feilding).

## BROADCAST ENGLISH

Sir,—As a listener I can enjoy any sort of programme that contains good music; I also like to listen to some of the ZB serials, but there is one thing that awakens a sort of homicidal tendency in my make-up: that is to hear a super-soap salesman blather about "lather" when I would much rather hear it rhyme with "father," as the inventors of the language intended it to. And when some announcers find it necessary to talk about Covent Garden they pronounce it Co-vent Garden. I was under the impression that every decently educated man or woman knew that the term was a corruption of Convent Garden and that centuries of English people have placed the accent on the first syllable as, Cov-ent Garden. With the New Zealand pronunciation of the word "ate" nothing can be done, I suppose, since children are taught in school to make it rhyme with eight. This reminds me of an incident which I am assured actually happened. After World War I, a man of my acquaintance settled in New Zealand and raised a family. One of his sons, born in the Dominion, one day, referring to his school lunch, said that he "ate" it in the school playground. His father corrected him and told him that in England the word was pronounced "et." "My teacher says it's 'ate,'" said the boy. "Well," said Dad, "you can tell your teacher she's wrong. It's 'et.'" After a little more argument the youngster said, "That's the worst of you 'homeys,' you know it all, don't you?" I am told that father rebuked the little New Zealander in the old-fashioned "homey" way, and that whether he "et" it, or "ate" it he took his next meal standing up.

HOMIEY (Christchurch).