

Libraries and Minorities

ONE of the points made by Lionel McColvin in an interview in last week's issue was the importance of libraries to minorities. A democracy in which minorities have no influence is of course not a democracy at all; but the technical problems involved in feeding minorities mentally involve usually a heavier outlay in material and money than minorities can afford. It is not easy for a minority to own a newspaper, for example, or if they do by some chance own it, to run it with a reasonable hope of success. Nor can minorities usually own broadcasting stations. But a minority of one can read and re-read a book. Books in fact yield their lessons best when they are so used. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that they resist majority use—passively if not actively. Although they are produced in thousands they circulate singly, since they have usually only one reader at a time. If a newspaper has 50,000 subscribers something like 200,000 people will read it every day (a large proportion of them at the same moment). But it has never happened in New Zealand that 200,000 people have looked at the same book on the same day; or a quarter, or a tenth of that number. It rarely happens, on the other hand, that a broadcast programme has an audience numbering less than thousands tuned in to it at the same time. Radio and newspapers speak to thousands simultaneously or don't speak at all. Books are the still small voice that the poorest and obscurest solitary (where there are free libraries) can hear when he wants to hear it. They are the protectors of individuals and therefore the defenders of democracy itself, which can't function without free and independent thought. It is also true of course that they don't grow on trees. The cheapest books to-day cost several shillings, the smallest public libraries hundreds and usually thousands of pounds. But even those are negligible costs when spread over the whole community—and spent to keep us free.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

WICKET OR PITCH?

Sir,—Your correspondent, R. Pape, finds it impossible to mow his wicket. He should try the one defined in the Oxford University's monumental *New English Dictionary* as "the ground between and about the wicket; the pitch," or even Chambers' *Twentieth Century Dictionary's* "the ground where the wickets are placed."

"MOW ME DOWN" (Wellington).

Sir,—Mr. Pape's insistence that the wicket be called the "pitch" has interesting implications. Such pedantry would mean that the ball would "pitch on the pitch"; that the gentleman who fields at right angles on the leg side would have a "square" leg; that his team mate in the long field a "long" leg and another a "fine" leg. When Mr. Bedser or Mr. Wright "bowled a maiden over" might we expect a resulting charge of criminal assault? Would a "glance to leg" have anything to do with short skirts? When Mr. Hammond "places the field" might we expect to see the English captain grasping handfuls of the Sydney Cricket Ground or the Basin Reserve and distributing them according to his whim and would a "hook to leg" be a fish story?

R.B.M. (Tawa Flat).

Sir,—It does not seem to have occurred to correspondents who have been discussing this matter, to refer to the dictionary. In the *Oxford Pocket Dictionary* I find: "Wicket (cricket): three stumps with bails in position: state of ground between the wickets (e.g., a soft wicket)." According to the O.E.D. therefore "wicket" is not synonymous with pitch, but can refer to the ground in special phrases.

QUIDNUNC (Dunedin).

WITCHCRAFT

Sir,—Your commentator took the talks on witchcraft too seriously. They were plainly meant for those who know nothing about the subject. Perhaps it would have been more correct to call them talks on witch-baiters. James I may have had many faults, but he treated the subject of witches on wonderfully modern scientific lines. There does seem room for a few further talks on the subject of witchcraft. I suggest:

1. Witch-baiting in Ireland and Wales.
2. Manifestations of witchcraft in advanced peoples.
3. Propaganda and witchcraft.

I could suggest others, but I see no hope of hearing them.

DEWINES (Dunedin).

LOCAL TALENT

Sir,—I feel that there is a lamentable lack of New Zealand talent used in broadcasting—particularly from Commercial stations. Why is this? Nobody is ever going to convince me that we have not got talent in New Zealand because I am not going to believe it—and I am not a New Zealander. I am a Cockney with 35 years' residence in this country.

Recordings are being made continuously in New Zealand and the technical production of them is as good as any that I have heard which are imported from overseas; but the artistic value of many of these New Zealand productions up till now has been extremely doubtful. I have little fault to find with recordings of singers and musicians; these

on the whole are excellent. But the scripts using the spoken word have almost without exception a distinctly American flavour.

Even our announcers cannot, or will not, refrain from using purely American words and phrases. One has only to listen to Commercial stations for a short while to hear the words street-car, sidewalk, medsun (for medicine) being uttered again and again. Why? The English language has served us well for many a century, so why this persistent adoption of Americanese? If we must depart from good old English, then why not our own New Zealand version? After all it is only monkeys who imitate—and who wants to be a monkey?

In broadcasting we have an excellent medium for moulding New Zealand standards and ideals; then why not let us get to work and build up something that will be expressive of New Zealand thought, and life? But that will take courage and daring on the part of those behind New Zealand broadcasting. I would like to see an immense campaign started to bring out the undoubted hidden talent that exists in this country. It will take money, yes, but we found plenty of that for war—why not find it for culture, our own New Zealand brand

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of culture? Let us give the Andrews Sisters a rest—they need it! If the public taste in music has become so depraved that it demands the Andrews Sisters—then why not let us have our own? I am sure that any girl with a bad dose of tonsillitis could give an excellent rendering of Dinah Shore!

However, if we are going to procure the best that our little country has to offer, then we shall have to guard carefully against being parsimonious in the matter. After all, we spend fortunes on American "tripe," so why not divert a goodly portion of that money into New Zealand channels? The campaign to be a success would of course have to be nation-wide, and would require Government support. By that I mean Parliamentary backing, both moral and financial.

"ALAN STUART" (Auckland).

"THE SOULING SONG"

Sir,—Those of us who neglected our musical education or have no understanding of classical music (I confess to both) welcomed the programme of English County songs from 2YA recently as affording us a link with the world of music. Incidentally, one of the songs, "The Souling Song," affords another link. In it occur the lines:

If you haven't got a penny
A half-penny will do,
If you haven't got a half-penny
Then God bless you.

It seems, therefore, that from this was borrowed the well-known Guy Fawkes refrain. Perhaps the proximity of dates had something to do with it for the announcer told us "The Souling Song" was sung on All Souls' Day. He also informed us (less accurately) that the song was a relic of pagan days and that All Souls' Day falls on October 11.

VINCENT COUNTY

(Wellington).

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

Ivan Lawson (Petone): Complaint passed on to the Director of Broadcasting.