

AUGUST 1, 1947.

Soldiers and Civilians

IT was useful to be reminded by Lord Montgomery that soldiers serve and don't rule. Put in another way it is the doctrine that power, where there is self-government, rests in all citizens, and not in any section of them. Soldiers obey the government because the government speaks for the whole community, including the soldiers. That is democracy and the alternative to it is tyranny. But one of the consequences often is that soldiers are called on to defend civilians with inadequate or unsuitable material. It happened to Lord Montgomery in the recent war and to Lord Haig a generation earlier, and has in fact hardly ever happened otherwise in the wars of democracy anywhere. Men will not live hard lives as long as it is possible to live soft lives, and democracy, if it does not directly advocate softness, seldom forbids it until calamity comes. So men like Lord Montgomery spend anxious hours wondering if we are going to do again what has so often all but destroyed us. He does not ask for bigger armies or bigger guns or bigger external bundles of any kind than we can comfortably carry. He asks for better internal preparation — more self-control, self-sacrifice, and loyalty. It is a request that every soldier is entitled to make to every government; as he is entitled to demand good shells and not duds. But it is the autocracies and not the democracies, totalitarian governments and not free communities, that find it easiest to meet this demand. So far democracy has rallied in time to save itself, but it is lunacy to assume that this must always happen, and that a free man without faith will always beat a crazed man driven on by fanaticism. The only defence against discipline in a bad cause is discipline in a better cause, and that is another way of saying that if democracy is to survive it must not merely recapture its faith, but live it. Character without a faith or a cause is a lever without a fulcrum.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

SOIL AND HEALTH

Sir,—Sir Stanton Hicks made it perfectly clear that he was not condemning outright the use of artificial fertilisers. He specifically referred to superphosphate, and he said that it was obvious that in New Zealand and Australia, in which the soils are apparently deficient in phosphates, it may be essential to continue to import phosphates if we are to maintain productivity. But he emphasised the stupidity of our present policy whereby we import at great cost phosphates from abroad, and then export a very large percentage of the same phosphates in the form of primary produce, and at the same time, deliberately destroy the residues of what is consumed by the local population, by burning in incinerators or pouring through sewers into the sea. Sir Stanton argued that, if for no other reason than an economic saving, we should conserve all our organic residues and ensure that they be returned to the soil in the form of organic fertilisers. At no time did he suggest that we should not import and use phosphatic fertilisers, but he did condemn our present practice of wasting the residues derived from the local population.

The fact that Sir Theodore Rigg in his article has again accused Sir Stanton of something which he never said strikes me as being grossly unfair. At the conclusion of Sir Stanton's address to the Royal Society, Sir Theodore made the same statement as that contained in his article, and Sir Stanton Hicks explicitly and specifically repudiated Sir Theodore's misconstruction of his statement. Yet Sir Theodore Rigg has resurrected this argument.

Sir Theodore Rigg's concluding statement that "the use of phosphatic fertilisers in China would increase production by at least 25 per cent." may be quite correct if he had added "for a few years." I think it is obvious that the addition of artificial stimulants to the overworked soil of China would temporarily stimulate production, just as a drink of whisky will stimulate a fatigued man. But this would only complete the exhaustion of the fertility of the soil, and within a few years, in all probability, the humus would be completely burned out, and then the Chinese would be in a worse position than ever.

Sir Theodore's comparison of the death-rate in China and New Zealand does not necessarily redound to the credit of the health of the people of New Zealand. According to the report of the Secretary of CORSO, there are only about 20 doctors to every 1,600,000 Chinese, as compared with approximately 2,088 for the same size of population in New Zealand. When we realise the terrific over-population in China, the fearfully insanitary conditions, extreme poverty of the vast majority, and almost complete lack of hospital and medical facilities, we realise the fact that the Chinese people must have enormous resistance to sicknesses and diseases which would probably have disastrous results to the people of New Zealand. This resistance must have some relationship to their agricultural practices and the quality of the food grown thereby.

Sir Stanton pleaded for a broad outlook on the whole question of "Soil

Food and Health": Sir Theodore Rigg has attempted to reduce it to a matter of chemical fractions, representing the average scientist's very limited and specialised viewpoint. He has completely disregarded the biological and biochemical aspects of the question. I wonder if Sir Theodore Rigg would seriously suggest that, ultimately, plants, livestock and human beings could live on the contents of the bottles on the chemists' shelves?

D. M. ROBINSON (Auckland).

BRITAIN IN INDIA

Sir,—In your recent admirable leader on India you quoted an Australian professor as saying that "the governance of India has been the most glorious thing in British history," and you remarked that perhaps he was "being deliberately provocative." Perhaps he was, but it is quite likely he meant just what he said. There is a case for this opinion. Carlyle was scornful of the idea of comparing the British records in India with Shakespeare as a British glory. Carlyle has been dead a long time, and much has happened in India since his day. But a generation after Carlyle, that accomplished and lovable Liberal essayist and critic, the late Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, made a similar comparison.

Whether England could better afford to lose Shakespeare or her Indian Empire is no fair question to put to an Englishman. But every Englishman knows in his heart which of these two glories of his birth and state will survive the other, and by which of them his country will earn in the end the greater honour. Though in our daily life we—perhaps wisely—make a practice of forgetting it, our literature is going to be our most perdurable claim on man's remembrance, for it is occupied with ideas which outlast all phenomena.

This is well said, but I suggest, it might be challenged, or seen in another light. True, the question framed in the first sentence would not have been a fair one. The appeal of Shakespeare is personal; that of the Indian Empire is not. One may admire a beautiful woman and the British Constitution. One can fall in love with the woman, but not with a system of government. Yet a system of government is of much greater moment. Quiller-Couch was very familiar with a parallel in history that might be used against him. He would have agreed that conduct is three parts of life, and that since government is conducted in action, it is more important than art. In those essays of his, which delight one as much as ever, he has something to say about the influence of Horace and Virgil in English literature. This has been deep and lasting. Virgil, indeed, seems to have exercised more influence on the culture of subsequent ages than any other writer of antiquity. But would Quiller-Couch have agreed that the modern world spends more time on the study of Virgil and Horace than on the study of Roman government (including the Empire), Roman Law, and Roman character? Every classical scholar reads Virgil. Every lawyer (so I understand) reads Roman law.

So the question may be put, will Roman literature outlive Roman institutions in the world's mind? The western world, of which New Zealand is a part, is what it is to-day much more by reason of Roman character, concepts of law, and dominion, than by reason of Virgil having been a great poet. So, it is highly probable that centuries hence men and women will be invited

to judge Britain's record not only by Shakespeare, Milton, and Dickens, but by British genius for government, at home and abroad, including India. I am pretty well aware of the darker side of the Indian story, and the case for self-government, and I have strong views on some aspects of British rule, but I believe history will pronounce what the British have done in India to be, on the balance, among their greatest achievements. Meanwhile what is happening in India to-day is giving world opinion a sight of the truth. Quiller-Couch says literature is "occupied with ideas that outlast all phenomena." But may not the same be said of politics? What of the idea of freedom? Is it not common to both? And has not this idea of freedom run like a theme through the history of the British in India and elsewhere?

A.M. (Wellington).

MUSIC BY NEW ZEALANDERS

Sir,—Perhaps the New Zealand public is not aware that within this Dominion we have several composers whose work is now finding a market in America. Having listened to various sessions on the Commercial stations, I would think that, instead of a quarter-of-an-hour of American melodies on the piano which is now featured twice a week, there might well be a quarter-of-an-hour of New Zealand melodies by New Zealand composers.

There is only one way for any songwriter or composer to have his work known universally to the public, that is by recordings and by broadcasts. Instead of filling Commercial broadcasts with American "jive" let the people of this Dominion hear nice melodies written by New Zealanders. I am fully aware that several New Zealand broadcasting studios do already feature New Zealand compositions, but not as a regular item of a weekly or monthly programme. "INTERESTED"

(Wellington).

APPRECIATION

Sir,—I am writing in appreciation of "The Piper" broadcast on Sunday, July 13, from 4YA. It was very well written and a happy choice on the part of the NZBS.

Congratulations to the players whose acting was without fault, and above all to the author himself.

J.E.J. (Dunedin).

TOO MUCH KILLING

Sir,—The excellent article in your issue of July 4 does not require the question mark. Every word of it is only too true. I have been told that a New Zealander reaches for his axe whenever he sees a tree, and as for fishing—well, I am an enthusiastic enough fisherman, but am frequently filled with disgust at the lust for killing which seems to obtain among many of the self-styled sportsmen in this country. They do not seem content to fish patiently, making a pleasant pastime of it, but must needs grab all they can get, as fast as they can manage it. Most of them seem to go in for duck shooting in its season, and there, too, their passion for killing is apparent and sickening. They positively gloat over the number of birds they have taken, and some even say they have fed the ducks before the season began, so that the poor birds are tame and plentiful. Such "sportsmen" are disgusting and cruel in their greed, and the sooner there is legislation to protect our wild life from this sort of slaughter, the better.

"MODERATION" (Christchurch).