

JANUARY 9, 1948

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"Down in Otago."

WHEN we said to a historian the other day that a good deal had happened in 1848 he asked if we meant "down in Otago." At the moment we were not thinking of Otago but of Europe, and had to adjust our thoughts, as he had to adjust his, before the conversation could continue. Now we should like to know how many people in Otago remember, as they enter their centennial year, that it is also the centennial of one of the big years of history. Some will not be interested if they do remember what was happening in Europe a hundred years ago. They will feel—up to a point it is a very wholesome feeling—that Europe is a long way off, and that too much has happened there since 1848 to make worrying about it now justifiable. But in fact Europe's year of revolutions did influence Otago in direct and indirect ways. It made the first settlers more conscious of tyranny and more sharply aware of the meaning and value of liberty, and it even sent a thin trickle of oppression's resisters to Otago's goldfields and farms. That of course was a delayed-action result, but can still be traced. Meanwhile Otago has arrived at its own big year, and is preparing to celebrate it in many permanent and passing ways, but above all in the lasting pages of print. Already two official and two or three unofficial volumes have appeared, and the indications are that enough books will appear before the year is over—certainly before the present enthusiasm dies down—to fill two or three cabin trunks. It is all very encouraging nationally, and to Otago natives quite exciting. But it is to be hoped that the historians will give us the land and the life and the people as they really are and were. It would be unpardonable to wash Otago's face until it shines with goodness, and to make saints of the engaging sinners some at least of its early inhabitants clearly were.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

MEN OF GOD

Sir,—Tamworth says: "If he rejects John the Baptist, then he must reject Christ." Naturally! Jesus is not an historical person, although portrayed in an ideal manner. His name (Hebrew-Joshua) is a popular one with the Jews, and any deliverer with them must be called Joshua or Saviour. "Wayfaring Man" accuses me of making a "string of assertions," but that is exactly my objection to the Bible stories of impossible men, like Elijah. S. F. Hunter, by a peculiar process of reasoning, claims that Elijah is historical because we have external proof that King Ahab is historical and because both are mentioned in Kings. By this process of reasoning Robin Hood must be historical also. The historicity of King Ahab was not in question. "Bible Student" pins his faith on Josephus, but the works of this historian have been interfered with whenever he comes into conflict with the Christian Church. A Russian version of Josephus's "Jewish War" tells us that John the Baptist's first public appearance was as a revolutionary in the year 4 B.C. as against 28-29 A.D., as stated by Luke. Such a difference as 32 years discredits the New Testament story completely. "R. E. Bartlett" takes me to task for contradicting "God's Holy Word," but the Bible is the writings of many men with conflicting opinions, and much fiction. He may be familiar with Greek, but he certainly does not understand plain English. I stated that Rama must also be included in the danger zone, and not in the coasts of Bethlehem as he tries to make out.

If modern history is only about 50 per cent. true then all ancient history must be regarded with suspicion, and Jewish history with its supernatural background with distrust.

"ARGOSY"
(Te Awamutu).

SCHOOL CERTIFICATE HISTORY

Sir,—Impressed as they must have been by the wails of the Latin enthusiasts over the softness of Social Studies, New Zealand parents will be relieved to discover that the school system still errs on the side of toughness. But there is something very illogical in the disposition, given such prominence in your recent issue, to judge a school test in a complicated and specialised subject, such as History as if it were merely a general knowledge quiz for people whose main interests are elsewhere. The tendency of some educationists to look for detailed knowledge too soon, and for too much of it, may be regrettable enough; but School Certificate is an examination, and History an optional subject, for High School pupils who have had four years' preparation towards it. And the standard required is that of a world which needs an extension of brainpower in the social sciences, and needs it badly.

Your advertising manager rightly demands that education should be related to real life; but his ground is rather shaky when he appears to imply that reality is what he himself knows about. No one seriously interested in History should find it hard to link most of the questions to current reality; and surely, in an age of crossword puzzles, some knowledge for its own sake may still be allowed for. Last year I saw a School Certificate Biology paper in which I could answer no questions at all. Granted that I may be rather a dumb

cluck, compared with versatile members of your staff, it is still true that Biology has as much to do with real life as History has. The odd thing is that hundreds of youngsters passed that examination, and it is still possible, isn't it, that more than a few will average the necessary 50 per cent. on this year's ordeal? Particularly if they happen to have done the work set down in the syllabus.

The directions to candidates are omitted from your article. No one was asked to answer "all this," nor even the half of it, although you certainly have led your readers to believe that they were. The fact that as many as 11 of the 16 questions could be left alone puts a very different complexion on the merits of the paper. It is a fair criticism that the directions were not prominent enough. I am sure that you will avoid the evils of small type when you amend your otherwise welcome article—welcome because a good deal of the recent excitement is due to ignorance of what goes on in a modern school, and why.

ERLE ROSE (Southbridge).

(We should certainly have made it clear that no one was asked to answer every question. But every question given by us was asked, which means that someone was expected to know the answer.—Ed.)

Sir,—I was interested in reading in the latest number of *The Listener* an article on, and publication of, the School Certificate paper in History. Permit me to state that the comment was cleverly written, so much so that I suggest that you find space to publish the School Certificate in English.

What I am particularly interested to know is if any of your staff could coolly, calmly and collectedly, read the paper in the 10 minutes allowed for that purpose. If so, they are in a world class. Apart from that I am convinced that the publication of the English paper, together with the "Round Table Conference" would be of even greater interest to your readers.

E. T. LAYBURN (Christchurch).

(We had intended to print the English as well as the History paper, but came to the end of our space. We regret that we still can't find room for it.—Ed.)

WEATHER FORECASTS

Sir,—I would be glad to know whether there is any technical or scientific reason why the weather forecasts for the Western Bay of Plenty are so unreliable. I cannot speak for any other part of the North Island, but I must say that forecasts for this district are often very misleading and therefore of little use to the farming community.

May I take this opportunity of wishing R.W.C. the Compliments of the Season and thanking her for the many pleasant half-hours she has given me during the past year.

R. S. W. HUNT
(Tauranga).

"SUNDOWNER'S" ARTICLES

Sir,—It is a pity that "Sundowner" objects to the truth about himself, even when expressed as succinctly as by Mr. Fell. Clearly, "I do not like thee, Mr. Fell; the reason why I cannot tell." "Sundowner's" North Island wanderings left a suspicion which his crossing of the Strait has confirmed. I am now sure, where previously I merely suspected, that his statements are often untrue, frequently misleading, and almost always unverified, his observations superficial, and his conclusions puerile. Here

are three examples from his South Island articles: A glance at the Nelson newspaper would have shown that in October there were not two but five air services to Wellington each day, and that so far from Nelson and Blenheim people ignoring one another, they are given 19 opportunities every week by service car alone of getting together. Moreover, Nelsonians have too keen an eye for business ever to insult Golden Bay by calling it "land's end." After all, much of our butter and all of our electricity is produced there. If "Sundowner's" series is to be continued, may I recommend that it be prefaced with "All characters are entirely fictitious. . . ." We will then know that it not merely is, but is intended to be, pure fiction.

BANANA BENDER
(Nelson).

Sir,—I enjoy "Sundowner's" descriptions and admire his philosophy. In due course I hope his contributions to *The Listener* will be published as a book, for I should like to have a copy.

W.G.M. (Wellington).

Sir,—As I look through *The Listener* of 12/12/47 I fear lest you have taken the tart advice of C. R. Fell and dispensed with "Sundowner's" articles. We want more of these informed observers travelling round the countryside and telling us what they think. No two of us see the same things and all too few can write down what they do see for others to read and evaluate. So let "Sundowner" carry on in his caravan without being too upset by those whom a warm sun may make supersensitive.

MORE LIGHT (Nelson).

THE ARTIST'S JOB.

Sir,—Isobel Andrews wants to be able to "trace our artists' inspiration from the New Zealand way of life and the New Zealand scene." If this means that an artist's first job is to portray the way of life or the country in which he lives, I do not quite agree. Such activity has its place in an artist's work, no doubt. But in my judgment the first job of the artist is to appeal to those emotions in us which are universal.

Constable was famous as portraying East Anglian scenes and Morland for English domestic scenes; but these pictures convey the scene only to those who know it personally or by study. Their pictures are great not so much because they portray England and its way of life, but because contemplating them there is evoked in us emotions similar to those experienced by the artists when they sat down to give us within the four corners of the picture a compact summary of tranquillity, luxuriant nature, and the mellow beauty of a settled countryside. Turner's "Fighting Temeraire" appeals to us not because it depicts an old English battleship going to destruction, but because the artist has managed to produce something that causes the sentimental and romantic feeling in us to well up as we consider the once so powerful and great now going, as we all must irrevocably go, into decline and the discard; it is a poetic interpretation in colour of the common experience "How are the mighty fallen." In my judgment, art is always an essay in emotion and great art is great because it fixes for us for all time various aspects of our emotions and not because it gives us geographical or social details.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).