

LISTENER

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EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES:
115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.I.
Box 1707, G.P.O.
Telephone 46-520.
Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

Shadow Over Berlin

ONE of the difficulties the Western nations are meeting in handling the Berlin situation is Russia's refusal to offer even a plausible excuse for the blockade. If a man before he hits you says you have insulted him, or busted him, or stood on his toes, or harboured dangerous thoughts about him, he may still be difficult to deal with, but you know that it is a simple case of assault. If he hits without reason or excuse you don't quite know whether to hit back or send for the police or call on bystanders to help you to hold him till he can be taken back to hospital. So the problem is to know whether Russia is larrikin, lunatic, or outlaw; taking pleasure in starving two-and-a-half million people and alarming 200 million more; has been driven crazy by suspicion and fear; or is simply pushing and squeezing and grabbing, in the hope that Britain and America will get out of the way to avoid a breach of the peace. It is of course not quite true that no reasons at all have been given for the blockade. The Russians offer "technical reasons" for it; but they do not say what the reasons are, and they do not suppose for a moment that the world accepts what they say or is even interested in it. It is this deliberate indifference to world opinion, as Harold Nicolson pointed out the other day in a BBC broadcast, that is not merely baffling but alarming. No one thinks yet that war is coming; and as long as there is a chance of ending the tension by diplomatic means it is criminal to talk of other methods. But it is not criminal to wonder how many differences so far have been removed by Anglo-American surrenders, and to point out that peace on those terms is not peace at all. The real test for both sides may not have come yet. If it has come, and ends in a compromise that brings us loss of face, democracy will have reason to tremble.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

FRUIT AND CAUSTIC SODA.

Sir,—In *The Listener* some time ago a correspondent to Aunt Daisy's Page gave a recipe for boiling peaches. She wrote—"I prepared a caustic soda bath—1oz. of caustic soda to 1 gallon of boiling water . . . and dropped in 16 peach halves. After boiling for about 1 minute I ladled them out and held them under a fast running tap." She went on to say that the lady who gave her this hint does them this way even when she stews them for dinner, "using one teaspoon of caustic soda to 1 quart of boiling water." And this poison-method is employed just to remove the "bloom" in order to avoid peeling. (But why peel peaches? Flavours and vitamins are in the skin.)

Caustic soda is a corrosive poison. If this soda in such a weak solution is sufficient to burn the "bloom" off the peaches, a great deal must be absorbed into the skin and fleshy part of the halves while boiling one minute. Then what must be the effect of this corrosive on the delicate walls of the stomach when these peaches are eaten? It's an illusion to think that a rinse in cold water is going to wash it out. So powerful is it that it even eats into iron pipes. A good plumber warns one that it must not be used as a cleansing agent for drains and sinks.

It would be interesting to know what our Health advisers have to say on this subject.

POISONS (Wellington).

(We have received this comment from the Health Department: "It is a fact that in commercial canning processes many fruits are dipped in a weak caustic soda solution to blanch them, or remove the skin. This is a carefully regulated process. It would however be very unwise for an ordinary household to use a caustic soda solution for food, especially as a liquid in which food is boiled. Peaches are not a rich source of vitamins, but this method of treating them would certainly be destructive of such vitamins as do exist, and holding a peeled fruit under a running tap would dissolve out many of the mineral salts. The best method of removing skins is to place the fruit in boiling water for a few minutes and then in cold water. With most bottling peaches the skin will then shrink and can be easily peeled.")

COST OF LISTENING.

Sir,—We can't let you get away with your leader of the issue of June 18, however plausible it may read. Your case is knocked skyhigh by one fact alone, viz., that of the annual fees of 25/- one half, 12/6, suffices to pay the whole costs of the National Broadcasting Department. The other half goes to Reserves, and the Reserves at the moment total something over two millions—a very useful accretion no doubt to the Hon. Walter's Accumulated Funds. If you can dispose of this fact editorially go right ahead, but failure to do so proves conclusively that it just can't be done.

"EXPLOITED" (Christchurch).

(Our "case" was, and is, that a fraction of a penny a day is a ridiculously low payment for 17 hours of broadcasting.—Ed.)

MEMORIES OF SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Sir,—As another reader who greatly enjoyed Mary Stewart's "Hear the Pennies Dropping," I should like to mention that on reading it I had the impulse to send congratulations to the writer on her achievement; but, being in bed at the time and over-busy ever since, I have neglected to do so. If she will accept this belated tribute it may induce her to "tell us another one."

It amazes me that anyone could find in the story the slightest intention of

belittling the noble, self-sacrificing work of the Sunday School teachers, both men and women, whom I, for one, remember with affection and gratitude to-day. It is merely a record, and an authentic one, of the sort of trials these good people had to endure from the children they endeavoured so lovingly to train. We would sing *Hear the Pennies Dropping*, and all the other old catchy tunes, with gusto (were we not attired in our best clothes, complete with satchel and parasol, with, as we grew older, a three-penny bit for the plate instead of the

More letters from listeners will be found on page 22

penny our little brother dropped in?) and the excitement of gathering together in a freer atmosphere than we were permitted at day school no doubt often made us very trying to our good teachers. Yes, Mary Stewart remembers well.

As for the story I consider it one of the best ever to appear in *The Listener*. The construction is good, the climax and anti-climax perfection. The irony and humour of the last two words drew a shout of delighted laughter from this reader.

ILLEEN DOLORES (One Tree Hill).

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN.

Sir,—When rather acid criticism seems often the order of the day among the very clever people who deal with the efforts of programme producers, I should like to voice the feelings of a crowd of quite ordinary listeners and express our appreciation of the work done by those who arranged the recent broadcast of the BBC series, *Gilbert and Sullivan*. Many years have passed since, as a youth, the writer received his introduction to a theatre where he saw *The Mikado* at the Savoy in London. The recent broadcast will have helped many New Zealanders to capture the thrill of wholesome fun that the genius of those masters of music and verse brought to English people through a long series of years. At the last broadcast we said farewell with something of a lump in the throat to Sullivan and Gilbert, whose artistic greatness we realised as we had not done before. What a gift they were and are to British people. We in this country are the richer for having had brought to us in so masterly a way the story of their lives and their achievements.

W.J.D. (Eastbourne).

PLAYS FOR NEW ZEALANDERS.

Sir,—In "Angry Listeners," Ngaio Marsh suggests that if "low-brows" were to listen to plays by Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, and a dozen other dramatists who have woven their plays round marriage, ownership of property, prize-fighting, moral responsibility, the colour-bar, the attraction between sexes, betting, strikes, social diseases, or keeping up appearances, they would probably find they enjoyed plays that made them use their wits.

The programme sounds bleak to me. I can imagine many New Zealand women who, by setting themselves to dwell on their immediate worries, and their fear for the final fate of themselves, and their families, could work themselves into such a fit of the "willies"

that they would regard Ibsen as pure farce. And I can imagine many busy members of the listening public finding much of G.B.S.'s wit as so many wise-cracks not always in the best taste; while I can see intelligent if not intellectual youths, when faced with the works of a dozen other playwrights muttering "Gosh! I'm sick of propaganda."

I do not think it is the "low-brow" New Zealander's fault that he does not listen to good plays or listen to bad ones. It is that the wrong kind of good play is presented to him.

It will spell the end of acting when people go to a play to think instead of living an experience. It's the low-brow's right to applaud and huzzah when the play pleases and hiss and throw missiles when it displeases. The only pity is that the missiles often fall short and hit the wrong victim.

"BEGGARS CAN'T BE CHOOSERS" (Dunedin).

TRUNCATED BROADCASTS

Sir,—Here are two angry complaints from one evening's sporadic listening. The recreated Caruso discs from 2YA on Sunday, June 20, made a singular presentation with the absence of the last published number in your journal, viz. "Ombra Mai Fu." Caruso's perfection is too rare for such a miserly offering. Lack of running time could not have been the tyrant, for a substitute number was played.

Even more annoying was the decapitating of Wanda Landowski's playing of "The Harmonious Blacksmith." The third variation was just under way with amazing dexterity when suddenly—the rest was silence.

What are we supposed to be? Groundlings with our ears split?

CLIFF DOWE (Mosgiel).

FOOTBALL WITH TOM BROWN.

Sir,—May I pay a compliment to those responsible for the preparation of the material for the Broadcasts to Schools given last Tuesday afternoon (June 15). The script-writer, and the commentator, Winston McCarthy, did a wonderful job of Tom Brown's football match; in fact so good that I hope the recording (which must have been made) will be presented at a suitable date to a larger audience (i.e., the dads as well as the lads). It was a grand performance.

APPRECIATIVE (Marlborough).

FOLK SONGS

Sir,—Replying to your correspondent, L. Etherington, in the introductory volume of the *Oxford History of Music*, A. H. Fox-Strangways contends that a folk song: (1) Originates with the voice, not with an instrument; (2) its rhythm is affected by the words; (3) it is not written down; (4) it is conceived a melody without harmony. Another authority states, *inter alia*, in dealing with folk music, including folk dances, that folk music may be described as traditional melodies, the spontaneous expression of national temperament in popular tunes, and essentially an art of the peasantry. While the words of the song mentioned were by Ben Jonson, who gave it the title "To Celia," it is included in a book of folk songs and though its origin appears to be obscure, it is quite possible that it may come within Fox-Strangways' definition.

HAROLD WHITE (Wanganui).