

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

## MODERN ART

Sir.—Your correspondent "Brown Sable" has brought a rather interesting problem to light. He deplores the freedom exercised by our contemporary "Moderns" in the handling of both their subjects and their media. However, the obvious weakness in his argument struck me rather forcibly in his admission that "our public may lack appreciation in the finer points (of modern art) and its approach to art appreciation." May I heartily endorse this, but add that the buying public not only lack knowledge of the finer points of contemporary painting but also of the fundamentals as well. In fact their innocence is so great as to confine their understanding and appreciation even of the old masters to a few famous names. This statement is rather bald, but I doubt very much that it could be proved incorrect.

Modern art is not the product of a few addle-pated high-brows; it is the inevitable advancement of culture under the stimulus of rapidly changing social conditions. Art is indissolubly bound up with life, hence it must interpret the spirit of the age in which it is practised. Picasso's "Portrait of Henry Kahnweiler" would have been impossible without the invention of the motor car or the aeroplane.

True originality is a rarity; it only comes with superlative genius. But it is impossible to expect a sane contemporary practitioner to grind on the worn out barrel organ of tradition to soft-soap public taste. If "Brown Sable" dislikes his "subjects stripped to the bare bones" he forgets that the bones are far more significant than the flesh which surrounds them. The old Keatsian cry of "truth is beauty" is not outdated; only the interpretation has undergone an evolution. The public must adjust themselves to the new standards, or shall we say values, which the modern movement has inaugurated. These changing values have been moving a little too swiftly during the last hundred years for the public to catch up in their appreciation. Hence the gulf that exists to-day. The fault again lies with the conservatism of the inadequate art education in most of our institutions.

"ARTIST SPECTATOR" (Nelson).

## M. H. HOLCROFT'S WRITINGS

Sir.—In reply to Elsie Locke, I would say that whether we concur with or take exception to the theses developed in *Encircling Seas* on Rhythmic Compulsion, it is not a definition of what an author should write about, but a description of the way in which M. H. Holcroft believes the creative mood operates. Mr. Holcroft may not agree with the main trends of thought and life in New Zealand, but his writing is steeped in a knowledge of our situation.

No one would give more whole-hearted support to the assertion that "Creative writing surely has its roots in life," than the author of *Timeless World*. Consider, for example, how he writes in the essay on Auriel contained in that volume: "He was unmarried. Children of his own might have added stability and a healthy contact with the world . . . Meditation on the sweetness of childhood needs the interruption from the voice of fancy, lusty and actual." In another essay we find him deeply concerned because from the abundant material of Public Works camps no novel or collection of stories has issued. I think, however, that Elsie Locke's criticism springs from a different source. She herself is in harmony with currents of thought in New Zealand to which Mr. Holcroft is opposed—where he would modify she would accept. It is a mistake, though, to identify any one current of thought and feeling with the total life of a country, and a further error to attack an author for a supposed failing which bears little relation to the evidence at hand.

No writer can simultaneously possess an entirely catholic sympathy and integrity. Where Mr. Holcroft's ideas and sympathies end, there we may suppose, Elsie Locke's begin; but for my part I more deeply share in those of the former. J.S. (Hororata).

(We are sorry to close this interesting discussion, but cannot give it further space. Elsie Locke, who started it, may however reply briefly if she wishes.—Ed.).

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