

Paper Talk

BECAUSE the readers of *The Listener* own it, we take them with us through our crises. They went patiently through the war with us because we explained, and they understood, what Hitler had done to our paper supplies, our staff, our distribution, and our postal deliveries. We believe they will go patiently through the present dollar crisis if we tell them frankly how we are caught in it. In any case they are entitled to know. Dollars to us mean newsprint—paper that now costs us three times as much as it did before Hitler first interfered with us. It costs us three times as much, and even at that price is three times as difficult to get. It has in fact been so difficult to obtain ever since the early war years that *The Listener*, whose first number was only three months ahead of the declaration of war, has not, like older-established publications, been able to build up a reserve. There have been periods when we have been only a week or two away from complete exhaustion, and no period when we have been more than months away, and we are of course greatly embarrassed to have to shorten sail just when we were beginning to feel that the war was over. But planning is like that. We are making such a sharp cut in our demand for dollars, in other words in our newsprint imports, that our circulation as well as our size will remain pegged till the crisis passes. There will be three or four more 48-page issues this year, issues for which the space has already been sold and the paper accumulated; but apart from occasional special issues we shall have to drop expansionist ideas for an indefinite period. Though our normal size is 56 pages, and we can't really do our job adequately with less space than that, we shall remain reduced to our present 40 pages, and sometimes perhaps drop lower still. Elsewhere on this page we explain what some of the practical consequences will be, and in what specific ways our readers can protect themselves against disappointment.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

PRISON REFORM

Sir,—On reading your leading article for September 12 it seems that the Howard League for Penal Reform has brought to your notice a subject about which apparently you have had little knowledge or interest.

It is true that those unfortunate people behind bars have few friends and that their case arouses little of public interest. It is also true, however, that a small group of people have concerned themselves with the welfare of those unfortunates and are working in the attempt to bring the prison system of this country more in line with that of other and more advanced and enlightened countries.

The pamphlet submitted to you contained signed and witnessed statements from reliable sources. There is no exaggeration or overstatement of facts as experienced by the men concerned. We do not hesitate to say that up to the present there has been little that can

system in New Zealand remains in a curiously muddled state—an ineffective compromise between archaic custom on the one hand and a timid humanitarianism on the other. "The New Zealand prisons are not harsh, if compared with the prisons of last century, and instances of blatant cruelty are not numerous. . . ." "We are, of course, fully aware of the difficulties which beset the whole problem of penal reform. We can offer no easy panacea for the ills of the prisoner. . . ." The pamphlet also stresses throughout the differences that exist among the various prisons.

You state that of the several "charges" made "not one . . . can be held to be proved." I believe that the pamphlet does give a reasonably exact picture of the medical and educational conditions in the prisons, and there is plenty of evidence available to confirm this picture, but it is true that the "charges" that grave consequences followed lack

TO OUR READERS

IT is painful to be short of paper, but criminal at present to waste it.

Will our readers please help us to avoid waste by ordering their "Listeners" in advance.

We do not mean ordering from us. We mean ordering from whatever source supplies them now. If they customarily buy their copies from a particular agent or shop, we ask them to let that agent or shop know week by week in advance what their requirements will be. In that way they will reduce the present very low rate of returns to nothing at all and completely eliminate waste.

They will also avoid disappointment themselves, since it will be impossible to supply agents with speculative copies.

be called reformatory in our prison system and that numbers of men have been returned to society more anti-social and less fitted to take their place as responsible citizens than before they went to prison. Moreover, the health of many has deteriorated because of conditions in the prisons and lack of modern knowledge applied in the medical service available.

That society should carry so great a burden as the criminal population of our prisons indicates and not concern itself to see that conditions conform to the most up-to-date and enlightened methods is for us to shut our eyes to what is our obvious duty to the community.
AMY F. CRUMP
(Auckland).

Sir,—The Howard League for Penal Reform appreciates your notice of the pamphlet, "New Zealand Prisons: Conditions Exposed," but I, as one not directly concerned in its compilation, feel your "superior" tone and deprecatory treatment call for comment. Your favourable remarks seem limited to the words "It is not a violent pamphlet. . .", and then you add, "but it is sweeping." If by "sweeping" you mean that the pamphlet does not attempt to give a balanced picture of the conditions with which it deals, it is strange that you overlooked most of the statements reproduced which bear on their surface evidence of the desire to be exact and just. You overlooked also the care taken to stress the difficulties faced in carrying out reforms in the prisons, and to acknowledge the complexity of the problems involved as well as the limited scope of the pamphlet. You could have quoted excerpts such as " . . . the penal

of proper medical treatment in the specific cases mentioned are not proved in a rigorous and complete sense. But are you not asking too much when you expect this? A pamphlet can normally only present a convincing case for fuller investigation, and point to the sources of further evidence. You might have stated that the facts of the pamphlet are presented in the form of signed statements from a number of men, all of whom in addition express their willingness to appear before a committee of inquiry. That these men, who in the opinion of the compilers are "reliable and intelligent observers," should allow their names to appear in print and undertake to substantiate their statements further is to any reasonable person *prima facie* evidence of their reliability. I suppose you would not suggest they are lying when they say they personally did not receive the detailed medical examination laid down in the Prison Regulations?

From the sentence you quote from the pamphlet, "It is hard to convince the public that our penal authorities are making almost no effort to reform prisoners" (your italics) you are led to favour the Howard League with a solemn warning of the dangers of crying "Wolf," and also to charge it with "turning querulous and sour." For you to find evidence of querulousness and sourness in the simple remark that it is difficult to arouse public opinion in these matters suggests that you have adopted the old trick of attacking the Howard League to distract attention from your poor case. There would obviously be little need of such pamphlets as this if the public, or even the legislators, were

fully seized of the facts presented, and if they were not chronically liable to regard the prisons as satisfactory from an educative and reformatory point of view simply because blatantly harsh conditions do not normally exist. The League stands by the statement that there is "almost no effort to reform prisoners" even though it may make you uneasy. The pamphlet does reveal the lack of educational and recreational facilities and of positive reformatory procedures, as well as the long hours (two-thirds of each day) that the prisoner spends in solitary confinement, with little provision for the profitable use of the waking hours of this period.

I conclude with the hope that your notice will cause many to read the pamphlet and judge the evidence for themselves. While the Howard League does seek to be the public "conscience" in regard to our prisons, its concern is not merely with prisons or prisoners, but with the prevention and treatment of delinquency and crime in the widest sense.

LINCOLN EFFORD,

President, New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform.

(We share our correspondent's concluding hopes.—Ed.)

WOBBLING SOLOISTS

Sir,—I've listened to many broadcasts of locally performed oratorios and cantatas. The choruses were sometimes well sung, but all broadcasts were marred by the wobbling soloists. Forty years ago wobble was held to be (what it is) unworthy of a musician; the wobbler was despised and ridiculed. Now, all the oratorio soloists wobble incessantly and unconsciously; a quartet of them in (say) "Since by Man came Death" is just intolerable to anyone with an ear.

Why, then, need our Choral Societies pay away good money at every concert to encourage intolerable soloists? Why can't they try the experiment of having the oratorio solos sung by all their singers of the required kind? English cathedral choirs have long been accustomed to allot Handel airs to all the boys, with telling effect. Those who heard Dr. Bradshaw's trumpet-toned boys sing Handel's "Let the bright Seraphim" could never again endure hearing that rapturously brilliant air taken by one solitary, wobbling, timeless, self-satisfied female. How much better would "He shall feed His flock" sound, if its gentle rises and falls were sung by 40 or 50 contraltos, all under the direct control and away of a musicianly conductor, than wobbled ad lib. by an irreverent woman such as would have provoked profanity in several languages from the great Handel himself!

F. K. TUCKER

(Abridged.—Ed.)

(Gisborne).

CHURCH BROADCASTS

Sir,—May I through your columns congratulate and thank the Director of Broadcasting on his defence of Church broadcasting. According to the Press the Bishop of Waikato's opinion is that it is unsuitable and unwanted. I wholeheartedly disagree with the Bishop. Church broadcasts are wanted, enjoyed, and serve a very useful purpose to a large section of the community who deliberately tune in.

One expects leadership of an uplifting nature from a high dignitary, but it seems strange to seek to debar the people from something good—especially bedridden people.

REGULAR LISTENER

(Bay of Plenty).