

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

THE NEWSPAPERS.

Sir,—Second-hand and shop-soiled knowledge was aired by Dr. S. Musgrove, Professor of English at Auckland University College, and Mr. J. Laird, lecturer in Philosophy, in 12B's citizens' forum on the New Zealand Press on Sunday evening, September 5. Throughout the discussion they did not seem to know what is meant by "news value." The fact that a newspaper prospers indicates that it is providing what the public wants. The journalist, through trial and error, is able to select what is news.

Professor Musgrove's first criticism was of "indirect distortion of facts." He based this charge on "filtering of news" and on "plugging certain lines." By filtering he meant the selection by overseas news agencies (some of whose correspondents have been New Zealand journalists) and/or local sub-editors of what they consider to be the most important news. In this case, the recipient newspaper office relies on the judgment of these experienced journalists; it must also take account of the short time available for getting the news to the people. By plugging he meant selection over a period of one topic or source of news for especial prominence. In supporting this accusation, Mr. Laird

said that in the recent Auckland waterfront dispute "the wharves got publicity out of all proportion to their importance." The continued prominence given to the dispute was justified by its obvious interest for many of the public. The same holds for most cases of so-called plugging.

Could Professor Musgrove give concrete examples in support of his next accusation, that news is slanted to lead readers to certain conclusions? In Mr. Laird's instance of the air crash between a Russian fighter and a British plane over Berlin the essence of the news was that at the outset the British authorities protested to the Russians that the Russian fighter should not have been flying in the area. It was not, as he suggested, played up by the newspapers as a possible cause of war.

Could either Professor Musgrove or Mr. Laird explain exactly what they meant when they said that the presentation of news in New Zealand papers was not only sensational but dull? In spite of their insistence on the presence of such a conjunction, the two are absolutely incompatible.

"There should be only limited space given to advertising," said Mr. Laird. If advertising were limited too drastically the cost of one copy to the reader would be too great a daily expenditure,

and if there were no advertisements the cost of one copy to the reader could be measured in pounds rather than pence.

We think it regrettable that two men so prominent in the University should be so ignorant of the workings of the Press in this country. Mr. A. K. Turner, the third member of the panel, although not a working journalist, is to be congratulated for combating their ill-considered arguments.

S. G. GAPPER and R. A. MELVILLE
(Auckland).

THE STATE AND LITERATURE.

Sir,—I have been interested in the correspondence evoked by the broadcast "Should the State Patronise Literature?" Like fellow scribes I think I could broadcast a convincing talk on "How the State Discourages Literature." So much freelance writing is labour in vain, and returns from New Zealand contributions are so meagre, that the classic story concerning Socrates sitting with Phaedrus on the beautiful banks of the river Ilissus seems apt. Socrates told his companion that the grasshoppers chirping and jumping round them were once authors, and being obliged in their original state to live without food, to sing in summer and pine in winter, Jupiter transformed them, as most suitable to their circumstances, into grasshoppers; those animals being enabled by nature to live without food and to support themselves by the dews of Heaven.

The taxgatherer pursues the freelance journalist for his whack of the meagre earnings that fall from the editorial table. Not only must the writer pay income tax on his literary contributions, but he must also pay an additional impost on those earnings under the heading "Income other than salary and wages."

And the taxgatherer has no faith in the honour of freelance journalists. He insists that the editors deduct for Social Security, and remit what's left over. I'm one of that unfortunate tribe who has acceptances in countries where a higher regard for literature prevails, as well as higher payment.

But I've discovered that the New Zealand taxgatherer is not satisfied and now demands his share from my pound of flesh earned outside New Zealand. Surely the New Zealand writer who can command the literary field abroad is valuable as a publicity agent and should be rewarded instead of being pursued by the remorseless taxgatherer. Where is the P.E.N. Club?

SCRIBE (Oamaru).

PLAIN AND FANCY SCIENCE.

Sir,—On re-reading "Plain and Fancy Science" I see that your reviewer found sufficient facts to satisfy him that Peattie was a sound botanist but not sufficient to give a judgment on the soundness of his biology. So I must remain

DISAPPOINTED (Dunedin).

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