

JULY 11, 1947.

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## Floods

FROM time immemorial floods have been among the earth's recurring calamities, taking about the same place in history as famines. But in this matter, as in so many others, New Zealand lies out of the stream of history, having no famines and few floods calamitous enough to be remembered long. Our rivers do, of course, often overflow their banks, but they don't often cause such misery as the Wairarapa endured last week, and because they don't it is difficult for those in other districts to realise what the situation was. In fact, it was just about as miserable a situation as men and women can endure and still remain healthy and sane; and sympathy alone will not compensate them. But sympathy will go a long way with them if it is based on understanding. It will not bring back their drowned sheep and cattle or restore their fences and food supplies. But it will restore their mental and moral circulation, steady their nerves, and keep their faith in farming from giving way under these recurring shocks. For farming will always be a life of adventure. It will never be stable season by season or safe from harvest to harvest. It will be safer than it is when science and forethought combine to cushion if they can't forestall earth's periodic calamities. But it will always happen at intervals that nature will defeat our plans, and even use them to our own confusion — as the flood last week used most of the stop-banks. Every intelligent farmer knows that a mine lies concealed in every gully and a booby-trap in every bush and tree, since the war with nature goes on for ever. Though it is a war in which he is always a volunteer, he must not be forgotten when reverses come or left to dress his own wounds. The Wairarapa calls to-day for practical and speedy help. But it calls also for that understanding of the country's continuing risks without which all the sympathy of the town is children's talk that means nothing.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, JULY 11

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Sir,—Your contributor Elizabeth Ann Miles writes an amusing article on the controversial subject of school uniform. I would like to point out a few of the misconceptions under which she labours.

- (1) Girls' school uniforms normally do let the sun "get at some part of the bare skin other than the face." In summer most schools allow short sleeves and ankle socks, and in many the girls remove their tunics for physical training.
- (2) Black stockings are not worn in winter by all schools. Many wear fawn.
- (3) Stiff starched collars are rare if not unknown.
- (4) Speaking to boys in the street is not generally forbidden. How can it be, when so many secondary schools, particularly in the smaller centres, are mixed ones?

UNA DROMGOOLE

(Christchurch).

Sir,—Elizabeth Ann Miles's article "School Uniform and Other Things" published in a recent issue of *The Listener* had, I think, many points quite untrue of many schools. The girls attending our school, for instance, are not compelled to wear black stockings or gloves, and they consider it a privilege to be able to wear the school uniform. I think having a school uniform gives a spirit of belonging, besides looking much smarter. I think wearing lipstick and rouge with a school uniform is ridiculous. If the girls want to look older than they really are there is plenty of time for that in week-ends or holidays. Mrs. Miles also says girls are not allowed to converse with boys in the street. There are few schools where this is forbidden.

SCHOOLGIRL (Leeston).

Sir,—I think that in her article "School Uniform and Other Things," Elizabeth Ann Miles is very unjust. Why is it that she criticises New Zealand schools in general when many of our schools have none of the rules she thinks should be done away with? For instance she thinks that girls look and feel uncomfortable in long black stockings, hats, gloves, and stiff collars, which she says are compulsory at High Schools. At the school I attend these articles of clothing are not compulsory but may be worn if desired. We like our uniform, and I think that girls without one often look scraggy. Mrs. Miles also states that she thinks the rules that stop girls and boys speaking to one another are absurd. Such a rule is unheard of in many schools, and so why are we all blamed for it? Your correspondent writes about girls in Canada using lipstick and rouge. If the poor dears want to grow up before their time, let them; but New Zealand schoolgirls don't want to seem too old too soon. In any case we have plenty of time to use make-up on Saturdays and Sundays.

Fifteen to twenty pounds is the amount mentioned by Miss Miles as necessary to buy our school uniforms. I think that it would cost no less to buy ordinary clothes, and so I don't see why she should make so much fuss about this matter.

"FOURTH FORMER" (Southbridge High School).

Sir,—In a recent issue of your paper you published a letter written by Elizabeth Ann Miles discussing School Uni-

form and other things. In reply I would like to say that children in New Zealand are very satisfied to wear school uniform. The amount you would have to pay for material to make frocks would amount to the cost of a school uniform, and in the depression the schools did not compel the children to wear school uniform. In my opinion the children look more like school children in uniform, and much tidier and neater. They do not have to suffer with stiff "Peter Pan" collars. In summer there is a summer uniform and in the winter they have the thick uniform. I am quite sure Elizabeth Ann Miles has the wrong idea about many schools.

Using lipstick and rouge in the American schools is very stupid. Do the girls do their work any better; do they look like school children at the age of nine or ten? The American children grow up too quickly for their age. And in how many schools out here has your correspondent seen where girls have their hair cut one inch above their collars; or plaits tied with navy and black ribbon? Most pupils find it the most convenient way to carry their school books in a bag on their shoulder. This is allowed because of the long distances some pupils have to come. The books are kept in very good condition whether they are in a suitcase or in a bag carried on the shoulder.

HEATHER GOSS (Southbridge).

Sir,—While L. Armstrong, in criticising my article, writes that there are "good and useful reasons for school uniforms" she fails to give us any indication as to what these reasons may be. Your correspondent has evidently misread my article. May I assure her that far from being "completely lawless," Canadian girls, on the whole, have minds that are singularly healthy and mature, partly, I believe, because a reasonable portion of their discipline comes from within rather than from without.

Regarding the anarchy that L. Armstrong seems to see in my proposals, what I suggested was, that our girls would benefit from being allowed to wear their own or their parents' choice in school clothing, or as an alternative, that a uniform be devised which was less restrictive, healthier and more attractive. Is this anarchy?

The criticism of my article by "Sixth Former" was, I think, more sound perhaps because, unwittingly, Sixth Former proves some of my contentions and has sound observations to make on some others. She says, for instance, that the school uniform is unserviceable, difficult to keep clean, and hard to press. Its only virtue is, apparently, that it is one example of unpleasant things that will have to be borne in later life. Surely the theory that a uniform is good which has nothing to recommend it except that it constitutes a kind of "hair shirt" for the chastening of the spirit in preparation for greater evils, constitutes an unfortunate philosophy.

Regarding the use of jewellery and cosmetics, I had no intention of suggesting that this was tolerated in Canadian schools. What I said was that the principles and teachers in Canadian Secondary schools tried to stop the girls using them but never quite succeeded.

I agree with "Sixth Former" that there is a tendency for the better-dressed girl to be more popular, but when the girls are all dressed alike the focus is merely shifted from the best-dressed girl to the girl with most pocket money, or the girl

with the most socially prominent parents. This is a sad commentary on our social system.

Again, in making the observation that the girls who are "silliest" about boys are those who have no brothers, "Sixth Former" is proving my point that girls who are denied normal, everyday association with the opposite sex endow that sex with a mystery and glamour which result in unnatural and undesirable behaviour.

(MRS.) ELIZABETH MILES

(Auckland).

(We have no more space for letters on this subject.—Ed.)

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

## FRENCH FILMS

Sir,—I read with pleasure the appreciative commentaries of your film critic on French pictures, which reach this country in too small numbers and too late. Having enjoyed the whole gamut in pre-war Europe and getting enthusiastic reports of new films almost every week, makes me realise that French pictures are gaining ground in many countries in spite of the financial stranglehold of American film magnates on the European market. It may be of interest to know that these first-rate pictures were, and still are, produced by near-bankrupt and tottering companies. The heroic battle of French genius is familiar to us from the history of her reactionary painters, but I don't think that it is generally realised that a similar battle is being fought for cinematographic art. With the New Zealand public lies the choice and the opportunity to inherit the astounding wealth of French culture.

It may be patriotic to promote a preference for British pictures, but why take the second-hand article when British art leans so heavily on French genius? The pathetic efforts of American and British producers to lacquer their wares with a French shine should become evident to anyone who has had the opportunity to see a representative range of contemporary French pictures. It is given to the French to produce such lasting masterpieces in such a delightful, matter-of-fact way, for theirs is a real culture, vital and alive.

"DUTCHMAN" (Duntroon).

## AS YOU WERE?

Sir,—I was interested and rather astonished to read Dr. Muriel Bell's article "About Turn" in your issue of May 23, stressing the importance of animal protein, especially meat in the diet during pregnancy. My family of four have never had any meat, before or after birth. They were all excellent babies; they all gained weight much above average without any setbacks; as children they are now all much above average in size and weight. None of them has had a serious illness.

In view of this experience over a period of 13 years, I would like to tell Dr. Bell, or any other doctor who feels inclined to "about turn," that whether or not meat is actually harmful, it is at least entirely unnecessary in the diet of an expectant mother, and to express the emphatic opinion that the advice given in the article, stressing generally the importance of animal protein and particularly meat, is wrong advice. If she should by any chance wish to verify the statements in this letter my wife and I would be glad to have her do so.

"X" (Hillgrove).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS  
P.F.F. (Taumarunui): No arrangements have yet been made.