

APRIL 18, 1947

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES:
115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.I.
G.P.O. Box 1707.
Wellington, C.I.
Telephone 46-520.
Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

Death of a Minister

THE death of Mr. Sullivan may not have surprised those who were close enough to him to know how serious his breakdown had been, but it was a shock to the rest of the community. It was also in a very real sense a death for his country, since he had probably worked 16 hours a day for 12 years. He had done that because we, his thoughtless fellow-citizens, would not accept less from him as long as he was willing to give more, and it is a poor defence now to say that Ministers sacrifice themselves voluntarily. They do in the sense in which every decent citizen sacrifices himself voluntarily when he accepts work at all. But they value, and need, rest as much as other people, and it is disgraceful to take advantage of their position, as we all do, and hold a kind of blackmail threat over their heads if they show signs of easing up. For that is what we mean when we remind them at every turn that they are there by our favour, and that is what we do to them when we pester them with all kinds of problems that should never come near them at all. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the moment a man enters a New Zealand Cabinet he says good-bye to buoyant health. A Minister may, by reason of strength, escape the penalty for a few years, but he is physically very tough, and emotionally very calm, if he is not soon a tired man, flogging himself on when he should be resting, and finding every task twice as difficult as it would be if he were permitted to live sensibly. There are of course great compensations which it would be humbug to ignore—the excitement of power, of service, of achievement, of signing one's name to a page of history. It depends on each man's make-up how exciting those experiences are; but the point is that they are stimulants and not normal excitements and may easily in themselves be a snare.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

RUATORIA HOTEL

Sir,—I have read the article by "Sundowner" on Ruatoria and I feel that I must protest about his description of the number of fleas in the Ruatoria Hotel. For the past nine years I have stayed at the Hotel on an average of at least once a month and I have never seen or felt a flea. The Ruatoria Hotel is the most popular house on the East Coast, and that couldn't possibly be so if things were half so bad as "Sundowner" would have the travelling public believe. His articles make quite interesting reading, but he should stick strictly to the truth. In fairness to the popular host and hostess of the Hotel I hope you will publish this letter.

A PUBLIC SERVANT (Gisborne).

(There is no reference to the Ruatoria Hotel in "Sundowner's" paragraph about fleas. On the contrary, there is a long note about the hotel earlier in the same article and all of it is favourable.—Ed.)

NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Sir,—I wish to discuss two implications in the letter from Mr. J. W. Heenan, published in your issue of April 3.

The purpose of Mr. Heenan's letter was, he says, to "make your readers aware" that Dr. Beaglehole's article was not, in his belief, written "in good faith."

It is, unfortunately, only too common in politics to slander your opponent if you cannot confute him. It is alarming that Mr. Heenan should have introduced this method of argument into a discussion of our National Orchestra. The real question is whether Dr. Beaglehole's article was correct or not. This is the question Mr. Heenan runs away from. It is a question which Dr. Finlay has discussed in detail, and one on which we must each of us come to our own conclusions, on the merits of the case, and on nothing else.

The other point I feel bound to refer to is Mr. Heenan's final paragraph, and his implication that *The Listener* is fouling its own nest (the Broadcasting Service as a whole) in printing an article which was in some measure critical of another part of the NZBS (the National Orchestra). Surely, in Heaven's name, the responsibility of *The Listener* is to its readers, the radio listeners, not to its colleagues, the radio workers. We have little enough journalism of independence and integrity in New Zealand, and let us encourage, not abuse, any sign of it that appears.

ORMOND WILSON (Bulls).

Sir,—Much correspondence has already arisen in your paper about the new National Orchestra. There seem to be two factions—one determined to be pleased with whatever is given them, the other critical, like Dr. Beaglehole, and wisely so. The only contribution I wish to make is on the subject of Dr. Finlay's headlined question: "By what standard?" To judge the orchestra by the normal performance of, say the London Philharmonic, he says, is unfair and irrational.

I say that, unless the conductor and members do this, unless they take the world's very best (I would say Toscanini's) for their aim and standard from the very first, they will never improve much. It's no use ever being satisfied

with the plaudits and bouquets of the easily pleased. Let the orchestra aim at perfection and they will attain heights; let them bask in uncritical praise, and there will always be, as now, room for considerable improvement.

F. K. TUCKER (Gisborne).

Sir,—From a listener's point of view I heartily endorse Dr. Beaglehole's criticism of the choice of the programmes for the first two concerts of our National Orchestra. The effect through the non-emotional radio was flat and uninteresting. On switching over to Invercargill to listen in to a recording of Beethoven, I could not make out what was wrong until I realised I was listening to a re-broadcast of the National Orchestra, so switched off again. For brightness and gaiety the Old Masters are unsurpassed, and the third concert of the National Orchestra, which included both Mozart and Beethoven, was an unqualified success, and gave great pleasure and satisfaction to listeners. I trust all future programmes will have a solid classical foundation.

H. M. HELM (Pangatotara).

CHRISTIANITY IN NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—Your correspondent J. Malton Murray has epitomized the position of Christianity very well and there is no doubt that the recent public statements of H. W. Newell had a very pessimistic ring about them. Mr. Newell is, however, in the position to know what he is talking about and I believe that, in his wider sphere of activity, he will find that the attitude of New Zealanders to Christianity is one shared by the people of Great Britain and of Europe generally—not excluding the Catholic countries. My experience of the people in those countries is that most of them are indifferent to religion, but that small minorities are fervently religious or anti-religious. A "gallup" poll conducted by one of the large London dailies before the war showed in the three capitals—London, Paris and Berlin—that the percentage of church-goers was roughly the same, that is, 10 per cent.

So Mr. Murray is correct when he says "You can't chuck overboard what you have never had on board." But when Mr. Murray wishes me as a New Zealander, to make a start at re-creating Christianity and indicates that our legislation has "declared the practicability of applying some of the fundamental commands of Jesus to daily life," I am entitled to ask what are these commands and whether they are suitable for our daily life. Apparently the great majority of people (despite the optimism of John Johnson, who says that "The life of the spirit is very real in this country") consider that Christianity is impracticable as a way of life.

What would have been the effect of the strict observance of the fundamental command of Jesus to "resist not evil," but to "turn the other cheek to the smiter," had it been applied to Nazi or Japanese invaders? How do normal mortals love their enemies when they have been in prison camps? What kind of society would we have if we all practised the commands to "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," or "take no thought for your life, what ye shall

eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on?"

It appears to me that the teachings of the Gospels were those current at the time among civilised people. The Greeks, Romans, and Jews all taught similar ideas, as witness the writings of the *Talmud*, of Plutarch, Epictetus, Seneca, Plato, and others who put these thoughts on record before the time of Christ. The ideas may have been suitable for a nation held in thrall by a conqueror although we moderns dislike the injunction to meekness in face of oppression, but they are of no use to-day and Mr. Murray will have to answer the latter part of H. W. Newell's question, "If Christianity is going to be chucked overboard . . . we must ask whether there is anything to put in its place?"

To this question the average New Zealander has evolved a satisfactory answer. In place of outmoded commands to do the impossible and in place of the exercise of faith (which meant believing that which we knew to be un-

More letters from listeners will be found on Pages 18 and 19.

true) we have a firm belief in ourselves as men and women capable of much or little, able to master the elements unaided by any supernatural forces, and capable in the light of increasing scientific knowledge, of evolving a social system which will make life more enjoyable for all. This capability requires education for its development: not the half-baked schooling which is all the majority can at present afford, but an education which will teach people to think and to make full use of each progressive step in scientific knowledge.

"NABAL" (Moa Flat).

THEATRICAL HISTORY

Sir,—A recent correspondent quoted an article in the *Kidderminster Shuttle* and *Stourport Courier* which refers to the purchase of an old Opera House and its restoration by a Repertory Society. The article claims that this "is believed to be the only recorded instance of an amateur dramatic society buying a professional theatre to be run as such."

It may not be generally known that in 1944, the Nelson Repertory Theatre purchased the old Theatre Royal and has for the last three years been running it as a professional theatre for visiting companies as well as for its own productions. The purchase was made possible by the taking up of debentures by supporters of the Society and since that time a considerable sum has been spent in painting, re-decorating and completely re-wiring the theatre. The citizens of Nelson have taken a very keen interest in this courageous venture and the Repertory Theatre is to-day a living force in the community. Last year "Peter Pan" was played for 14 performances when 7,000 young and old of a total population of 15,000 revelled in Barrie's immortal classic.

C. G. KIRK, President, Nelson Repertory Theatre.

MURAL ART

Sir,—You made reference a few weeks ago to a competition in Mural Art. Can you tell me when the competition closes, and where entries should be sent? ARS LONGA (Wellington).

(Closing date is April 30. Entries should be addressed "Hon. Organiser, Mural Competition, 24 Hereford Street, Christchurch").