

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

CHRISTIANITY AND NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—“If Christianity is going to be chucked overboard—and the fact is that New Zealand seems in effect to be abandoning it—we must ask whether there is anything to put in its place.” That is part of the Rev. H. W. Newell's message published in your issue of February 14. I would say that you can't chuck overboard what you have never had on board. There is not a so-called civilised country in the world that has ever put into practice Christianity as propounded by its Founder. It is a healthy sign if mankind has decided to seek for something more effective than what has so far passed for Christianity.

From the time that the early Christians slaughtered each other on the altar steps in quarrels over doctrinal matters, the Christian Church has been a congeries of rival factions each claiming to be the possessor of the real truth. It is true that persecution, torture, burning at the stake, have gone as penalties for failing to agree with the politically dominant religious body of the moment. We have a variety of denominations which constitute useful social bodies having largely commercialised creeds, costly and ornate places

of worship and rituals, and comprehensive balance-sheets and budgets as the machinery of those who claim to represent the Man “who had not where to lay His head.”

Not many theologians seem prepared to face the facts with the same courage as Reinhold Niebuhr, who in his *Ethics of Christianity* says: “The ethical demands made by Jesus are incapable of fulfilment in the present existence of man.” Organised Christianity has for centuries proceeded upon the false assumption that the demands of Jesus can be fulfilled by ordinary mortals in this ordinary world, so that it is not surprising if the Church has failed to achieve the impossible.

Balfour says: “We desire, and we desire most passionately when we are most ourselves, to give our service to that which is universal and that which is abiding.” Organised Christianity does not provide us with that. Professor E. H. Carr says: “Those who believe that a return to Christianity is the clue to our problems, must face the task of re-creating Christianity before they can use it as a foundation on which to rebuild the world.” A world, I would add, that contains two non-Christians for every Christian.

Mr. Newell doesn't think New Zealand has anything much worth while to say “in the world's state of spiritual bankruptcy, unless we do find a faith of some sort.” In my view, the social legislation of New Zealand has—to use an Americanism—“said a mouthful” to the world by declaring the practicability of a community applying some of the fundamental commands of Jesus to daily life; not an “abandonment” of Christianity but a fair start at re-creating it.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).

THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—I am sorry indeed that my friend Herbert Newell, ere his departure, should sound so pessimistic a note on the life of the spirit in New Zealand, especially as I think he is wrong. Every public teacher knows the mood in which he sadly and perhaps even resentfully says: “I have piped and ye have not danced,” and gets annoyed. In such case, however, the first question the prophet should ask is surely: “What was wrong with my piping?”

Watching as a Quaker somewhat from the outskirts of the Christian Church, I have felt that in recent years Barthianism—to sum up a trend in one word—has had a bad effect on many estimable Christians, in clouding their view of “the glory of God” and the “wonders of His Grace” to use rather hackneyed terms,

but expressive all the same. And I think Herbert Newell errs in rather too easily labelling people “cynical humanists,” which can so readily be generalised. Many of us humanists—so-called, but we do not mind the name—are by no means cynical, nor are the cynical all humanists. I seem to see a trace even in Herbert Newell himself. The use of labels so easily limits the power of God who still moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. As I wander round New Zealand I daily see these wonders, both inside and outside of the Church in the very healthy life of this Dominion. The Life of the Spirit is very real in this “God's own country.” May I in conclusion offer to Herbert Newell—if he should perchance see it—the well-known urge of George Fox to “walk cheerfully over the earth, answering that of God in every man.”

JOHN JOHNSON (Northland).

NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Sir,—On behalf of the Blenheim Branch of the British Music Society, I wish to inquire about the chances music-lovers in provincial towns have of both hearing and seeing the N.Z. National Symphony Orchestra in the flesh.

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