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Friends of Britain

WE don't know as we write what the British Government proposes to do to meet the thickening crisis, and we are not going to guess. We do know that these are Britain's darkest days since 1942, and that only her enemies think it permissible to do nothing. The question is, Who are her enemies? If they are men and women of other nations this is not the time to talk about them. Britain has foreign enemies for good reasons and foreign enemies for bad reasons, and neither one group nor the other can be asked for sympathy now. But in Britain itself, and throughout the whole British Commonwealth, everyone is an enemy this week who is not a friend. We are enemies when we eat too much, waste too much, do too much idling, arguing, criticising, or complaining. The most hostile act of all is to say or suggest or encourage others to say or suggest that all this trouble could have been avoided under a different government, that Britain is short of dollars and of food, of labour and of capital equipment, because her people voted one party out and another in at the last election. The search for scapegoats is one of the oldest, shabbiest, and shadiest tricks in history, and no political party has ever kept quite free of it. Mr. Churchill's Blenheim Palace speech, for example, will one day seem as disgraceful to his supporters as the mud slinging of ingrates seems already to his worthier opponents. But that offence too is a symptom. It means that there is tension in the big houses of Britain as well as in the smallest, that no one is comfortable or at peace, that tempers are wearing thin, and that whoever adds to the burden and the strain is a criminal if he is British and does it deliberately.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

SPOKEN ENGLISH

Sir,—I suggest that A. R. D. Fairburn's recent quotation from Gerald Bullett's letter in the English *Listener* still does not prove that "rewrite" is "we-wite" in Southern England.

Among the examples given, surely "ah troops opened fah" and "restawing" should be pronounced "ah tweeks opened fah" and "westawing" according to Fairburn's fantastic theory. In any case "The great majority of expensively-educated Southern Englishers" of Gerald Bullett's acquaintance do not constitute the "Southern Englishmen in general" referred to in Fairburn's article.

I would like to add that if any type in my Surrey village of Haslemere was heard bleating the refrain "A'round the wugged wocks the wagged wascals wan" he would be regarded with suspicion. Sir, better men have been drummed-out for less.

NICHOLAS BARWELL (Wellington).

Sir,—In *The Listener* for July 25 Mr. Fairburn says, "Any English-speaking Scotsman or Irishman speaks infinitely better English than the great majority of expensively-educated southern Englishers." That is corroborated by Y.Y. in the Stevenson Bookman (1913), page 13: "So long as Lowland Scotch survives . . . a Scots student will seek

in England with a special contingent, and he and other colonial officers were guests of officers of the Guards at Lord's. Bauchop was so pleased with the agreeable conversational speech of his hosts among themselves, that he asked one of his fellow guests to listen. This was a man from New South Wales, rather a rough diamond, who was to rise to general's rank in the first world war. X listened for a few moments to the guardsmen talking, and then said: "That! I call that bloody side!" No doubt the guardsmen said "he-ah" for "here," but probably Bauchop, as I do, preferred that to the thin nasal "heer" (the "r" hardly sounded) that is so common in New Zealand. Too many New Zealanders tend to think that agreeable speech is affectation. I have known schoolboys who have two styles of speaking—one for company and one for their mates. Our pronunciation of words is less at fault than our general tone of voice and our sense of rhythm, which is rudimentary.

In my 11 years in broadcasting I had to arrange many talks by distinguished men from Britain, representing all parties and classes. I don't think there was a really poor speaker among them. They all had a sense of rhythm. I attribute this to tradition and educa-

The inference from this article is that it would be a bad thing to graft standard middle-class English speech on to a New Zealander, but, like Miss Marsh, I can scarcely agree. What puzzles me, however, is where speech faults end and an "accent" begins. Have New Zealanders an "accent" or do they just speak badly? If the latter, will these faults eventually crystallise into another variation of English, surely the most mutilated language in the world? Although I am aware of the many complex factors involved, it appears to me that age can sometimes turn bastard speech faults into legitimate accents.

FRANK PONTON (Wellington).

Sir,—Many years have passed since the late Mr. Baeyertz, in the *Triad*, publicly indicted and executed murderers of the King's English. Opportunely Mr. Fairburn takes up the prosecution and Miss Marsh is fortunately at hand to sheet home the crime. As Mr. Fairburn suggests, attention must

More letters from listeners will be found on pages 28 and 29

first be directed to the children; and, incidentally, what of the little ones who are suffered to come to the microphone from far and near on late afternoons to make those awful noises in the name of speech? Do their parents and teachers understand what they say? I think the impact of cacophonous American radio recordings and inferior sound films is very baneful to young ears, but the deterioration set in long before these pests were introduced. Over 40 years ago my father objected that when he asked for a ticket to "town" the conductor invariably enquired whether he meant "teown," and when in desperation the word "City" was tried, the conductor would declare his preference for "cit-ee"; finally "Queen Street" was considerably allowed to pass without correction.

We are notoriously lazy linguists, and not above laughing at the foreigner's mistakes even when his treatment of vowels and consonants is superior to our own. Laziness is also at the root of our "yeah" class of speakers. Well, I hope our educational authorities will do something. Surely so important a matter will not be forever excluded from the school curriculum. The art of reading aloud, under the guidance of a capable teacher, would be of inestimable value. Diagrams of throat, tongue and lip formation would no doubt be used in a well worked out system. I believe the singing as well as the speaking voice would benefit tremendously by such training.

While vowel trouble is very prevalent, consonantal sickness is also fairly widespread. Writing of the imperfection of most singers, Mr. Dyneley Hussey in *The Listener* (London) of February 13, 1947, stated: "One fault is in the pronunciation of their consonants . . . none of them make their consonants clearly audible or used them as they should be used, to give leverage to the phrasing . . . the production of a series of beautiful vowel-sounds without strong connecting consonantal links is not the sole requisite for a good singer."

We are much indebted to Mr. Fairburn and others for bringing forward this matter, and I hope some good will result from the discussion. There was a recent controversy on "Corruption of Taste." Is there a flame discernible anywhere, do you think, as the result of the sparks then kindled?

—JOHN TOLE (Auckland).

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUPPLEMENT

THOUGH we printed ten per cent. more copies than usual, our issue of August 1 containing the House of Representatives gift supplement was completely sold out within ten days. However, some copies of the supplement only are still available and may be had from "The Listener" Publication Department in return for fourpence a copy, in stamps. Twelve or more copies of the supplement will be sent post free to any address on receipt of postal notes to the value of three shillings and sixpence a dozen copies.

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out the purest exemplars with a singleness of eye by us unattainable." Of course Y.Y. refers to writing and Mr. Fairburn to speaking, but both have noticed what I call "the unidiomatic precision of a foreigner." I noticed that first when I was at school. We had a Frenchman to teach us French and a German to teach German and if either was absent the other could take his place. We found it delightfully easy to follow the Frenchman speaking German or the German speaking French. I think the reason lies on the surface. Among your own people you speak the colloquial language and you speak it with a rhythm peculiar to your town class or your own district, but to a foreigner you use his written language and you speak it carefully and accurately. When I reached Gisborne in 1890 I was struck by the beautiful English spoken by the well-bred, half-caste girls who had been to Te Aute College. There again you have "the unidiomatic precision of the foreigner." Their English accent was perfect because they were not English.

THOS. TODD (Gisborne).

Sir,—I should like to congratulate Mr. Fairburn on his study of New Zealand speech, and add some notes from my experience. I think the basic trouble is that New Zealanders do not appreciate the practical value of good speech and its aesthetics, that indeed they have a distinct prejudice against it, an inverted snobbishness. The late Colonel Arthur Bauchop, who fell at Gallipoli, a soldier with a cultivated mind, told me of the following incident. He was

tion and to the practice of speaking in company where the standard is high; also, and this arises from the foregoing, to a social poise. They were sure of themselves, at their ease.

ALAN MULGAN (Wellington).

Sir,—With reference to the recent articles on "Spoken English," by Mr. Fairburn and Miss Marsh, the following quotation may be of interest. It is lifted from a provocative article by Montagu Slater entitled "How Shall We Bring Up Our Actors, and for What Theatre?" which appeared in *Theatre To-day*, an English publication.

A special complaint made of both R.A.D.A. and the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art (which used to be Fogarty's) is that they produce a special and very limiting speech. The speech training is sound, but the ultimate criterion in practice appears to be social as much as artistic; the voice must be well-bred, a notion which imposes a serious limitation on the actor's range and value. The resulting voice has more than once been accused of strangling drama and hindering film: it has become difficult, it is said, to cast an ordinary person in any play, and comment is made on the welcome vitality and truth of voices trained elsewhere. My quotation is from an early draft of a considered report now in preparation.

Slater then goes on to say that there is an influx of new voices which he traces to theatres like Unity London and Unity Glasgow, and to the documentary film.

The influx is valuable and refreshing. . . . I am sure that if the Old Vic school recruits a player with an accent, as from time to time it will, there will be no attempt to take the man's accent away and replace it by a synthetic speech like that which Professor Lloyd James invented for BBC announcers.