

Health and the Soil

A GOOD deal of our space this week is devoted to a subject on which nearly everybody has strong opinions and hardly anybody firm knowledge. We all agree that if the soil does not remain healthy we ourselves shall not, but conflict arises when we carry our questions a little further. Are we as healthy to-day as men were a hundred years ago or a thousand years ago? Are men as healthy in Australia and New Zealand as in China and Japan? Even if they are, can we go on being healthy with our present methods of treating and working the soil? If these were scientific questions only we could leave it to science to supply the answer and to politics to apply the remedy. Sooner or later, if everybody knew what was wrong, the self-interest of the many would prevail over the vested interests of the few who were robbing or poisoning or starving or otherwise ill-using us. But the soil is one of the earth's new religions. It is beginning to be as difficult to discuss it without heat as it has always been to discuss other miracles calmly—even among men of science. We could inject about three adjectives into this article that would bring the moon down on our heads. Even Sir Stanton Hicks found it easier to raise questions than to settle them when he twisted the tails of the chemists at the Congress. He made us all think, which he set out to do, but he did not say finally what he thought himself: whether the Japanese are healthier than the people of New Zealand, whether he would change our economy for theirs, whether they would use artificial fertilisers if they could get them (or ever did use them), whether they do now return to the earth everything that they take out, and whether when that is done health follows as a matter of course. He said that our way of life is wrong, largely because our way of thinking about the soil is wrong, and in support of that gave some rather picturesque facts. But the questions raised by Sir Theodore Rigg call for answers too, and he is a bold bio-chemist who would argue that nature never fails.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

THAT BIRD AGAIN

Sir,—Could you make it known in the right place, once and for all, that Dove Sono (Doe-vay So-no meaning "Where are") is not a misprint for Dove Song. Your Viewsreel Commentator cleared this mess up a year or so ago but the wretched bird has reappeared twice in a week: once with an announcer (who corrected himself) and again in your programme summary for May 23. Would not operative titles in English be more explanatory and less pretentious?

A. J. HODGKINS (Heriot)

WRESTLING BROADCASTS

Sir,—Hamish G. Hay refers to wrestling as cheap and vulgar—this is not just his opinion, but a positive fact! Just because he says so. In spite of the fact that hundreds flock to the booking office as soon as the box plan is open, he brands all these as "depraved dupes of this so-called sport." And all those people who live in the country and cannot get in to book their seats, he would deprive of listening-in, because he does not understand what sport is. Does he know that these wrestlers have to submit to a most rigorous self-discipline and strict training so that they enter the ring as perfect as the human body can be? They must be quick to think, and act, and spend years getting themselves in this condition.

Perhaps "H.G.H." prefers a sport where animals are flogged and ripped with spurs to get the best out of them, or another where a small animal is chased by a pack, urged on by pursuers till exhausted it is caught and torn to pieces. If the rising generation would only put in a fraction of the training and self-discipline these wrestlers have to give themselves, the nation would be a lot better for it, and should occasion arise there would not be so many rejects for National Service.

A. T. BAILEY (Ohakea)

Sir,—Hamish G. Hay in your May 23 issue considers that the YA stations are lowering their standards of broadcasting by the relaying of wrestling matches. Furthermore he terms the sport as nothing but hair-pulling, etc. Does the writer consider the country people or others like myself who like to listen to those broadcasts, because we are unable to witness them? I suppose he would have the condemned stations provide a classical programme or such-like or even the 9.0 p.m. news which would normally be broadcast. Broadcasting has 21 stations listed for the benefit of listeners. Could not one of these satisfy his tastes for an evening's entertainment?

A. BINNIE (Masterton).

CORRUPTION OF TASTE

Sir,—I do not agree with Vernon Brown that the subject of the article by A. R. D. Fairburn, "The Corruption of Taste," is becoming stale through repetition. In Britain, yes, but something has been done about it there. In New Zealand the patient has suffered for long without complaint. Until he complains the physician cannot diagnose or prescribe a cure. At last, with the voice of A. R. D. Fairburn, and through the medium of your journal, he has done so.

With Vernon Brown's diagnosis I agree, and with some of his cure, namely,

that a body be set up such as a Society of Industrial Arts. He does not make clear what he means by "creating a new aristocracy." In his analysis of Industrial design in Britain the aristocracy he speaks of was all that the word implies. They do not exist as such to-day and it would be impossible to create one in New Zealand. The recent reforms which have taken place in Britain are on an industrial basis, catering for the middle and lower classes. Precisely as Vernon Brown says, we are the same middle and lower class here. I gather that he means an aristocracy of taste which would form the homes of an Industrial Society of Arts (I would include the tradesman of taste who is all too often dispirited at turning out shoddy for the "boss" without taste), holding exhibitions showing us that better designed houses and furniture are possible. To do this we must be made design-conscious in the same way as we seem to be becoming music-conscious. Only then will a Society of Industrial Arts have the necessary foundation to build on and function without succumbing after a brief career.

Some authoritative body such as, may I suggest, the NZBS, could, if it would, help Industrial Art in New Zealand.

MAY SMITH (Gisborne).

PLAYS AND PLACES

Sir,—Will you tell me why it is that Greymouth is the favoured place when plays are being allotted? We are not musical folk, but always enjoy plays and serials, especially now that the evenings are longer; but again and again find several from Greymouth while the stations we can hear have none. If you look through your past programmes you will find that Greymouth has more than a liberal supply. Hoping for more generosity to other stations.

"PLAY-FAN" (Hastings).

(If our correspondent will look through the programmes of Greymouth and Napier again, he will find that in a week both stations present almost the same number of serials and plays. As compared with the four main stations both 2YH and 3ZR, in fact, schedule many more serials.—Ed.).

SATURDAY AFTERNOON PROGRAMMES

Sir,—While agreeing with Enid M. Smith that Saturday afternoon programmes should be on a fifty-fifty basis of classical and modern music, I would hesitate before criticising the other fellow's taste, and be a little tolerant. Recognising that both classical and modern music give pleasure to large percentages of the population, I feel that my above remarks would be a satisfactory solution, and not savour of criticism.

TOLERANT (Auckland).

NEW ZEALAND AND U.S.A.

Sir,—I wish to reply to a letter published in a recent *Listener* signed "Putiti." "Putiti" talks about "Yankee pot hunters telling us their ideas and wishing us from their empty brains, good luck, etc." Does "Putiti" realise that those Yankees with "empty brains" invented the electric light, the phonograph, the atomic bomb, and many more of the world's most famous inventions? If a child happens to swallow a nail or a screw, where does he have to go? To the country with the "empty brains." It seems to me that "Putiti's" argument is

based on ignorance, and that he should not talk about empty brains.

He also says the Americans "have definite ideas of their importance in the world to-day." I would appreciate his telling me who he thinks is more important. There is a definite threat to the world nowadays, and it is America alone who can stand against it. Also America is now ready to lift the world from its present state of chaos by loans and food exports. People now say that had it not been for England fighting the Battle for Britain, America would not be free to-day. I agree in part with that; but now America is on top and England owes its present existence to the United States of America. Why are we so unwilling to admit this?

"PRO U.S.A." (Greymouth).

VIEWSREEL COMMENT

Sir,—I had not, when I rushed into print, guessed at the hell your commentator inhabits. Having now glimpsed it—his everlasting search amid the welter of programmes for some little thing to say before the week is out and his grinding endeavour to cut down that little to reasonable proportions—I am filled with remorse and am busily counting my blessings.

DERMOT CATHIE
(Palmerston North).

THE OLDEST BOOKS IN NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—May I be permitted to use your columns to seek assistance in an investigation I am making? With the help of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, I am hunting up the oldest books in New Zealand. My chief concern is with books actually made by hand before 1500 A.D. I have already been in touch with a number of libraries and private institutions, and some private owners. If there are any of your readers who know of the existence in New Zealand of any such manuscript books, besides those in the biggest libraries, would they be so kind as to inform me of them?

As regards printed books, only those printed before 1480 A.D. come within the scope of my project.

DAVID M. TAYLOR (The Vicarage,
Hinds, Mid-Canterbury).

NOT WITHOUT ITS FAULTS

Sir,—I have been a regular reader and admirer of your paper since its first number, and I often say that *The Listener* is the best threepennyworth printed in New Zealand. One feature in particular delights me. That is the "Letters from Listeners." I like the way they wield their pens. The controversy over the article "Don't Learn the Piano Till You're 21" was a good example. None of the writers make any bones about their ideas. I believe that is a healthy sign.

Another thing I enjoy is the variety of topics. One finds something in each issue that appeals, something novel, arresting, humorous, or even touching. Your commentators are worth reading, but I think one or two of them are dogmatic and just a bit conceited.

Your paper is of course not without its faults, but so long as it maintains its present standard and improves with age, I shall gladly pay my little coin each week.

JOHN R. BEST (Wellington).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

R. Spence (Wellington): The concert to which you refer was not under the management of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service.