

MAY 23, 1947

Art and Everyman

IT is a healthy sign that most of us shrink from any whittling away of the substance of democracy. Of 21 men and women who commented on J. B. Priestley's complaint that the blind lead the blind when the multitude decide questions of taste only two supported him without qualification. A majority did not support him at all, but opposed him, although there could be no doubt of the accuracy of his statement that it is lunacy to leave culture in the hands of people who do not even pretend to know anything about it. If that were actually done in what he calls cultural democracy the arts would be in a more parlous state than is the case now. It would mean that the number who can now enter "worlds of wonder and delight," small as it is, would be infinitely smaller, and that the journey from aesthetic barbarism to aesthetic civilisation would be infinitely longer than it now is in every country in which the people rule. But the situation is not as bad as that. Art is already to a considerable extent in the hands of artists, and always has been since the first cave-drawing. No one can make artists sing or dance or paint pictures or write poems if they don't want to. The worst the world can do to them is starve them if they don't do what it wants, which in practice usually means making them earn their bread in some other way. That of course is barbarous and wasteful and makes life in general more brutish; but it leaves art in the hands of the artists. In any case, democracy, as one contributor pointed out, is indivisible. Political democracy includes cultural democracy and can't be separated from it. It may work slowly, clumsily, and blindly in the field of culture, but that is the price we have to pay for its basic liberty. It means houses that perhaps 2 per cent. of the population think ugly, music that 5 per cent. would sooner not hear, poems and pictures that offend 1 per cent. But that is not felt as an oppressive price by the rest of the community, and prescribed or dictated art would be.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS**22B ANNIVERSARY**

Sir,—On Sunday, April 27, 1947, the Commercial Station 22B made a most awful fuss about its tenth birthday, and the only part of the programme which could really be called genuine was the speech delivered by the Hon. F. Jones; the balance of the evening was pure, if one can use such an expression in this case—TOSH. To me it appeared a very definite glorification of certain of the people who pay for time on the air, as well as establishing a precedent by giving the 100 per cent. United States firms, i.e., MGM and Warner Brothers, free publicity—and on the Sabbath at that.

As ten years have passed since the station was established, surely there were matters of Dominion importance which could have been broadcast, instead of having all those Yankee pot-hunters telling us their ideas, and wishing us, from their empty brains, good luck, etc. The United States has definite ideas of its importance in this world, without our local stations coming to their aid, and a few stories of what Station 22B has achieved would have sounded much better to us in Wanganui. The announcements were definitely a cheap "handout" to those movie corporations.

In closing, I do not want you to tell me that the "quizzing of the Quiz Masters" was New Zealand, because I think it was about the poorest part of a poor evening. "PUTITI" (Wanganui).

Sir,—With a fanfare of trumpets and much excitement 22B announced their monster 10th Anniversary programme, which we lucky Wellingtonians would have the privilege of hearing on Sunday, April 27. We six citizens in this household, being far from old and decrepit, sat in our seats and listened eagerly. But what a shock we received! At the conclusion of the announcer's recital of wonders to be heard we looked at one another in amazement. Then we looked at the radio, to see if by some mistake we were on short-wave. "Surely," we said to ourselves, there were amongst the programmes at least four dealing with Hollywood's too-too wonderful stars, to say nothing of a programme of American so-called humour.

As an excerpt from this latter we were thrilled to hear a raucous-voiced Hollywood actress saying, "Hi ya Fellahs." It is kind of 22B to give us so much Hollywood. I suppose it would be impossible to have by way of a change New Zealand talented artists who have risen to fame in the last 10 years, viz., Oscar Natzke, or Australian talent, and impossible also to give us even one programme of British humour and stars. 22B apparently must stick to America—there are no worthwhile artists outside this land, or are there?

SIX OF US (Wellington).

(The Commercial Division of the NZBS states that special programmes were broadcast over a period of 18 hours and opportunity was taken during the afternoon of featuring first-class Wellington artists as part of the celebrations. It would be incorrect to assume that all the "high-lighted" material was of American origin. Possibly because of the power cuts the correspondent could not hear the various programmes.—Ed.)

CORRUPTION OF TASTE

Sir,—A. R. D. Fairburn tells us of our lack of taste and that we have become corrupted in such matters. Most of us know these things well. We know from overseas illustrated papers that we

are being misled. But from Mr. Fairburn we rather get the idea that we hoi polloi are to blame and he goes on to show his bewilderment at such a state of affairs. One would rather have hoped for a diagnosis and a probable cure. We are always being clouted by someone—Morris, Fry, Read, Gloag and now Fairburn. As a very small boy I was told that all art is bought and sold merely for its value as an indication of social status. This in an England where the tatters of an aristocratic patronage remained and Leverhulme had cut the head out of his portrait by Orpen to prove that industrial patronage was on a different basis.

In New Zealand there is no patronage or appreciation. I see no reason why there should be; we are middle class and lower. Those in a position to influence matters of design, industrial art, advertising, etc., are those who have got on—generally self-made and in most cases showing the thumb-marks. Such people live in a world of symbols and find in art their richest symbolic currency. In such a world the creative artist and man of science stand isolated; these people above all are up against certain relations which do not stand for something else, but have ultimate value, to be real. The mention of the pre-mechanic age should have made this clear. Such a period was controlled by a landed aristocracy. The aristocrat by reason of his negative sense of taste was able to deal with the artist; he became a patron and as such a great influence, working in a fully-developed idiom. The artist worked freely, sometimes apt to pull the forelock but always distinguished. Your plutocrat, on the other hand, has no taste but a great desire for polish even if its only on the furniture. He has a great fear of the creative artist. He looks upon creative art as a wanton attack on his system of society; at such times he accuses artists of Bolshevism, socialism, moral depravity and worse.

This then is where we stand. For further proof, look at the sign-writing on the walls of any New Zealand city. Note the goods they advertise. We have no say in such matters. As an instance of bad taste with no justification, I offer the cover of *The Listener*. Our architecture in most cases is a matter of throwing together fag butts of design: it is a desperate assembly to keep face and cover a failure to look deeper into our needs. Our standards are being rotted; such standards are decided by industrialists, or tradesmen from whom clearly we can expect no other behaviour.

The solution is clear, a new aristocracy must be created; the bones could be found and gathered together with an Industrial Society of Arts, similar to the Royal Society of Arts. (Here note the absence of tradesmen). Our own local societies have proved quite unable to deal with the matter or perhaps they are not interested; confining their efforts to sales of members' pictures, quite oblivious to the larger aspect of art; and turning themselves into glorified picture shops, the only difference being that societies do not sell wallpaper and paint, and for this omission they charge more for their work.

Might one suggest an exhibition of industrial art. We are not shocked when we discover that society does not encourage art, any more than religion ensures saintliness. Given a chance we

hoi polloi could prove that all we need is an opportunity to buy good things. The lot of a man wishing to buy good simple furniture is desperate. Our experience in these matters is extensive. We know of a great demand for better furniture, better this, and better that; we know also that such things are generally cheaper than the present rubbish. But we look upon the present state of affairs as inevitable under enterprise. VERNON BROWN (Auckland).

Sir,—It is exciting to see in *The Listener* of May 2 such an article as A. R. D. Fairburn's "The Corruption of Taste." It is more than exciting, it is highly

More letters from listeners will be found on Pages 14 and 15

stimulating, and should raise a pean of thanks from many that someone has at last attacked this horror.

May it be the first of many blows struck at the pretentiousness and the resultant vulgarity of our New Zealand furniture design.

M. M. HAYDN (Auckland).

BAND TESTS

Sir,—While agreeing with "Very Much Annoyed" in your issue dated April 18 that jazz is, from the musical point of view "crazy," I cannot concur in placing this year's band contest music in the same category—let alone dubbing it as "worse than jazz!" I enjoyed these test recordings from 2YA, and found them both entertaining and educative.

G. R. HILL (Auckland).

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

Sir,—As a listener to the radio I very much appreciate the *Desert Island Discs* session from 2YA on Thursday evenings and sincerely hope it will continue. I am sure it has given enjoyment to every one who is a lover of good music.

IVA INNES (Maniaia).

THAT SHIRT AGAIN

Sir,—Will one of your readers, perhaps an accountant, solve the following problem, which was printed in *The Listener* some years ago? An argument has arisen as to the correct solution. The problem is as follows: A man went into a shop to buy a shirt. The draper showed him a shirt at 12 shillings, which the man took. He gave the draper a pound note. The draper had no change, so took the note to the chemist next door, who gave him 20 shillings in silver for the note. The draper then gave the man the shirt and eight shillings change, and the man went away. A few minutes later the chemist came to the draper and said, "This note you gave me is a bad one, a forgery," and it was. So the draper had to give the chemist 20 shillings. How much did the draper lose? The generally-accepted answer was 20 shillings, being the eight shillings given to the man and 12 shillings, what the shirt could have been sold for. But is this correct? What would an accountant say? It is argued that the real loss is the eight shillings and the sum the draper paid wholesale for the shirt. If this was, say, 96/- a dozen, or eight shillings each shirt, the draper lost 16 shillings. It is also argued that as the selling price of 12 shillings included the wholesale price of eight shillings which had been paid, the real loss is the eight shillings and four shillings profit. Which of these solutions is correct? OUTIS (Auckland).