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Another Year

THE exciting feature of every new year is its almost complete uncertainty. Seasons come and go, but we have no idea when they come in what circumstances they will go for any one of us. We think we know what the present signs mean; or some of them; and now and again we do. But more often than not we misinterpret them as completely as the weather is misjudged by meteorologists whose instruments are faulty and records incomplete. It seems to most of us at the present time, for example, that 1948 will be a disturbing and trying year. It begins with war, or near war, in China, India, Palestine, and France; with a profound economic crisis in Britain to which no one can yet see the end; with a struggle between liberty and control in all those parts of the world popularly regarded as civilised (including our own); in short with half the people in the world whose destinies most nearly affect our own living anxiously on the edge of a volcano. Those are the signs that it would be criminal folly to refuse to see. But it is only a degree less lunatic to decide on such evidence that the battle is lost already. It is easy to play the fool with history, but easier and commoner to play it with no-history; with the knowledge of the moment and the short stretch of path we can see at our feet. We may not always be able to feel, with Browning, that in the long run all is well with the world, but we can agree with him that the commonest causes of depression and fear are darkness and incomplete vision; seeing the part and not the whole. The thin shreds of history that are all most of us possess loudly proclaim the folly of easy surrenders. They proclaim too, no doubt, the folly of rhetorical swagger, of filling our bellies with the east wind and calling it confidence. But even the worst kind of optimism is safer to live with, and easier to endure, than the nerveless pessimist who is sure that every cloud on the horizon is smoke from the bottomless pit.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

LOCAL TALENT

Sir,—I read your article "Making our own recordings" with great interest. I have no quarrel with our NZBS. One can usually find something somewhere on the air to suit one's fancy. But I have also realised that our programmes are cramped and restricted for mechanical reasons. I like music hot and new. I was crammed with the older classics as a child and now their dreamy pastoral rhythms and harmonies revolt my ear from sheer familiarity. For which I apologise to nobody. But then again I am unspeakably fed up with Pedro the fisherman's little whistle, which rends my heart almost every morning from a station which should know better. I am so tired of American song hits.

Here in New Zealand there are song writers who cannot get a song published even if it has merit, because the local market is flooded with Hollywood hits. This is our country. We do the work in it. But the NZBS is trying to force a culture on us that is not ours. Imported songs. Imported records.

The local market cannot sell enough copies to make any local song repay publication costs. Surely talent should be our most cherished and protected industry? But he who writes a song must be prepared to be sneered at. If a composer cannot hear his songs sung, he cannot assess their merits, or improve his style, or approximate to popular taste. Yet musical talent has to confine itself, in New Zealand, to teaching the next generation to hammer out the same old classics.

The NZBS, with its ample funds, could provide a wide opening for local talent. It could stimulate and advise and encourage. If I were to beg for half an hour a week from 2YA of New Zealand made records, featuring New Zealand songs sung by New Zealanders, would I be crying for the moon?

I should like to mention that I enjoy NZBS stories and plays and am delighted to find that I can hear more and more of these. New Zealand wit is a subtle thing, which we cannot import. It actually grows here like the pohutukawa, and the kauri and the rimu. Strangely it likes no other soil.

So, while not complaining about the programmes I hear, may I beg for New Zealand records. Incidentally, they don't cost dollars. I know we have tenors, sopranos, contraltos, and basses here whose voices have our own pleasant insular drawl, which is as welcome as clematis in spring, besides all those other lovely qualities which make a singer easy to listen to.

Now that we have the machinery, can we not hear them frequently?

STILL HOPING (Feilding).

(Formerly technical difficulties have limited the recording of local artists. The new plant will help to overcome this. Last year, however, the NZBS broadcast 3,252 performances by local artists or societies and some of these featured New Zealand compositions. The Service is always willing to consider compositions submitted by local composers.—Ed.)

DIET AND TEETH

Sir,—In view of the findings of Dr. Hearman and other researchers abroad that the cause of tooth decay has been traced to the use of white flour and sugar, it would be interesting to know what other troubles are due to the same cause. The teeth are but a part of the

body as a whole, and it seems unlikely that a substance adversely affecting them should have no effect on the rest of the system.

I had an interview recently with a school doctor which surprised me. In the course of routine questions as to what my child was being given to eat, I was asked whether she had cakes and sweets. On replying in the negative, I was told to "Give her some; give her a piece of barley sugar every day." Presumably the idea was to increase energy, but as she has more energy at the moment than any of us knows what to do with, the use of any "energiser"—always provided that it worked in the way of intended—is completely unnecessary.

Not many weeks ago advertisements were appearing in your columns and in the daily press drawing attention to the fact that New Zealanders eat far too many cakes and sweets for their

More letters from listeners will be found on page 14

health. Is it wise, then, for a school doctor in contact with the parents and presumably with a greater influence than any radio or newspaper announcement, to give advice contrary not only to the findings of research, but also to the Health Department's own advertised principles? "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare in the day of battle?"

Recently the Minister of Health expressed a hope that something would be done to lessen the amount of medicine consumed in this Dominion; but while school doctors are handing out advice such as I received, the need for bigger and better bottles of medicine will grow instead of diminishing.

I. M. HEYS (Wellington).

(This letter was submitted to the Health Department, and brought this reply from Dr. H. B. Turbott, Director of the Division of School Hygiene: "The cause of dental caries has not yet been established, diet being just one factor in a chain, the various links of which are still in a tangle. While diet is not the whole story as yet, it does have marked influence on the well-being of the whole body, including teeth. Hence the Department advocates a diet balanced in body building and protective elements, agreed to by nutrition authorities as best in the light of present knowledge. If that balanced diet is the home standard, the right proportion of carbohydrate foods—flour, bread, sugar, etc.—is eaten. In fact, priority being given to the correct bulk of milk and dairy products, meat, eggs or substitutes, vegetables and fruit, thereafter appetite may be safely satisfied on carbohydrate foods. The virtue of the balanced diet is that the taste and desire for cakes, sweets, etc., is reduced because other foods that are better for health are really more satisfying. School doctors are not 'handing out advice contrary to this teaching' as a group; they believe in and teach the balanced diet. Steps are being taken to see that any one individual's personal views contrary to our nutritional expert's (Dr. Bell's) advice are not aired in Health Department clinics. Your correspondent may rest assured we agree heartily with the Biblical quotation in the letter."—Ed.)

FROM A PAL

Sir,—Oh! Mr. Editor (and Oh! Oh! Mr. David Hall)! To think of all the hundreds and thousands. No, I am not alluding to those pink and white things which appeared on our bread 'n butter at parties, but to those who read your magazine: some because it's faintly pink, though to me the paper you use is white; some because of the programmes; and some—like me—who enjoy and appreciate most of its articles and accept

them as—well—probable fact. But I shuddered at the review by Mr. Hall on *To-morrow and To-morrow*, by E. Barnard Eldershaw. Not at the review, Mr. Editor, which may be O.K., as I have not yet read the book. But sir, surely in these days of haste or turmoil or what-have-you, surely your Mr. Hall should know that "he" is two women. At last you have it from me. Yes, not one female alone to be a "vigorous satirist" and "able to see round corners"; but two, E. Barnard being one, and Eldershaw the other. Did not Mr. Hall's memory click back to the time when *A House is Built* was given a prize as the best novel of early Australian life? It was announced then that two women collaborated to write it. Shame, shame! Such a pity in such a good little o' faintly pink paper not to get facts right! So, though I feel strangely like the female who writes to *The Times* saying she has heard the first cuckoo and it must be spring, I just had to tell you. What a pal I am.

"JIB" (Hamilton).

(Mr. Hall writes in reply: "I am grateful to my pal 'Jib' for so courteously pointing out that 'Mr. Barnard Eldershaw' is—or should I say 'are'?—plural, a fact also pointed out to me in private by another correspondent. For some strange reason I don't feel ashamed of having so far overlooked such a large feature of the Australian literary landscape as *A House is Built* and whatever publicity attended it. I suppose it just is that I have got used to living with my own ignorance. But anyway, thanks pal!"—Ed.)

WHAT IS A LIBERAL?

Sir,—I have just read Brian Fisher's story of the small boy and the merry-go-round, on which he bases a parable of liberalism. Applying the analogy, we find that the non-Liberals—and what sort of illiberalism is Mr. Fisher asking us to admire?—are they who go round and round at great speed, with much hideous noise, and stay in exactly the same place, deafened and dizzied out of any kind of rational self-possession.

J. G. A. POCOCK (Christchurch).

TWO BROADCASTS

Sir,—May I express an appreciation through your columns of two broadcasts heard recently by Ernest Jenner. I refer to his first New Zealand performance of Bernard Steven's "Theme and Variations," and secondly to the York Bowen Sonata for Violin and Piano, the latter in conjunction with Frederick Grinke. We need more enterprising broadcasts by local artists of this nature, and it is to be hoped that both the York Bowen and Bernard Steven's work will be heard again in the not too distant future.

RONALD TREMAIN
(Feilding).

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ARTISTS

Sir,—Nugent Welch expresses concern for the professional artist because of exhibitions being "swamped out by the work of amateurs, whose livelihood doesn't depend on their sales." Surely work should be hung for its merit. It is no exaggeration to say that there is, today, work being produced by little-known amateurs that bids fair to surpass the efforts of some of our established professionals.

Does Mr. Welch, as Betty Rhind suggests, want such gifted amateurs "exterminated and silenced," and thus convert an art exhibition solely into a shop-window for professionals?

"BYSTANDER" (Wellington).