

JANUARY 24, 1947

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Clipped Wings

WE regret having to appear this week with our wings clipped to three columns. Although the war is over the consequences remain, and one of them is a disrupted newspaper industry which may or may not be fully restored in five years. One trouble is the fact that the situation which cuts off supplies of newsprint greatly increases the demand for newspapers. Britain, for example, consumed about 1¼ million tons of newsprint in 1938. But the intense interest in war news during the next six or seven years lifted the circulation of the newspapers so rapidly that the demand to-day is 2,000,000 tons, which is vastly more than the industry can supply. British newspapers have in fact reconciled themselves to a five-year plan under which the pre-war size will be reached about 1950; so New Zealand so far has been lucky. But it will surprise some of our readers to know that another factor in the problem was a drought last summer in Newfoundland. Newfoundland is not our only source of supply in New Zealand, but it is a very important source, and it is not exactly amusing to learn now that the meteorological conditions which gave us our mild 1946 winter gave Canada such a dry summer that the waterways could not be used for transporting timber to the mills. At present they can't be used because they are closed by ice, and it will therefore be some months yet before supplies are on the move again in the normal way. So the world is one after all. A dry wind blows in Newfoundland and a column disappears from the pages of *The New Zealand Listener*. It will come back as soon as we can make it grow; but the world's production is only about 6½ million tons, and three-quarters of this is consumed in the United States. All we can do at present is play with figures and pray that the people of Newfoundland, God bless them, will get no sunburn next summer.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, JANUARY 24

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

ARTS YEAR BOOK

Sir,—I think there is little need for Dr. Beaglehole or anybody else to be mystified about the purpose of the *Arts in New Zealand Year-book*. I take it that Mr. Wadman and Mr. Tombs have set out to provide, quite simply, a year-book—that is, a record of the work New Zealanders have done in the various arts during the course of the year. There is an obvious need for such a publication. It will be useful to refer back to these volumes in 1950, or 1970, and see what was being done in 1945, 1946, and so on. (From this point of view it might even be justifiable to publish a certain number of bad examples, just as museum pieces, provided they were sufficiently interesting.) Some basic critical standard—not necessarily the very highest—is of course implied, but there is no need for the editor to try to hatch out a phoenix every year. Phoenixes aren't hatched, in any case.

There is a good deal of "damned scenery" in the year-book for the reason that most New Zealand painters are interested in landscape. Perhaps they are too exclusively interested in it. Perhaps some of their work is inclined to be dull. On balance, I think it is better that they should be working patiently at this rudimentary level than apeing cosmopolitan manners. We must avoid cultural hydroponics.

At the same time, I agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Beaglehole about the need for establishing critical standards. If fine critical articles are published in the Year-book, that is all to the good. But I think that, in the main, this refining and sharpening process should be carried out in other places. The Year-book, by recording the broad movement of the arts, helps to make us more coherent, and at the same time provides useful material for the critic—a sort of continuous art gallery, existing not to enshrine the occasional masterpiece, but to display the characteristic work of this period and that. Judged from this point of view, I think the Year-book does very great credit to its hard-working editor and publisher.

As for the poetry section, I can assure Dr. Beaglehole that the question of catholicity of taste hardly arises; the problem being, not to weed out a small selection from a vast mass of material, but (largely by writing begging letters) to get together a body of work that is at least competent and presentable. If Dr. Beaglehole knows where any good poems can be come by, poems that are at present being overlooked, I am sure Mr. Wadman will be delighted to have them for next year's book.

The Year-book would be dangerous if it set itself up too arrogantly as the official arbiter of taste, or if it showed complacency. I see no evidence of these things. The thing to realise is that it is, first and foremost, a year-book—a sort of *Wisden* of the arts—not an attempt to cover the whole ground of criticism.

A. R. D. FAIRBURN (Devonport).

Sir,—In reviewing the 1946 *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* J. C. Beaglehole says: "... Anything of the sort, to realise its great potential value, needs to be firmly grounded on a set of clearly thought out critical convictions." No

doubt there should be in such a compilation (which I have not seen) an introduction, essay, or general commentary covering what is included in the book and giving valuations based on the writer's claim to competence as a critic. But, in my judgment, the value of such a work rests largely, not on any clearly enunciated critical convictions, but on the convictions to be deduced from the work of the artists.

Mr. Beaglehole finds it difficult to decide what the *Year Book* is driving at. Although I have not seen it yet, this comment indicates that the compilation is fulfilling its true function, namely, that of reflecting the disoriented, disorganised, and groping mind of mankind. If, as Priestly contends, there is a grand universal mind of which we individuals may form the cells, I think that mind is at present sick. Your own editorial in the same issue refers to the lost values of words, and says: "Before words lose their value, men and women have lost their character." When vital words such as

More letters from listeners will be found on pages 24 and 25

liberty, freedom, democracy, truth, are used in ways that prostitute the meanings they have hitherto had, it is no wonder if our arts, which uncannily reveal our mental and spiritual states, do not fit into categories hitherto held to be valid.

Art schools seem unconsciously to reflect mass movements of the human mind; the pre-Raphaelites and Impressionists grew out of revolutionary fervours in Europe. May not our art of to-day be symptomatic of the universal upheaval in the world? And can we look for clearly thought out critical convictions in a world where about the only clear conviction seems to be that we must at least survive either by hook or crook.

J. MALTIN MURRAY (Oamaru).

JAZZ AND THE NEGRO

Sir,—I should like to know what your commentator meant by saying that "leaving aside the question of its musical worth" jazz is "one of the ways by which one can appreciate life of the Negro in the Southern States of the U.S." The use of the words "Negro" and "Southern" may be queried. The former may be too restrictive. The latter may be omitted.

"CORNES" (Titahi Bay).

CRICKET BROADCASTS

Sir,—I would like to express appreciation of the excellent cricket descriptions given by the commentator from Wellington. I'm sure that all cricket enthusiasts will agree that his description of the Plunket Shield game (Auckland v. Wellington) was in all respects of as high a standard as those we are accustomed to listen to from Australia. I wish I could be as enthusiastic about the painful dithering which emanated from Christchurch.

R.L.M. (Westport).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT
"Constant Reader" (Frasertown): Please send us your address to enable us to pass on the information you asked for.