

Words Without Caution

IT was a little depressing to find statesmen all over the world talking about the new year as if they had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. Unless the cables seriously misled us, as abridged messages so often do, the world's spokesmen are still ready (with some notable exceptions) to commit themselves to promises and pious hopes that have less than one chance in ten of realisation in our time. We seem to have lost our fear of words and to have forgotten that the leader who holds moons in front of us when the facts would justify a limited amount of very green cheese delays recovery with every extravagant phrase. It is permissible to offer miracles in the pulpit; but to offer them in the market place and on the public platform, in chancelleries and parliamentary assemblies, is to discourage the growth of the few small plants whose cultivation is really worth while. Nor is it the answer to say that no one is unduly elated by words these days or unduly depressed. That may be true but it is not an encouraging truth. Before words lose their value men and women have lost their character. It is not the words that then mean nothing but the things of which they are the labels, beginning with the biggest. We have only to say truth, or liberty, or kindness, or charity, or courage to realise how rare those qualities now are; and we don't bring them back by talking about them. It is equally true that we shall not bring them back merely by being silent about them, but we give ourselves a chance to respect them again if we keep them out of the mud in the meantime. Let us face the fact that all the virtues but two or three have been found too difficult for the modern world; that it is not the moral Everests on which we are now standing but foothills and mud flats; and that the most pitiable of all adventurers is the man who goes a mile into the wilderness and comes back claiming a hundred miles. There are times when it is most encouraging to raise no hopes at all.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

THE UNIVERSITY

Sir,—I read with interest the article on the University in your issue of December 6. There is an alternative proposal (I believe not entirely new) which does not appear to have been covered; namely the establishment of a genuine teaching University of New Zealand.

It has been suggested, in several quarters I believe, that a University of New Zealand be established in some comparatively small but central town, catering only for full-time residential students. The present Colleges could be continued for the benefit of those who might for varying reasons be unable to attend the central institution, but they would be subject and responsible to it and such students as would attend them would do so on the basis of extra-mural students of the central University.

It is, I submit, only by the establishment of a full-time residential University that the essential nature of a university (i.e., a community of scholars with each individual thinking and learning to think for himself) can be achieved. The centralisation of university education would avoid much unnecessary duplication and render more easy the offering to professors and lecturers of a salary more commensurate with their ability.

Mr. Turner argues, with justice, that the establishment of four separate universities would enable the professors at each to specialise in those aspects of his subject in which he is most interested. But the same end could be achieved equally well by widening the range of alternative syllabi for Stage III. and Honours subjects. The departments of a central university could well be staffed with specialists in aspects of the subject other than those which might most interest the professor.

It may be argued that this suggestion of a "New Zealand Oxford" is an impractical dream. But at this time the various Colleges are talking of spending much money on extensions to buildings. This money, I submit, would be far better spent on an establishment such as has been here proposed.

PIERS L. R. ABRAHAM (Wellington).

WAR STUDENT SPEAKS HIS MIND

Sir,—After a period as a prisoner-of-war and a period with UNRRA, I returned to this country late this year. While a prisoner I got in touch with the Bodleian Library and asked them to forward books so that I could study the New Zealand University Syllabus books for English I. On my return to New Zealand I contacted a correspondence school and continued the study of English with them. The school apologised and said that owing to the shortage of typists they had not been able to rewrite their notes to cover the work that would be set by the four University Colleges under the new system of internal examination; they hoped that papers for the next few years would be general enough to enable students handicapped by war work, to answer them and get a reasonable pass.

The English I, paper a for B.A., Auckland University College, had three-fifths of the questions set on Professor Sewell's *Practice of Prose*. This book is undoubtedly an excellent one; unknown

to the Bodleian Library and unavailable to me as a prisoner-of-war.

The danger of allowing each College to examine its own students will result in narrow teaching. The enthusiasms aroused by new freedoms generally die away and text-books now used in the four colleges will be replaced by those of the various professors and teachers. If the teaching staffs of the colleges are anxious to build a brave new world they should remember that there are still a few left working on the foundations. A new method of examining should be introduced gradually, or at least wait until the war has been officially declared ended.

SIX YEARS LATE (Auckland).

NOTE OF SOLEMN WARNING

Sir,—I read with pleasure "Sundowner's" articles, but one point he makes is open to question, I think.

He thought the Cliff Walk at Eketahuna would be suitable for courting. There is a very cold wind blows right along this track (it is in a river valley) and except for a short period in high summer, or on a very mild evening, it would be courting pneumonia, to use the Walk in the manner suggested.

WINTERBOTTOM (Nelson).

AUTHOR AND REVIEWER

Sir,—Your correspondent, Paul H. Simpson, is mistaken in thinking a review of his book completely destructive which recognised the vivacity of his style, described it as "brisk" and "wise-cracking" and acknowledged that the whole book was "entertaining." This liveliness of manner is, in my opinion, his chief claim on the attention of the public in this country or in any other country.

DAVID HALL (Lower Hutt).

UNACCOMPANIED SINGING

Sir,—I had an all-too-rare treat when I listened in to the breaking-up of the New Zealand Correspondence School, and heard the singing of "Land of Hope and Glory." The uniqueness of this item lay in the fact that it was entirely unaccompanied by any instrumental performance at all. There was just the boy (or man?) singing, and nothing else to drown it. I thought it wonderful. I wish we could have more unaccompanied songs.

REFRESHED (Taumararua).

ONE FOR TWO AGAINST

Sir,—One word of appreciation and two of "constructive criticism." We who love organ music—numerically insignificant, possibly—are often forgotten, so it is with real gratitude that I write to express appreciation of the half-hour of good organ music from 12M on Sunday evenings at 9.30. The time is right, the music is right: long may it continue.

First criticism: When we are "taken over to the Auckland Town Hall" for a concert, it is the custom of the "host" to mutter in his beard during the whole of the interval. Did he keep quiet we could absorb the atmosphere of the large gathering by listening in to the buzz of conversation and other typical noises, but mine host, speaking very slowly to make his scanty matter spin out, and repeating himself over and over

keeps up a continuous deep-throated monologue, until the artist reappears, when he gabbles off the rest of his sentence at a terrific rate. Silence is golden.

Criticism two: The theme-song complex has spread to 1YA, which now plays the same contemplative music every day following the devotional session. One can have too much of a good thing.

R. S. JARDIN (Takapuna).

FOSTER PARENTS

Sir,—I wonder how many teachers would agree that this business of foster-homes is as successful as the article you recently printed implied. Looking back over a period of five years' teaching, I can remember foster-children who were "difficult" (liars, cheats—what Mr. Nixon, in his admirable article on "Problem Children" called "wretched little compulsive thieves"), who were backward, who were not very clean and not very well looked after, but not one who appeared both well looked after and emotionally well adjusted. A few appeared physically well cared for. In some cases it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were cheap labour.

My experience may have been unfortunate. I should be pleased to think so, and intensely interested to hear what have been the experiences of other teachers. I agree with the correspondent who said that the payment on these cases must raise a doubt as to the amount of motherly emotion involved.

NANCY M. FOX (Panmure).

Sir,—I have come in contact with many foster-parents and in every case they love the children as their own and would like nothing better than to adopt them, but for various reasons cannot do so. One woman I know has for the past six months been boarding a baby who is mentally deficient, and now she is entering an agreement to keep him indefinitely because she cannot bear to think that he may go into an institution. This woman is only one of hundreds of genuine child-lovers who certainly do not board kiddies as a money-making business. The foster-parent receives £1 weekly, out of which she supplies everything—pram, bed, clothing, food and pocket-money. Take a boy of six—I have one and have recently bought him a new outfit—shoes 23/6, pants 16/—, flannel shirt 10/3, underpants 5/—, jersey 13/9, socks 3/6. I won't mention coat, raincoat, school-books, etc. These things need renewing constantly. Add the price of food and see how much the "money-grabbing foster-parent" gets away with.

"Hannah" says that the article by A.M.R. was like a sundial registering only the happy hour. Personally I would die happy to know that my children would be under such a department as the Child Welfare Department. The Welfare officers are kind, tactful and very friendly, yet they do their job well and I am sure any complaint from a child would be looked into. Then, too, the headmasters of the schools (only the headmaster) know which children are State wards and keep an eye on them. Our headmasters are interested in their children and are a very fine lot of men who would not hesitate to interfere on behalf of one of their flock.

MARTHA (Christchurch).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"Fair Go" (Masterston): No name, and in any case too violent.

J.W.M. (Wellington): Letter should be sent to the paper which published the report.