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Songs of the Land

IT is pleasant to be able to make an appeal to our readers that is not an appeal for people in distress. The letter on this page from Mrs. Woodhouse may have something to do with spiritual hunger, but it is certainly not an appeal for the physically hungry or cold or halt or maimed. It is a request for songs, songs about mustering and snow-raking, dipping and droving, and it gives us great pleasure to pass it on. We are not sure that we want Mrs. Woodhouse to unearth a singer of "bush burns": if that sad necessity ever moved a New Zealander to song, it might be as well that it should never become a popular song (though Guthrie-Smith has celebrated burning in prose). But the danger is not that Mrs. Woodhouse will be overwhelmed with verses on any aspect of farming or embarrassed afterwards by their effect on national policy. It is that she will not be enabled to make her anthology truly representative: that the writers and collectors of such things will neglect to send them in, some through inertia and some because they are not sure of the value of the lines they have hidden away in scrap-books. It is readers who have made collections of their own—furtively, perhaps, and in any case diffidently—who are in the best position to help, and it will be a pity if they fail through shyness. While it is unlikely that first-class verse lies hidden anywhere, there must be a considerable amount of material that is authentic in setting and feeling even if it is not distinguished in expression. In any case it would be worthwhile sending everything to Mrs. Woodhouse that smells of the shearing-shed or smacks of the bush; that seems to have been written not too far away from live horses and sheep and cows and dogs; or near the kitchen oven.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

FARM VERSE

Sir,—In one of the New Zealand centennial surveys it was pointed out that "we . . . have musters and swaggers but no Henry Lawson; roaring camps but no Bret Harte. We have never had a Banjo Paterson." This expressed what I have felt to be a loss to our country since the days of my childhood when I learned to love the horses and horsemen of the Australian Bush Ballads.

But although we have had neither a Lawson nor a Paterson, and, may I add, neither a Lindsay Gordon nor an Ogilvie, we have had some poets who have written of our farms and stations and of the sheep and cattle, horses and dogs, men and women who live on them.

During the past two years I have searched in libraries and newspaper files for material that could be collected into an Anthology of New Zealand Farm and Station Verse, and several artists have kindly offered to provide illustrations.

But although my quest has not been unsuccessful I do not think that the yield gives a true picture of life on our farms and stations. In fact, a reader might be forgiven for assuming that the North Island was populated almost entirely by Dairy Cows and the South by Rabbits, Swaggers, and Shearers—in that order. No one has sung of mustering or snow-raking; lambing, drafting, weaning, branding, dipping, droving. No one has described a wool or a stock sale. Several have written of ploughing, none of harvesting, nor has anyone described the grassing of bush burns or the war waged against the ever persistent manuka of parts of the North Island. Also, I have found no poem telling of the work of women on the farms, either in the house, or on the land during the war.

There may be much good farming verse as yet unpublished or hidden away in newspaper files, and I would be grateful if you would permit me to appeal, through your correspondence columns, to any reader of *The Listener* who has material, original or otherwise, which might be suitable for inclusion in this anthology and who by sending it to me would help to make this book really representative of New Zealand Farm and Station Life.—A. E. WOODHOUSE (Blue Cliffs Station, St. Andrews, South Canterbury).

ART IN OTAGO

Sir,—If Mr. Brasch's elevation to the rank of editor has gone to his head, it is a pity that you, sir, as editor of *The Listener*, should provide him with the opportunity of displaying his unbalanced and immature judgments on the book *A Century of Art in Otago*. In the first place, the length of the review was out of all proportion to the relative importance of the book as a literary effort. Indeed it appears to have been made the pretext for a lengthy expression of opinion by a self-appointed critic about art in general and Colin McCahon in particular.

Mr. Brasch may hold any opinions he likes about McCahon's position in Art in Otago—I am completely indifferent to them. Mr. Brasch may deem "lamentable" the literary qualities of my written work, from which, Heaven knows, I do not claim my standing as an artist—and again I am completely

indifferent. But it was lamentable indeed that his angry difference of opinion should have led him to the immoderate and discourteous statements that you allowed to go into print.

The wise discrimination that you could have shown, as an experienced editor, would have protected those who, along with me, put in so much honest work with so little expectation of reward. This was no literary essay, to be judged by hardened critics, but the straightforward, unpretentious record of the events of a century. It was a task arduous and essentially altruistic. As such it should have been reviewed. As such it might even have been commended. But to have done so, the reviewer would require to possess the decent qualities of understanding and generosity. In both, Mr. Brasch has shown himself lamentably deficient.

H. V. MILLER (Dunedin).

(Our duty was to give the book to a reviewer competent to pass judgment on it. To change what he said about it, even though our purpose was to temper the wind to the shorn lamb, would have been improper.—Ed.)

POSERS, PENALTIES, AND PROFITS

Sir,—In my opinion the lady who had to answer four questions wrongly won the fur coat. Having answered three questions wrongly (and there was no doubt about this), then she was asked: How many questions have you now had? She said three. If another question was coming that was correct, but if that in itself was to be taken as a question then to have answered correctly she should have said four. Thus three was in fact incorrect and so she should have won the fur coat.

GARTH HALL (Epsom).

A. L. ROWSE

Sir,—Please note that the member of the BBC Brains Trust described, both by *The Listener* and by the 4YO announcer last night (May 3) as Al Rowse, is A. L. Rowse, the historian—not, as one might suppose, a boxer or a member of the variety stage.

"SURPRISED" (Dunedin).

THE GREATEST NOVELIST

Sir,—Virginia Woolf, the greatest woman novelist of our time! Ha! Ha! MARC T. GREENE (Auckland).

SOFT PEDAL POLITICS.

Sir,—At the risk of being dealt a mightier blow than that received by your correspondent R. Goodman, I would suggest that your leader "Gathering Clouds" was completely lacking in inspiration and practical help for your readers. How many New Zealanders are there "who would sooner have the excitement of rumour and lies than no excitement at all and can sometimes be too dangerous to be allowed their liberty?" This smacks of Gestapo and Oppu. You counsel us to think about war but to say nothing about it. For too long has the liberal press handed out insipid, diluted philosophy and politics to its readers. Personally I am grateful to those authoritative voices which for the last two or three decades have proclaimed the dangers of Communism. Communists are ceaselessly working, and if they are not to prevail we must be ceaselessly nailing their lies and counteracting their poison. There are comrades everywhere present who are ready to hurl their appeal to our youth if an opportunity

should arise. We need not fear that international relations will suffer if we proclaim our intention to fight tooth and nail to rid the country of Communism. Your paper assumes that the majority of our population is mortified that a former ally should be responsible for depriving some dozen nations of their sovereignty and liberty. The fact is that there are thousands in New Zealand who are delighted with Russia's success. A friend of mine, who is in a position to influence the youthful mind, has stated that it is fine, in fact, a miracle. I am a fervent admirer of *The Listener*, and think you should take every opportunity of printing informative articles on what is probably the greatest political and social crisis in history.

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT

(Auckland).

[We do not know how many New Zealanders are "delighted with Russia's success" (in depriving neighbours of their liberty). Neither does our correspondent. We know that whatever the number is it is too many.—Ed.]

ENGLAND TO AUSTRALIA.

Sir,—One reads the articles in your paper with pleasure, and in certain cases with enlightenment. On reading your article on Sir Frederick Sykes in the issue of April 16, one learns that "he was partly responsible for early barn-storming flights . . . that of Ross and Keith Smith to Australia for instance." Other readers besides myself would, I am sure, be grateful if you could give us some more information about Ross. We know of the epic flight of Sir Ross Smith and his brother, Sir Keith Smith, but you would not, of course, refer to that flight as "barn-storming" any more than one would refer to the navigational voyages of Drake or Captain Cook as barn-storming, though the idea was the same—"to show people that it could be done."

To apply such a word to an achievement of that kind is to insult the memory of a great pioneer of flight.

D. T. WOOD (Whangarei).

(We acknowledge our correspondent's right to be facetious at the expense of a typographical error, but so far as "barn-storming" means flying for profit it may not unreasonably be applied to the flight of Ross and Keith Smith, who won a prize of £10,000. It is hardly necessary to point out that the word was not used in any disparaging sense.—Ed.)

G.T. AND P.T.

Sir,—Valerie Lockwood says that you did less than justice to Gisa Taglicht's method of rhythmical gymnastics. I think you did more than justice to it. Whether the film itself was fair or unfair I don't know, but I imagine that it emphasised what Mrs. Taglicht herself asked to be emphasised: In any case I saw it twice—not by choice—and in each case the audience simply laughed at it. FEET ON THE GROUND

(Wellington).

SCENERY PRESERVATION

Sir,—Listening to the Wellington Brains Trust the other night I was astonished that, in talking about the preservation of our natural beauties, not one of these brainy men mentioned, or seemed to have heard of, the work of the Scenery Preservation Board. The members of this Board have been meeting regularly in Wellington for years—and no doubt still are—and are responsible for preserving large tracts of bush and lake scenery and beauty spots in every part of New Zealand.

A. K. WILSON (Whakatane).

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

Curious (Auckland): Rhymes with "play." Staunch Protestant (Christchurch): We do not print letters which raise sectarian issues.