

## Atomic Christmas

EVERY year since our first issue there has been some special reason why we have found it difficult to wish our readers a care-free Christmas. Three months after we came into existence a world war started, and raged for six years. As soon as it stopped a political war started, again involving the whole world, shadowed now by the atomic bomb; and he is a bold man who thinks he can see to the end of that. But what is Christmas if it is not light in darkness? Whether we celebrate it as Christians or as Pagans the central fact is joy over good news. And the story is always this and always true: that we have escaped expected pain. Christmas may mean more than that to us; very much more; but it need never mean less. To say that it should always bring us unqualified joy would be to deny pain altogether; to deny hunger, and sickness, and disappointment and sorrow. The most fervent believer in the traditional story does not shut his eyes to pain and sorrow. He says simply that they have lost their sting, and that every Christmas since the first has been a celebration of that fact. The doubter is standing in his own light who can't say something equivalent to that. We shudder at the course of world events since 1939, but a great deal of the horror would go if we knew other stretches of history as well as we know those dismal eight years. But those who lived through them knew them, and still rejoiced at Christmas. If we can't rejoice it is not because faith has gone and history cold-shouldered us, but because we have lost the capacity to laugh anywhere but in complete security. And safe laughter is not laughter at all. It is like the gifts of people who are embarrassed by possessions. Christmas has nothing to do with security, or with protection. It is the festival of the insecure, of the forgiven and the forgiving, of dried tears and brands snatched from the burning

## LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

TO R.W.C.

Sir,—Permit me again on behalf of the many in our Dominion who have during the fast closing year enjoyed *The Listener* crosswords to express our heart-deep thanks for the weekly entertainment, and wish your contributor, R.W.C., a joyous Christmas and the happiest of New Years.

"DOWN SOUTH" (Dunedin).

### "FORM IN MUSIC"

Sir,—Who is responsible for the improvement in the Harp Quartet? To contrive once these horrid 5ths is bad enough but to repeat them right away would almost suggest that the writer was not too familiar with the contralto clef! Or is the original too commonplace?

### ORPHEUS IN THE POULTRY-WORLD (Nihotupu)

(Miss Bessie Pollard wishes to thank "Orpheus in the Poultryworld" for pointing out the mistake, which was quite accidental—the substitution of an incorrect for a correct copy. She assures "Orpheus" that she really does understand the alto clef.—Ed.)

### RACING BROADCASTS.

Sir,—There is a time limit on Church broadcasts, and I suggest that a time limit should also be applied to racing broadcasts, with particular reference to 1YA. I have recently been putting the clock on the 1YA racing commentator, and his average time for each race is 25 minutes. The race itself takes up two or three minutes, and for the rest of the time he slowly announces (and repeats) details that can only be of interest to bookmakers and their followers. For instance, who wants to know the order of favouritism of every starter in a race? Ten minutes should be ample time to give the starters, describe the race, and announce the winners.

CUT IT SHORT (Hawera).

### "DIVIDING SEAS."

Sir,—I am writing this letter not in an attempt to convert your correspondent, Rita Atkinson, or to criticise—one way or the other—Ngaio Marsh, Joyce West, and those others whom she upholds as models of New Zealand writers. Nor in an attempt to defend such New Zealand writers as Frank Sargeson, Allen Curnow, A. R. D. Fairburn, etc. They can do that adequately themselves, if they care to—which is unlikely. I am writing in order to say that New Zealand has produced writers and poets of the first rank who are held in high esteem overseas and whose work ranks as literature.

These writers do not belong to what L. A. G. Strong, in his book, *English for Pleasure* describes as "entertainers" whose principal "aim is to make money . . . to find what is popular and to supply it." They are the artists whose attitude to the public is "take it or leave it," though, being human, they hope the public will "take it" and like it. They are the artists who, having something to say, are determined to say it, who would prefer to work on the wharves to prostituting their art by playing up to public demand, and who write of the world as they know it, not as people would like to see it, with blue skies, green fields, and birds singing, and Cupid, fat and naked, hiding behind a tree; but as it is with its beauty and its ugliness, its drabness and its unexpected heroism. These men regard themselves as the interpreters of life as it is.

As for the typical New Zealander—who is he, or she? Surely there is no

one type but innumerable types which are produced by the many facets of life in this country. There is the farmer, the white-collar worker, the spiv, the water-sider, the weakling, the smug, and "my uncle." Here he is: "It doesn't interest him to listen to what you've got to say . . . But he likes to get going himself. He loves the sound of his own voice and he's all the time waiting for you to finish so that he can get going himself . . . he never reads a book . . . he looks very serious, very responsible."

As for the poets, most of them have their stuff published overseas—not for snobbish reasons, but for the simple reason that a man, even a poet, must live—and if you receive 7/6 for a poem

### CHRISTMAS MESSAGES

CHRISTMAS Messages will be broadcast by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. P. Fraser, and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. S. G. Holland, at 12.30 p.m. on December 25. They will be heard over 1YA, 2YA, 3YA, 4YA, 2YH, 3ZR, 4YZ, and all Commercial stations.

here and £5/5/- for the same poem overseas, well, you are a fool if you sell it here. And that's largely why New Zealanders don't know much about their poets.

I have not touched upon the work of James Bertram, Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, or the short stories of A. P. Gaskell, as well as the work of many others. But just listen to this by A. R. D. Fairburn. It is from "Town Hall Concert." He describes

The mass, the mortal array; darkness, the hush.  
The wilderness around. And then the sudden rash of stars across the void, O bright stars breaking through mist, white-clustered flowers  
shining in the wintry forest of our night!  
I thought of him, that first adventurer, untaught, bleakly anonymous, who found the prism that broke the white light of silence  
and filled the trembling air with rainbow sound."

Who will say after this that New Zealand has no poets? They're there all right (if they haven't starved to death through New Zealand's neglect) but you must go out and look for them, you must learn to appreciate them, for you cannot expect anything worth having without searching and working. Life does not as a rule lay its gifts on the front door step.

CONSTANCE DUTHIE (Remuera).

Sir,—A word about certain male bards who have set themselves up on Mt. Olympus. Some may read like Milton—some are balderdash. But it must be remembered that he who crows loudest is heard. Also women have always been more retiring in spite of several women writers who gained distinction several years ago in London. What is needed in this country, however, are the fair-minded critics who give all styles a hearing with the exception of utter rubbish. Poets who have found space in reputable newspapers deserve a voice. Cliques should be suppressed.

PAUL WRIGHT (Winchester).

### "WHO STEALS MY PURSE"

Sir,—Your correspondents "Three Dumb Clucks" ask for an explanation of the plot of the excellent short story *Who Steals My Purse* written by A. P.

Gaskell and printed in *The Listener* for November 14. At the risk of explaining the obvious and revealing my lack of the necessary "superior intelligence," I would say that the plot is meant to show the misfortune which often befalls a well-meaning but irresolute man like the "hero," Les Wilson. In this respect the plot is similar to that of Hamlet. To see the point of *Who Steals My Purse*, one must realise that the purpose of this story is to explore the human personality and human relationships rather than to narrate an exciting tale.

Since the title has no interrogation mark, it is no doubt an ironic evocation of the Shakespearian phrase, "Who steals my purse steals trash."

F. W. REEVE (St. Albans).

### ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ARTISTS

Sir,—I agree with Betty Rhind's criticism of Nugent Welch's amazing statement: "It would be a good idea to have some sort of system to ensure the sale of his (the 'professional's') paintings for a fair price without having exhibitions swamped out by the work of amateurs, whose livelihood doesn't depend on their sales."

If Nugent Welch's view is also that of his fellow members of the council of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, one wonders if much good work by talented "amateurs" is thrown out at selection time, not because it doesn't reach a high enough standard but because the artist is also a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick-maker whose "livelihood doesn't depend on sales."

Mr. Welch should come down from his pedestal and ponder on the words of a great French impressionist: "There are no 'professional' artists and 'amateur' artists; there are only good artists and bad artists."

CERULEAN BLUE (Wellington).

### HOLIDAY BROADCASTS FOR CHILDREN

Sir,—This is only the third day of the enforced closing of schools in our area, so my daughter for the first time since reaching school age has had the pleasure of listening to the school session at 1.30, and might I tell you how much she is enjoying it? It seems to me that there is a golden opportunity missed during the school holidays, enforced or otherwise, to enable children to cultivate a taste for something more than murder serials, etc., and I would like to see this time continued throughout all school holidays with, say, a repetition of some of the fine historical serials which have come over the air during the past few years. I am sure many an adult listener would like the opportunity of hearing them again. I know I would.

The children's time in the late afternoon is all very well and has its uses, but no one could call it instructive. A session for children at 1.30 continued during the holidays would encourage them to listen to something worthwhile. In addition, it would ensure their having a short rest during the heat of the day, just at a time when it is difficult to get these older children to sit still for a little while.

DOROTHY BLACK (Taupiri).

(We think we may assure our correspondent that her "golden opportunity" has not been overlooked.—Ed.)