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The Itinerary

THE most important sentence in the Prime Minister's statement on the Royal Family's itinerary will probably prove to be these five words: "No variation can be made." It would have been intolerable to have had public bickerings over the claims of different localities for more time or a different time, even if there had been a chance that the result would have been general agreement. There is never any chance of satisfying everybody in such a situation, and it would have been calamitous to try. The important question is not who sees the King first, but who will not be able to see him with a reasonable effort and at reasonable cost. We of course all want him to see us too—to see where we live, and how, what our district has of grandeur or quiet beauty, and what our reactions are to the whole purpose of his exhausting journey. But it does not matter in the least in what order he sees us or we see him, and it does matter that we should be found when he does come to be reasonable human beings who can swallow local disappointments and meet him smiling and satisfied. Meanwhile it is worth plotting the route on a map to get a God's-eye view of the development of New Zealand in a hundred years. Most of us forget that settlement still clings to the coast—or to a coastal strip seldom as much as 50 miles deep. To meet four of his people out of five the King has seldom to go farther inland than a bird will fly at sunset to roost. The fifth person whom he will thus miss is certainly most important: he is the man who has pushed farthest into the wilderness, and fought and won the loneliest battle. The King will particularly wish to see him, to see his wife and his children, and let them feel his interest in them. But that man will get to see the King: he is not afraid of distance or troubled by discomfort—and it will not be his voice that will be heard, if any voice is, crying out for more consideration.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

UP IN THE CLOUDS.

Sir,—After reading your leading article "After Many Years," in the issue of August 13, I feel that there are two matters concerning Dr. Comrie which might be corrected.

First, so far as I know, he is not at present Superintendent of H.M. Nautical Almanac Office. He did hold this office from 1930 to 1937, but has since established a private business known as Scientific Computing Service Ltd. This has become a business venture of national importance in England, as those acquainted with its inside story know.

The second matter concerns the sentence, "If philosophy fails us when we have reduced all knowledge to symbols, have we not floated too long and too high in cold thin air?" I do not understand what were the full implications which might have been intended in the question. If, however, it is suggested that Dr. Comrie is up in the clouds too much, then I wish to point out that nothing could be further from the truth. If ever there was an intensely practical man, penetrating the clouds if necessary in order to produce further practical benefits, then that man is Dr. Comrie.

The man who "went over the top" in 1918; who transformed the Nautical Almanac into a very practical volume; who did not invent calculating machines to carry out his computations, but explored existing commercial machines, and succeeded, thus saving much money in many spheres of national and international life; who in World War II sweated in the production of millions of figures used by the forces—this man cannot be said to be up in the clouds. The bombers flying over France on D-day, and releasing the bombs according to tables produced by this man, may have been in the clouds at times, but the man himself had a firm grip on the solid ground. This was only one among hundreds of jobs performed by him during the war, and it was work requiring a little more than a philosophy which may exist in cold thin air.

I. L. THOMSEN (Carter Observatory).

DEPRESSING PLAYS.

Sir,—I wish to protest against the morbid, depressing plays put on for our entertainment on Friday evenings. Why not cheerful, jolly plays like *The Man in Possession*? It was a most enjoyable change from the gruesome things we often have, all about crime and murder. What good are they supposed to do? They neither cheer nor uplift and this weather we need something cheerful.

A. MINEHIN (Mangamuka Bridge).

"CARMEN"—OPERA COMIQUE

Sir,—It may be misleading publicity that calls *Carmen* grand opera; I do not know. But the French libretto calls it an "opéra comique." The tragic ending—which seems to be almost an accepted convention of "grand" opera—shows that the words do not mean "comic opera" in our sense. The term simply means an "opera" containing the usual arias and choruses, but interspersed with spoken dialogue. This is how the work was given when I last saw it at the Opéra Comique with Conchita Supervia singing and speaking the title role in French. The current performances according to the two broadcasts I have heard contain no spoken dialogue. This

version, I take it, must be a later arrangement, for Bizet died so soon after the first performance that it is difficult to see how he could have written all the recitatives.

Gounod's *Faust* too was an opéra comique, when it first appeared in 1859. It is now given in Paris without spoken dialogue—but only at the Opéra not at the Opéra Comique. The original version was revived as a historical curiosity in 1932. Curiously enough a criticism I still possess by Gustave Bret mentions that *Carmen* has been relieved of its dialogue "for performances in foreign languages" and that the dialogue in Italian versions of Rossini's *Barber of Seville* is replaced by recitative.

It is probably Italian opera that Anglo-Saxons have vaguely in mind when they use the senseless term "grand opera"—though the Italians themselves do not use it. So strong is the Italian convention that the English firm of Boosey

LISTENERS' GUIDE

LAST week's issue of "The Listener," containing the guide to the new station frequencies and call-signs, was sold out soon after distribution. Extra copies of the guide, however, can be obtained from "The Listener" Publication Department, Box 1707, Wellington. These will be posted to any address on receipt of twopence a copy in stamps.

used to publish French operas like *Faust* with text in English and Italian (not French). Further, if I am not mistaken, the first London performances of Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* were given under an Italian title.

To expect the literary merit of Mérimée's story to be reproduced in opera is futile. Just consider the history of the Shakespearean operas, *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, where *Romeo* and *Juliet* must be alive at the same time at the end to sing a final duet. So in *Carmen*, you must have a soprano, hence the introduction of Micaela. (*Carmen* herself being a wicked woman, must be a mezzo or contralto—like Delilah.) Luckily (for the librettists) Mérimée was dead when the opera appeared, or he would probably have had something to say about it, as Victor Hugo did when Verdi's *Ernani* appeared in Paris.

As for words, when you begin to translate, especially for voices, your troubles really begin. The French words translated as "Come and buy one" are actually "A deux cuartos, a deux cuartos." A slightly more accurate translation would be "Half a dollar, half a dollar," but this of course would be open to other objections. In fact, the absurdity of operatic conventions to a people with a dramatic tradition are insuperable. But once you have learned to stomach some of the less egregious, *Carmen* is as good an opera as most and far better than dozens one could name.

A. C. KEYS (Auckland).

DANISH SHORTWAVE SENDER

Sir,—I hereby take the liberty of informing you that Denmark is erecting a new powerful shortwave sender. So far regular broadcasts have not been instituted, but experimental broadcasting

takes place every week-day between 4.0 p.m. and 7.0 p.m. GMT, corresponding to 4.0 a.m. to 7.0 a.m. New Zealand time. The power of the transmitter is 50 kw. From 4.0 a.m. to 5.30 a.m. the wavelength is 19.75 m. (15.165 kc/s.) and from 5.30 to 7.0 it is 31.51 m. (9.520 kc/s). During the first one and a-half hours the beam is directed to Greenland, Canada and U.S.A. and will also cover New Zealand. No direction of the beam is arranged between 5.30 and 7.0, which will probably mean that the broadcast cannot normally be heard in New Zealand.

I shall be very pleased indeed if any reports from listeners who have been able to get the new Danish station could be forwarded to me.—KARL I. ESKE-LUND (Royal Danish Legation, Wellington).

TALENTED WOMEN.

Sir,—Marion Waite in a recent discussion on radio programmes complained that there is not enough New Zealand talent on the wireless and at the same time said that with a household of three to look after she had no time to study *The Listener* for programmes. As she is obviously a stranger to New Zealand and to *The Listener* I would point out to her that New Zealand women's best talents are not such as could be advertised on the air. Marion Waite should visit the Plunket Rooms, Karitane Houses, Women's Institutes, Women's Division of the Farmers' Union, and similar gatherings and see the wonderful and varied crafts and cooking displayed. True, we have our bad cooks and untrained housewives who whimper about work, but they do not come under the heading of talented women. New Zealand women are talented and able gardeners, horsewomen, and dancers. Marion Waite should see our farmer's wives catering for musterers and shearers at shearing time when their day's work begins about 5.0 a.m. and ends at 8.0 p.m. Many New Zealand women have a horror of becoming narrow-minded—they like to hear the great performers overseas—to hear the best the world has and so be able to judge if New Zealand has anything really good to offer. Marion Waite should also see New Zealand women catering for a large gathering in the country such as dog trials, sports meetings and so on when really good food is put on free, and at the end of the day she will see these women spruce up and be found as hostesses at the dance that generally winds up these occasions.

And she will hear no complaints from them that they have no time to study *The Listener*.

SOPRANO (Palmerston North).

CORRECTION.

Sir,—Being responsible for handing over Mr. J. McAllister's collection of early Taranaki photographs to the Turnbull Library, I feel that I must correct your caption of a pioneer landscape (*Listener*, 6/8/48) as having been taken by the late J. McAllister. Mr. McAllister is still very much alive.

S. A. KILMISTER (Stratford).

(We are happy to make our apologies to Mr. McAllister.—Ed.)

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS.

"Pig-Islander" (Gisborne) and several other correspondents: We have no more space at present for comparisons between Christianity and Communism.