

AUGUST 22, 1947.

The Chainless Mind

IT is an encouraging fact that when the House of Commons went into committee last week on its Supplies and Services Bill—a measure for bringing all the resources of the community, and the activities of the individual, into the absolute control of the Government—the Opposition moved, and the Minister accepted, an amendment that “nothing in the Act should be held to authorise the suppression or suspension of any newspaper, periodical, book, or other publication.” Although it is not likely that suppressions would follow if the Government were free to order them, it is better to have such issues settled beyond the possibility of doubt. In war, if the danger is acute enough, we surrender all liberties but our right to change the people who take them away. In peace the mind must remain chainless, with all reasonable methods of expressing it. It is not much use being free to think if we are not free to speak; and since print carries thoughts to the ends of the earth, the human mind is only as free as print (and now broadcasting) is allowed to go. If there are large areas of the world in which it must still travel under control, it is a stimulating thought that Britain has remembered, even in this desperate extremity, to guarantee its free passage at home. It is in fact roughly true that thoughts expressed in English travel freely where English is the national speech; though it is possible to think of exceptions. We can think of them because they are exceptions—exceptions that all lovers of freedom deplore, and as often as they can, resist. It will of course be remembered by some readers that the Government which has so promptly guaranteed the freedom of print against suppression limited it not so long ago by cutting down supplies of paper. That may or may not have been necessary for economic reasons, but it was at least not done for political or religious reasons, and if it had been, and had been so regarded by the public, the Government that did it would not now be in power.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

“GREAT EXPECTATIONS”

Sir,—*Great Expectations* may be a good film as films go, but it is certainly not the authentic translation of the novel to the screen that so many film critics have declared it to be. For one thing it does not make complete sense even of the melodramatic story to which Dickens's complex novel has been reduced. No satisfactory motive is given for Magwitch's hatred of the other convict, or for his wanting to make Pip a gentleman. In the book it is much more than gratitude that makes him do what he did for Pip. Further, the film omits telling us how Pip is to live after losing his expectations. And, finally, the changed ending, in which the Havishamming Estella, untarnished by marriage to a brute and wearing the conventional film face and manner, is made to surrender so very nicely to Pip's spectacular appeals, makes nonsense of Dickens's Estella. This ending carries to unbearable lengths the surrender to popular taste begun by Dickens himself when he altered his original ending to allow Pip and Estella to come together after 11 years of work and suffering.

More serious than these omissions and distortions is the smudging over, in the usual stereotyped way, of the main theme of *Great Expectations*, which is compounded of a bitter attack on the hypocrisy, snobbery, and toadyism of Victorian middle-class life, respect for the honest working man and woman like Joe and Biddy, and indignant pity for the handicapped and hounded outcast. What the film gives us is little more than the Dickens of the melodramatic plots; it is not the liberal, tortured, generously angry Dickens who was, in Edmund Wilson's words, “the greatest dramatic writer that the English had had since Shakespeare.” Another classic has been emasculated and turned into a screen “comic.” W. J. SCOTT

(Karori).

BRITTEN'S MUSIC

Sir,—I was interested to read Mary Covel's letter on Britten's music, and as another untutored listener I would like to add that no contemporary music has impressed me so greatly as that of this young composer. Britten's music is dramatic, original and yet at times so spiritual and mystical that it moves one profoundly. It is good to realise that genius is recognised in these times when one remembers the struggles and pathetic lives of many of the great composers. This is mainly due to broadcasting which has made it possible for the ordinary citizen to be educated musically. E.D.M. (Nelson).

SOIL AND HEALTH

Sir,—I was glad to note the prominence you gave to Sir Stanton Hicks's address on the intimate connection there is between the soil and the health of the people. Sir Theodore Rigg confuses good health with a low death-rate. Rousseau was right when he wrote two hundred years ago, “Life consists less in the length of days than in the keen sense of living.”

Some deficiency in our diet may account for the marked deterioration in the physical output of men, from the time when we were living on the products of a healthy virgin soil to the present time when we depend on chemical fertilisers. When I came to New

Zealand 40 years ago I was much impressed with the zest for life and work shown by the people here. The men could point with pride to the farms and homes they had created, the talk of the young men was often about the number of sheep they could shear, the acres of bush felled, or chains of fencing erected. The women seemed to manage with zest their large families and house-keeping, and also their extensive hospitality.

In those days bush was felled and the land grassed and fenced ready for production at a cost of £3 to £5 per acre. The cost for preparing land for settlement was tabled in a recent debate in the House of Representatives as £25 to £75 per acre. Looking through my records of about 35 years ago when practising as an architect, houses of a similar class to State houses could be built for 4/6 to 6/6 a square foot. Some of the State houses now cost, I believe, 42/- per square foot. (For correct comparison of above figures allowance should be made for rise in rate of wages from two and a-half to three times).

There are not now enough men physically fit to do the heavy work like mining, timber production, constructing hydro-electric schemes, especially tunnelling, where younger men are not replacing the older men when their working life is over. The same deterioration is apparent in the time it now takes to unload and load our seaborne traffic. Our hospitals are now unable to cope with the number of patients requiring treatment and our consumption of five million bottles of medicine annually gives food for thought. Yet many white women, including New Zealanders, in a Japanese concentration camp in the tropics were able to do coolie work and work in the fields when fed on a coolie diet of rice, etc., produced in the age-old way. H. M. HELM

(Pangatotara).

THE UNITED STATES

Sir,—Your correspondent “Pro U.S.A.” in a recent issue shows, I think, rather a curious standard of values when he says, “Now America is on top.” As regards wealth in actual terms of money, I grant this, but is that the best of standards? When I was in America a few years ago, one of the things that most struck me, in speaking to strangers, was their deep admiration (not untinged with a trace of envy sometimes) for the best that England stands for—the true aristocracy of ideals and manners which our King and Queen had not long before exemplified to them.

While it is true, I think, that the Almighty Dollar makes itself unpleasantly felt, first of all, when one visits America, I think one does get to realise that it isn't the actual money itself, but the power it bestows, and the success that it exemplifies, that count—the picture in the Corcoran Art Gallery, for instance, for which they paid half a million dollars; and other lovely things which only much money can buy, they seem willingly to spend their money on. We were in the States early in 1940, and even then, with the war only just developing, Sunday after Sunday we heard preachers give the same exhortation to their hearers—that America was so wealthy and so blessed, that they should not even lend, but give, out of

their abundance; warnings about the rich man, and the Kingdom of Heaven, and reminders that “every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above.”

To me, the most outstanding of the results of the war was the forced association of the Allies, linked by a common ideal. Most of the criticisms, formerly, were based on ignorance, I think, and now that that excuse has been done away with, and we have the experiences of the past few years in common, don't we find that, given that common sure foundation, the differences in outlook broaden one's view, and make a link, rather than otherwise—make us feel that, as members of a world family, each country has its own individual contribution to make to the good of the whole, with no thought of rivalry? And as regards New Zealand, does not Rewi Alley set us here the best of examples?

C. BEVERLEY (Auckland).

SOCIAL JUSTICE SESSIONS

* Sir,—Bigotry, the greatest curse of humanity, is sadly evident in the letter of your correspondent “Rationalist.” Although I, personally, am convinced that social justice appeals will always go unheeded by the majority, I also feel that the commentators of these sessions (especially the Rev. J. Calder) are to be applauded for their fearless statements. In this world with its stage being set for the final struggle between the two destructive extremes, very few voices advocating the middle path of sanity and salvation are to be heard, and these are, therefore, extremely refreshing to all who possess the ability and intelligence to think past the narrow boundaries of hatred and intolerance.

“Rationalist” unwittingly spoke the truth when he asserted that the Marxists and Atheists have their recipes for the world's evils—ample proof of this is being enacted every day on our waterfronts, in the slow strangulation of our productive capacity, in the profligacy of the rising generations. Beliefs born of frustration will never serve any other cause but just that. However, I agree with “Rationalist” that they should be given the freedom of the air; a surfeit of their perverted doctrines would not only be the awakening of the public—it would be humanity's salvation.

SOCIAL-MINDED

(Christchurch).

(We have no space for further discussion of this topic.—Ed.)

BROADCAST INTERVIEWS

Sir,—Radio interviewing seems, in the ZB stations, to be getting out of hand. Too often the interviewer approaches his job from the wrong angle, accentuating his own part and leaving to the person interviewed a subsidiary role. An interviewer is only the medium through which somebody else expresses views or tells a story. He should not, as so frequently happens, seek to build up his own “personality.” Here is a case in point which came from 2ZB on Sunday night, August 3: “You have just been listening to Wallie Ingram interviewing the well-known sporting figure, Dorrie Leslie.” Not, you will note, “Dorrie Leslie being interviewed.”

HAMMER THROWER

(Wellington).

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

“Observer” (Hawera): We hate spoiling your joke. But faces and names got mixed in one printing which was afterwards replaced.