

AUGUST 8, 1947.

More People

It was both good news and bad when the Minister of Rehabilitation told us last week that there were far more people in Britain ready to migrate to New Zealand than the available shipping can carry. It is good news that New Zealand still attracts the people of Britain and that our population, when immigration does begin to flow again, will be enriched by the people to whom in all the world we already owe most. But it is not good news that so many of the people of Britain have decided that they must get out to get on. A few thousands are of course not many out of 40 millions, but it is a depressing thought that Britain is now regarded as overpopulated and that stability, when it comes again, will probably be at a point appreciably below 40 millions. Nor should we delude ourselves into thinking that every displaced Briton will come to rest in a British Dominion. A majority will, but many will not, and we deceive ourselves in New Zealand if we think that they would all come here if there were ships available to bring them here. Most of us, when we talk about immigration, talk without knowledge. We don't know, and we don't seriously try to find out, whether we could absorb five thousand or fifty thousand people a year (even if we had no housing crisis). The matter is discussed at considerable length, but with scientific restraint, in the latest issue of the *New Zealand Geographer*, and the conclusion of the investigator, G. N. Calvert, is that New Zealand could not "without disruption and unbalance," add more than about 2 per cent. per annum to its population for the next two generations, and that to achieve this increase, or something like it, "we should need both to maintain our birth rate at the highest levels in the recent years of war and demobilisation, and also to admit immigrants at a rate of something over 10,000 per annum." Mr. Calvert does not expect us to move quite as fast as that, but even if we do it will take us 10 years to reach two millions, 20 years to reach 2½ millions, and between 40 and 50 years to get near four millions.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

SPOKEN ENGLISH

Sir,—My note on Mr. Fairburn's articles was written too soon; my answer to his letter may come too late. I should, however, like to add a coda to this business of Southern English. Tricks of speech like table manners or clothes may undoubtedly be classed under the heading of group-behaviour and may have originated in the adoption of distinctive group-habits. But to me, at least, Mr. Fairburn suggested that individuals in the class in question consciously, deliberately or snobbishly affect certain turns of speech with the considered intention of distinguishing themselves from the "lower orders." As for the elided "R," my note was directed specifically at the substitution of W for R and did not extend to the admittedly general practice of neglecting to sound the R altogether. I stand to my point though Providence has provided Mr. Fairburn with a Field Marshal. The Field Marshal in this, as in other matters, is exceptional.

NGAIO MARSH
(Christchurch).

Sir,—I have thoroughly enjoyed Mr. Fairburn's articles on Spoken English and Miss Marsh's contribution too. They prompt me to try and make several small points.

(a) The Standard English Mr. Fairburn likes is undoubtedly the stage speech which post Great War actors strove to attain. It was mostly a process of ruthless pruning. It was the boast of a good actor that one could not "place" him, i.e., detect locality, school or university, in his voice. For instance, how many would recognise the background of Lancashire in Donat or Yorkshire in Mason.

(b) The ear develops sensitivity if one is interested in speech, but also, paradoxically enough, the voice becomes far from immune to environment and becomes positively allergic to local accent. Your correspondent R. G. B. Lawson unwittingly illustrates this. Alister Cooke comes from Manchester. At Cambridge he acted and modelled himself on Shaw's Higgins (Pygmalion) till he could "place" the voice of any of his fellows with amazing accuracy. Rid of a slight Lancashire accent he spoke standard English. Now some years later he is accepted as being unmistakably American. I too once purged the Yorkshire from my voice and spoke tolerable standard English, only to hear myself the other day in a recorded broadcast telling the children to "Gow" (as in cow).

(c) I can, I think, detect an Otago voice sometimes, but otherwise no local flavour here. This idea is borne out by the remarkably uniform accent and intonation of the wartime broadcasts of thousands of New Zealand voices in *With the Boys Overseas*. And yet I have a Swedish friend who is an expert, complete with recordings, in the various dialects of Suffolk, a rural area about the size of Taranaki. He can place people village by village. The BBC however is wreaking its havoc on many of the local dialects. I have heard school children in Norfolk correct themselves, abandoning rather pleasant local sounds for far from standard BBC ones.

(d) I think New Zealanders just do not mind about voices—they just accept them. We have many who can

mimic excellently so we cannot be deaf. There is perhaps some "inverted snobbery" which dislikes careful speech, but it is unconscious and whether it matters is not for me to say. Those who do not enjoy the spoken word miss a possible pleasure. Of course the Maori knows this pleasure and can speak the imported tongue with more taste and accuracy than most of the importers.

PHILIP A. SMITHELLS
(Wellington).

Sir,—I would like to pay my tribute of thanks to both Ngaio Marsh and Mr. Fairburn for their articles on Speech Habits and Social Attitudes. I have greatly enjoyed them, and I hope, learned much—at least to be aware of my speaking.

In this busy life we need to be sharpened by talks and articles of this description. "BETTER SPEAKING"
(Wellington).

STUDENT REVELS

Sir,—I fear Mr. de la Mare is a prize example of those "dignitaries of society" to which my article alludes. "Off the Chain" was intended to be a survey and apologia for student extravaganza, everywhere, and in New Zealand in particular. If I recall, it did not mention either Victoria University College, or *Cappicade*. Mr. de la Mare however has used the occasion to embark upon his annual public philippic against his own college, and one can do nothing but deplore his taste. However, since Mr. de la Mare's sole contact with extravaganza, 1947, appears to have been the perusal of one *Capping Magazine*, might not one ask whether this is sufficient to substantiate the innuendo implicit in his letter?

In conclusion I would point out that two wars have materially changed the world's outlook since Mr. de la Mare compounded his *fin de siècle* brew of "humour and high spirits" and that the type of concoction produced then, if placed before the public now, might not result in the £700 contribution to the Building Fund, which, I understand, will be made possible by public support for the last Extravaganza in Wellington.

DORIAN SAKER (Wellington).

THE DRAGON OF WANTLEY

Sir,—In response to the enquiry by your correspondent "Vincent County," I found this information in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. The name "Wantley" is a corrupted version of Wharnccliffe lodge, which lies a mile or so from the village of Wortley, near Rotherham, in Yorkshire. The ballad is supposed to relate allegorically a lawsuit concerning titles for church land between one of the Wortley family and the parishioners of the church. That later writers should use the name is in no way surprising, but Surtees' spelling is correct. A. S. RAE (Christchurch).

We have to thank other correspondents for supplying similar information.

FEAR OF THE Highbrow?

Sir,—It is now some two months since the French film *La Kermesse Heroique* was reviewed in *The Listener*, but since its Auckland screening has just been held it is still in the news here, and one of the points under discussion

is why it ran only a week. From the theatre management's point of view the answer is obviously that the size of the audiences attending it did not warrant a longer season, but the query still exists as to why those audiences were not bigger, especially when it is considered that it ran for six months to packed houses in London. The film seemed to me to be quite well advertised, and although Aucklanders may have forgotten G.M.'s praise in *The Listener* by the time the picture was screened in Auckland, one of the local papers gave it a good review when it appeared here. Furthermore, all those I personally know who saw the film—and they were people of varied film tastes—spoke in the highest terms of it, so that it would not be unreasonable to presume that word-of-mouth advertising of the film was favourable. It might be thought that the fact that a number of worthwhile films have been screening here recently—*Great Expectations*, for instance, opened at the same time as *La Kermesse Heroique*, attracted attention elsewhere, but this argument holds no water, as some mediocre films have also been screening here and to better houses than in the case of *La Kermesse Heroique*. Therefore one is left with the conclusion that the public were frightened away from the French film, either because the dialogue was in French, or because they considered that, being foreign, it would be beyond their enjoyment—"too high-brow," in other words. Of course nothing could be further from the truth. I do not pretend to be a so-called high-brow, nor do I pretend to fully appreciate the finer points of motion picture art, yet I, and many others like me, thoroughly enjoyed this film as one of the most delightful comedies ever seen. Therefore I find this lack of interest in this film, not necessarily a thing to be deplored as an indication of poor taste on the part of Auckland film-goers—I leave the deploring to those better qualified to speak on films—but as an intriguing sidelight on human behaviour. It would be interesting to know how long *La Kermesse Heroique* ran in other centres, and if for only a short time, what reasons can be put forward for this.

A.M. (Auckland).

GOING OFF THE AIR

Sir,—May I make a suggestion regarding the cuts made in the hours of broadcasting, due to the shortage of electricity at the moment?

When broadcasting from the family radio ceases, with a cut, it very often happens that no member of the family notices it—even if there are several members in the room. If a particular stirring record were played each time the station went off the air, listeners' attention would be drawn to the radio, and surely the turning off of radios would be prompter and more regular. As it is, the radio simply ceases; the sound merely gradually dies away in an inconspicuous manner. Naturally the same tune would have to be played from every station, at least within each town.

POTENTIAL PATRIOT
(Wellington).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

M. Fitzroy (Havelock North): Request referred to Station 2YH.

"Otaki": The item is sung by Anni Frind (principal) and the chorus of the Grossen Schauspielhaus, Berlin.