

FEBRUARY 21, 1937

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## Propaganda Successes

THE success of the road safety campaign during the Christmas holidays may not mean that the roads are now safe; but it does mean that they are safer; and it means more than anything else that most of us can be lined up on the right side in a good cause. The risk in such campaigns, as we have more than once emphasised, is nagging. On the other hand everyone who has had anything to do with the circulation either of news or of views knows that one telling is not enough; one hearing or one reading. Lessons have to be repeated and rubbed in, but at the point at which friction develops the rubbing must stop. There was no stop in the road safety campaign and the success was almost sensational; which means of course that there was far more direction than most of us imagined. But another factor was our readiness in that case to be persuaded. We were afraid, not merely of other people, but of ourselves, and we are at least beginning to be afraid of ourselves in the case of forest fires. If it is astonishing to note how many people still throw lighted cigarettes about, or leave camp fires still smouldering, it is interesting to see how many are careful not to do such things any longer. Sense in these matters comes slowly, but it does come, and it is now coming a little faster. It is not easy to drive through a place like the Wai-poua Forest, for example, without catching the note of anxiety in the fire notices, and feeling a little ashamed to smoke. If propaganda could now be turned on the litter vandals they too would be roused to new standards in a year or two. For they are of course careless rather than stupid, forgetful rather than delimiters in dirt. The key to success with them is the fact that more and more of them this year visited the places that they or someone else fouled last year.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, FEBRUARY 21

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## CREATIVE WRITING IN NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—I have no quarrel to find with *The Listener's* constructively critical review of my *Creative Writing in New Zealand*, but it is otherwise with the truculent assertions printed in your issue of January 31 over the name of Gordon Ingham. As your correspondent criticises especially the first 30 pages of my book, and as it is there in particular that I make some attempt to fuse moral and religious values with literary ones in assessing the work of certain poets, it is not difficult to identify Mr. Ingham as one of those to whom the mention of religious values is anathema. Were he to argue his case, I would attempt a rebuttal, but as he produces no facts whatever, the assertion that the type of approach I favour is naive, can only strike me as absurd in view of the achievements of T. S. Eliot, Herbert Read, Middleton Murry, E. I. Watkin, Charles du Bos, Francois Mauriac, and Elizabeth Monroe, to name but a few moderns. Again, Mr. Ingham characterises my work as a "digest" of its admirable predecessors, and at the same time condemns it for its "almost uniformly destructive tone." He cannot have it both ways. He conveniently ignores the fact that many of the writers I discuss are not mentioned in previous surveys, and that my views on those that are mentioned often differ from their surveys in basic matters. As for my book's "destructive tone," I leave this preposterous statement to the judgment of readers of the work, commenting only that at least one reviewer has taken me to task for leniency with regard to the moderns!

I do not know what are Mr. Ingham's qualifications as a critic of New Zealand writing and criticism; he certainly gives no evidence of any such qualifications in his letter. But, at the risk of trumpet-blowing, I would point out that reviews of my book by many informed critics give the lie to his charges. For example, Douglas Stewart, in a lengthy appreciation in the *Sydney Bulletin* (January 8, 1947) writes, "Mr. Reid's survey is not only the best the present commentator has seen, but, allowing for a few minor complaints, as good as could be asked for. . . . It is the balance of his outlook that makes his book superior to all recent competitors." W. F. Alexander in the *Dunedin Evening Star* (December 17, 1946) said, "In *Creative Writing in New Zealand*, Mr. J. C. Reid has done more to show this country's literature, and especially its poetry, in its right perspective and proportions than any writer before him." Perhaps even Mr. Ingham will concede these gentlemen some authority on the matter. In these circumstances, it is hardly to be wondered at that his letter strikes me as being inspired less by a concern for New Zealand writing than by a desire to defame a book which has the temerity to pay some tribute to religious values. Mr. Ingham is welcome to the rest of his name-calling. As Kierkegaard once said, "God be praised that all this attack of vulgarity has fallen on me."

J. C. REID (Auckland).

(We have received other letters, in support of Mr. Reid. But the author has now replied to his critic, and we cannot find space at the moment to prolong the argument.—Ed.)

## "MAY I NEVER SEE . . ."

Sir,—I read G.M.'s criticism of the picture *Holiday in Mexico* with disgust. I went and enjoyed the picture, and the piano-playing was magnificent. I say candidly, G.M.'s criticism was cheap, flashy, stupid, vulgarly ostentatious, profligate, raucous, infantile, meretricious, tasteless, shallow, embarrassing, outrageously long-winded, wearisome, and far from being true. In fact it was the vapourings of a being with a furred tongue, a bad liver, gout in one foot, and a man-sized corn on the other. May I never see a worse picture.

DISGUSTED (Hamilton).

## CHARACTER IN A SERIAL

Sir,—In a recent copy of *The Listener* I see there is a reply to certain criticism of the serial "Mackenzie." There is just one point that I would like to raise. In the serial, Mackenzie speaks with a broad Scots accent, whereas one would normally expect a Highlander who is used to speaking Gaelic, to speak a broken English. In fact, H. Beattie in his book *The First White Boy Born in Otago* quotes T. B. Kennard as saying that such is the case.

STRATH-NAM-BO (Edendale).

## ALICE, WHAT ART THOU?

Sir,—May I congratulate S. Morrison Jones on her interesting character of "Alice" in the short story "Family." As the Americans say, "I think she has got something there." Indeed, though it isn't the thing to say I shall be bold and give it as my opinion that "Alice" is a fine drawing of a type developing in this country with educational and social implications on which I should be delighted to enlarge—if anyone would listen. But let me say this please. Have you noticed that Alice isn't a lady? Why, she isn't even a gentleman!

I. CALEY (Huntly).

## JEAN SABLON

Sir,—I think that your commentator in *Radio Views* on page 19 of your issue for January 24 has been more than unfair to the French singer Jean Sablon. The unfairness would appear to spring from ignorance.

Your commentator implies that Sablon is a crooner of post-war growth. Sablon was immensely popular on the Continent before the war and his records were best-sellers both there and in the United Kingdom. His present visit to America is due to his popularity with G.I.'s who heard him in Paris and preferred his light-hearted Gallic interpretations of popular songs to the saccharine brayings of their native-born artists. I would refer your commentator to an article on Sablon in *Newsweek*, September 2, 1946, and the picture of him reproduced there also shows that his eyebrows are no cuter than those of other mortals. Other appreciative articles on Sablon have also appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Time*.

J'ATTENDRAI (Wellington).

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

*Bedridden* (Blenheim): Sheer arid pedantry.