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Passage from India

IT is an indication of the speed at which events are moving in India that Mr. Attlee's statement on the transfer of power has been accepted as calmly as the change of viceroys. Many are uneasy and a few ask questions, but the questions are for party purposes more often than for information. The withdrawal itself is a fact that all parties accept and a substantial majority of members approve, and those who are excited about it are more likely to be foreign than British. It is not clear that even the British in India are excited, whether they are officials or business men, though the officials know clearly enough that their careers have come to an end. It is only in its implications that the change remains dramatic, and to feel the force of it from that angle is difficult without a good deal of knowledge and some historical imagination. The dullest however know that if the reasons for the withdrawal are legion and mixed, the strongest begin in Britain itself. It was the pressure of liberal and radical opinion, and the unceasing demand for the application of liberal principles, that prepared Britain through two generations for this half voluntary and half compulsory renunciation of authority that still confuses the rest of the world. Even Mr. Churchill, with his strong views about the preservation of the Empire, has attacked only the time and method of the withdrawal and not the withdrawal itself. To say that Britain could have avoided withdrawal would of course be humbug. But it is not humbug to say that withdrawal could have been delayed for some years yet with a very good appeal all the time to necessity and commonsense. The decision to hand over next year was made because liberty is a fact in British politics and not merely a slogan. The wheels started to go round before Mr. Attlee was born.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, MARCH 7

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

M. H. HOLCROFT'S WRITINGS

Sir,—Since we are unable to gather around a table and continue this discussion in the way that all your correspondents, I am sure, would like to do, one general observation may serve for my reply. The final test of any theory is in practice. To my mind, M. H. Holcroft's mysticism has its counterpart in a certain aloofness from his fellow-countrymen, from which he sees them generally as raw fellows much given to drink and gambling. Two recent contributors to *The Listener* have drawn from life, and many a reader will be as delighted as the author with the bushman's wife of Anton Vogt's story—rough and ready, yet able to "manage" an accident as capably as she manages her brood of men and children; and with the farmers, garage men, housewives, craftsmen, and crusaders for many causes, encountered by "Sundowner." As the title of Alan Marshall's fine little tale of Australia has quoted, "These Are My People."

ELSIE LOCKE (Christchurch).

(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

ELECTIONS IN RUSSIA

Sir,—Your inaptly named correspondents "B. Sensible" and "Liberal" do not seem to have taken very great pains to inform themselves well on the reality or otherwise of democracy in the U.S.S.R.

As that eminent Independent member of the House of Commons, D. N. Pritt, K.C., has said, those who seek to rule it (the U.S.S.R.) out briefly as undemocratic have no right to pass over in silence the formidable authority of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, in their great study *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*. It is to be presumed that both "Liberal" and "B. Sensible" have access to this monumental work, which may be found in all public libraries.

A direct study of this book should prove useful and enlightening to all interested enough in the question of Soviet democracy to write letters to *The Listener* about it. We would refer them further to *Moscow Dialogues* by Julius F. Hecker, *Light on Moscow*, by D. N. Pritt, *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, by Dr. Hewlett Johnson, *Soviet Democracy*, by P. Sloan; and to the printed copies of the Stalin constitution which are available at small cost at most bookshops. By thus acquainting your correspondents with the existence of even a few of the many authoritative accounts of Soviet institutions we hope we have administered some antidote at least to the poison spread by the pens of M. Eastman, William L. White, Colonel McCormick, De Witt Wallace and their local sycophants.

MAX AND CONRAD BOLLINGER
(Pohangina).

(For reasons of space we have deleted from this letter a long quotation from the above-mentioned work by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. As our correspondent points out, it is available in all public libraries.—Ed.)

Sir,—"B. Sensible" thinks I have a curious idea of what constitutes a free election, yet there are noted writers and historians such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb who have travelled through the U.S.S.R. on three different occasions to study life there, Anna Louise Strong, American graduate who went to Russia more than 20 years ago and is still there on the staff of the *Moscow News*, D. N. Pritt, W. R. Batsell, G. H. D. Cole, Dr. B. N. Anderson, M. Arnold,

the Dean of Canterbury, E. J. Dillon, R. W. Dunn, and many others I could name, who say the elections in U.S.S.R. are as free as in other countries. "B. Sensible" tries to compare elections here with elections in U.S.S.R. He does not seem to know that elections in capitalist countries have an Opposition and by doing away with capitalism you do away with that Opposition; that is what they have done in Russia, and when they meet they discuss the affairs of the country instead of abusing each other across the House. "Liberal" says only a few lines are required to answer my letter. But the contents of my letter were from the above-mentioned writers, and it would be interesting to know where he gets his marvellous plethora of knowledge to be able with a few lines

More letters from listeners will be found on pages 18 and 19

to obliterate and cast into oblivion all the renowned writers I have mentioned. He also accuses me of ignoring to state who the women can vote for; he might as well ask me who the women in New Zealand can vote for. I would say for the candidate they think would represent them best.

B. HONEST (Richmond).

(This letter has been abridged and this correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

"ERRORS IN TASTE"

Sir,—It is a matter of public interest that there is a paper enterprising enough to print a prize-winning New Zealand short story. Felicitations therefore to both author and publisher on Anton Vogt's "The Accident." But always mindful that the role of the critic is easier than that of the author, I submit comment on what appear to me errors in taste and atmosphere.

The use of the expression "By Christ" is an example of the former. Most of us are Christians and I believe to the majority of readers the use of this oath is offensive. While the short story may be a form of art or carry a message and so on, its chief object is to entertain and not to disgust. This is putting the matter, I hope, briefly, but on its lowest common denominator of taste. And then the oath is several times repeated. Mr. Vogt may claim he needed the first for atmosphere and realism, but the repetitions do not appear to make the atmosphere thicker, but are rather examples of what could be described as exorbitance.

As to atmosphere and realism as opposed to taste, I have lived on brief occasions with bushmen and have never heard one or indeed any New Zealander use the adjective "bleeding," though of course its synonym is common enough.

And the real surprise in the surprise ending lies in the fact that Mr. Vogt should imagine that bushmen regard the Schedule to the Workers' Compensation Act as generous at all, let alone generous enough to tempt self-mutilation.

I ask leave respectfully to endorse the opinion of the competition judges that the story is very well told.

"CERVANTES" (Wellington).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"Very Interested" (Masterton): A. Yes, with the addition of glockenspiel and celeste occasionally, making 69. B. It doesn't—there is no piano with a symphony orchestra.