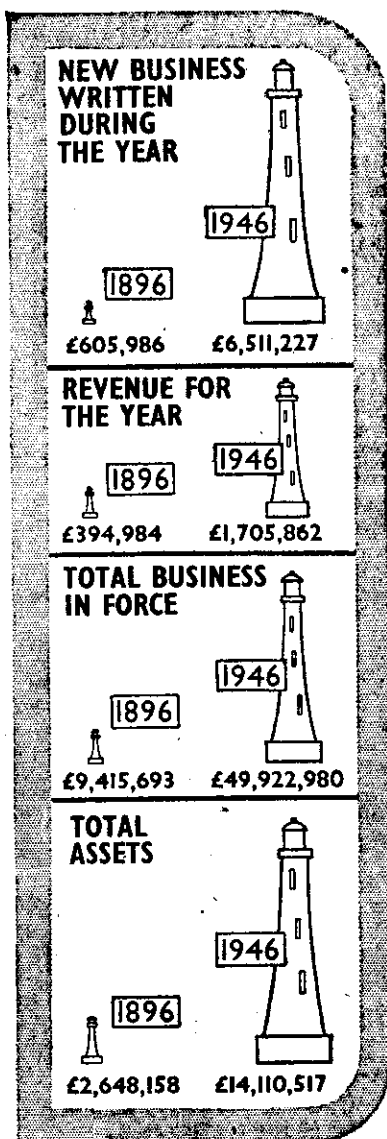


# Progress OF GOVERNMENT LIFE INSURANCE OFFICE

The Government Life Insurance Office has "grown up" with New Zealand. Since its inception in 1869, the Office has expanded steadily, year by year, until today, with assets of over £14,000,000, it ranks as one of the great Life Assurance Offices of the Empire. Its fitting symbol—a lighthouse—is used here to illustrate graphically the remarkable growth of the Office in the last 50 years. Each year the profits are allotted on the mutual principle and despite the adverse circumstances of the last few years the rate of bonus has been maintained.



Certificates showing the distribution of the surplus for 1946 are now in the hands of policyholders.



## Letters from Listeners

### Craftsmanship and Common People

To the Editor,—

SIR,—It is in keeping with the existent confusion over questions of aesthetics that in reports on the visiting exhibition of rural handicrafts from Great Britain the press has attributed to the simple English, Scottish, and Irish craftsmen such complete command of the art of functional design, and such profound artistic judgment and ingenuity as I am sure could only be accounted for by a practice of some form of black magic. In *The Listener* we read that "the curves and proportions of every article are such that they must have been designed by artisans who were also artists." Then further along *The Listener's* review goes on to say that "the whole exhibition indicates that the artistic faculty is not found only in a few select persons. The makers of these implements are ordinary men and women whose art is as spontaneous and natural as the craftsmanship with which they serve the community."

Statements like these about work of this nature are misleading, to say the least. Besides giving the false impression that the craftsmen responsible for making these very excellent things are also the originators of the form of the articles, they completely ignore the whole most important lengthy process of evolution from the often crude beginning-idea through to perfection by gradual improvement extended over many generations of practical use that is the basis and the strength of all traditional designs.

With a little thought it becomes obvious that it is precisely this long process of refinement—this long apprenticeship—that accounts for the perfection of traditional forms, and that in the majority of cases even the most skilled rural craftsman is following patterns that have been gradually evolved and improved as they have been handed down from one generation to another. These forms are right, not because they have been designed by particularly clever people, but because they have achieved functional perfection. And it is because they are right in this way that they are good to look at.

It is no disparagement to the craftsmanship of these men and women to point out that they are not necessarily the original designers of the things they make. To follow sympathetically the traditional form a craftsman needs to be an artist of specially developed sensitivity. Traditional forms are not rigid, and even when they have reached a high degree of perfection they still permit of personal and local variations. The personal touch of individual craftsmen and various regional characteristics can always be seen in work of a similar nature from separate districts.

And the people doing this type of work can hardly be classed as the ordinary run of English, Scottish, and Irish people. Here writers have followed without due reflection Massingham's preface to the exhibition catalogue. The artistic faculty might, as Massingham states, be "in widest commonalty spread," but it is not, unfortunately, as widely cultivated. The craftsman has

developed certain of his artistic faculties to a high degree; and also it must be taken into account that he probably had a pronounced bent or inherited talent in the first place for the particular craft he has mastered. These craftsmen are specialists, nothing less. The local insurance agent cannot be expected to make competently a functionally beautiful scythe, weave a graceful basket or a good and handsome piece of cloth, or model a special shoe for a horse. Neither can we expect such skill from the average barmaid, clergyman, storekeeper, farm hand or retired stockbroker.

The truth is that the craftsmen form a minor and quite distinct section of rural society. Apart from their special skill, their pride in and love of their work and the integrity of their approach gives them an outlook vastly different from the average run of people to-day. Inevitably their numbers have decreased with the spread of cheaper mass production methods of making the things of every-day use. This is regrettable, but the really lamentable part is that the spirit they represent has in the main been completely lost by the highly mechanised manufacturers who are taking the handicraftsmen's place in modern society. In the days when everything had to be made by hand most men must have taken pleasure as well as a pride in their handiwork and it is the fact that this is far from the case in many of the mass production factories of to-day that has a lot to do with the shoddiness that is everywhere around us.

ERIC LEE JOHNSON  
(Auckland).

### TWO SIDES TO A CURTAIN

Sir,—Your correspondent "Consider Both Sides" makes no attempt to live up to his pen-name. Mr. Taylor did not picture Britain as a monster of iniquity; he adopted a very sane and fair attitude in dealing with British-Soviet relations and pointed out the faults of both nations. He did not mention the "control" of the Straits; he said: "We refuse to allow Russia at the Straits the security which we have at Gibraltar and the Suez Canal." I have a copy of the *Listener* article and have quoted correctly. It is a pity that your correspondent did not do likewise.

"Consider Both Sides" is inconsistent—in one paragraph he is the champion of Italy, Austria and Hungary, all of whom fought against us in the last war, and in the next paragraph he would deny Bulgaria an outlet to the Aegean because she fought against us in that same war. I should like to know where your correspondent got the information that Poland is planning to spend nearly three times as much on her secret police as on agriculture. Those figures would bear checking.

Russia did not steal Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania and a large part of Poland. In 1940 the three Baltic republics were governed by semi-Fascist groups. The governments of Esthonia and Latvia, in particular, were backed by German

(continued on next page)

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, JULY 4



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