

LISTENER

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Entertainment and Art

G. B. SHAW wrote to *The Times* recently suggesting that civilisation was doomed unless it provided itself with a new political dictionary. Though civilisation has a habit of surviving its dooms, Shaw was right in saying that one of the causes of world strife is confusion in the meaning of words—or as he put it, the pot calling the kettle black and neither knowing what black is. And he need not have said political words only. A cable message last week made Lord Samuel say that "art has become non-moral" now that "crime is entertainment and murder a parlour game." Though it is not likely that Lord Samuel said it in precisely that way it is significant that this was found to be the easiest way of reporting him. It was the easiest because it was the least accurate. Crime may be entertainment, if we have a kink that way, but when it is entertainment only it is certainly not art. It of course can be art; but it is not art when it begins and ends as a parlour game. There are as many definitions of art as there are of goodness and of truth; none of them quite satisfying. But art is always in some important way an expression of life itself and not of some hollow imitation of life. Murders and adulteries can be the material of art because they are among the experiences of life that the human race so far has not been able to avoid. They are art not because they are inevitable, but when they are inevitable and are worked by genius into the pattern of existence. If entering into the result is entertainment, we can't use the word for the shallower forms of sensation, the mere shocks and thrills and sensual titillations that Lord Samuel was thinking about when he made his protest.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

DO WE NEED A NATIONAL TRUST?

Sir,—Mr. Fairburn is to be congratulated on his article "Do We Need a National Trust" (September 3). I think there is no doubt that we do, or at any rate some organisation of similar responsibilities and powers. Casting my mind casually over New Zealand it would seem that some of the more obvious monuments have been saved from destruction, but there are small tragedies occurring every day, which are no less tragic because of their smallness.

The history of any country is made up as much, if not more, by the day to day activities of its citizens, as it is by great national events, and in a way our own early history is one more of individual effort and fortitude than of outstanding national achievements. For this reason many of our "monuments" may, at first sight, appear insignificant, even worthless. Such, for instance, as the little bond store in the heart of Wellington through which passed the first goods for the support of the little settlement which is now our Capital City. I am sure that anyone with any imagination will, if he stops to think, realise the tremendous value to us of these small reminders of the courage and vision of the people who gave us our country.

I realise the difficulties ahead of sorting out what should or should not be preserved, but as a first step could not a panel be set up to make a survey of the whole country? This panel might consist of an architect, a historian, a geologist, and a botanist—and there may well be others. The business of this panel should be to investigate, record, classify and advise on all buildings and tracts of land which they think should be preserved. They should also see that the result of their work gets into the right hands.

It is a very big job, but much of their work will be that of co-ordination as I know that a great deal of valuable work has already been done by both official and private organisations. But, whatever is done, let us have as soon as possible a responsible body to whom we can all go with confidence, for a considered and enlightened opinion on these matters.

NANCY NORTHCROFT (Waimai).

ORPHANS AND ORPHANAGES

Sir,—The article "Orphanages without Orphans" in *The Listener* (20/8/48) calls attention to a fact which has been well known for years to those in close touch with questions of Child Welfare, but which has been practically unknown to the general public. Of the 3,000 or 4,000 children in homes and institutions in New Zealand a very small proportion are total orphans. It is not a new situation. An examination of the *New Zealand Year Books* shows that in 1925 the number of total orphans in orphanages was only about 7 per cent, and it showed a downward tendency to about 5 per cent in 1938, when the system of publishing these statistics was altered. It is now probably not more than 3 per cent.

But does not this fact imply a criticism of the Committees and Councils in charge of these orphanages and homes. While commending most heartily their interest in, and work for, the children, should they not have considered it part of their duty to have educated the public on the real (as distinct from the purely financial) needs of the institu-

tions and the social conditions that gave rise to them. One feels that they were content to "cash in" on the sympathy which the pathetic picture of a homeless orphan would evoke and limit their concern to the raising of funds. The daily papers and radios this month are giving publicity to a "Combined Orphanages Appeal" in Christchurch. Yet probably only half a dozen of the 250 children in the "Combined Orphanages" are total orphans.

I write to advocate that all committees, councils, etc., of children's homes maintain, as well as management duties and money-raising organisations, a research department to study the social conditions that produce the children seeking admission to their homes: work out remedies for them and educate the public to needed reforms. The ultimate aim of an orphanage ought to be to close its doors.

PEGASUS (Waimate).

Sir,—Your footnote to H. C. Mathew's letter in your issue of September 10 is so churlish that it cannot be let pass. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research would not publish a book unless written by an authority on

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a particular subject and furthermore such books do not usually become generally read. To class Mr. Mathew with the usual run of authors and sneer at him is quite unjustified. He and his wife have received a Carnegie grant for six months to travel in the U.S.A. to study penology with particular emphasis on juvenile delinquency. Needless to say the Carnegie Institute does not make such a grant lightly and Mr. and Mrs. Mathew's qualifications need no further mention.

H. E. RUSSELL (Invercargill).

(Mr. Mathew needs some protection from his friends. *The Listener* did not question the value of his book or his knowledge of juvenile delinquency. It expressed surprise that he should have complained publicly of lack of appreciation as an author.—Ed.)

Sir,—Mr. Mathew may have earned your reproof for advertising his soreness as the author of a forgotten book, but the fact remains that his book does cover very thoroughly most of the points raised by Mrs. Mirams, and many more besides, and that it should be known to everyone who wants to consider himself informed on the subject. If it is forgotten, that is because of the same public apathy Mrs. Mirams rightly complains of.

DENNIS McELDOWNEY (Papanui).

COMPOST HEAPS

Sir,—The Gardening Expert, speaking from 2YA recently, said that dock and couch roots should not be put in the compost heap, as they would grow. I consider that he should have added "unless sufficient heat is generated to kill the roots." This is a serious matter as it may involve the loss of tons of potential humus so sadly needed by our overworked soil. Only last week I saw several dray loads of couch raked off a paddock—destined, not for the fire, but for a compost heap, along with stable litter. That heap is now steaming merrily.

When I moved into this town section, the back garden was a wilderness of tall

grass and weeds, including a perfect mat of convolvulus. When I got down to forking the soil I was able to fill the barrow with convolvulus roots in an hour or so. Those roots have all gone through the compost box, together with plenty of docks and other things.

L. T. M. BODLEY (Hastings).

(Station 2YA's Gardening Expert replies as follows: "Mr. Bodley is quite right in drawing attention to my omission of the phrase 'unless sufficient heat is generated to kill the roots.' My remarks were meant to apply to small gardens, where the owners seldom have stable litter, etc., or enough other material to generate the heat needed to kill convolvulus and other noxious weeds."—Ed.)

CROSSWORD PUZZLES.

Sir,—What about cutting out a lot of this Shakespeare, Byron, Milton stuff in favour of something more practical? They are more like examination papers on classical literature than crossword puzzles, and your subscribers are not all teachers or professors with a reference library. I used to look forward to *The Listener* puzzles but I don't lately.

"HAD IT" (Timaru).

FRUSTRATION.

Sir,—Speaking of our promising young musicians, Guy Marriner says in your issue of September 10: "It worries me to think of the undeserved frustration and disappointment many of them will meet with." The gap between aspiration and achievement is, with most of us, so wide, that a feeling of frustration is a common experience, particularly after we have passed middle-age. Our promising musicians can hardly expect to escape the general doom.

The crux of the matter is found in the needs of the artistic temperament. The young musical genius, practising alone, or on a desert island, can enjoy the thrill of sublime achievement, and if some of the mush uttered about "art for art's sake" is valid, this should be satisfying. But it is not completely satisfying. The genius not only wants to feel that he, or she, is a masterly or brilliant practitioner. The craving for pre-eminence is so strong that the corroborative testimony of a packed audience and thundering applause and a full till in the box-office are required. The truly artistic ego is, so to speak, a worthwhile facet of our common human vanity, and the aspiring artist these days will feel frustrated if the foregoing gratifications are not experienced.

This gratification is only possible in the highest degree where there are vast concentrations of civilised beings, as in Britain, the U.S.A., or a restored Continent of Europe. New Zealand can do nothing about it because the population is too small and scattered to provide compensating thrills or a comparable sense of distinction. So we must expect our promising young folk to follow in the footsteps of Natska, Farrell, Horsley and the others.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).
(Abridged.—Ed.)

I'S AND Q'S.

Sir,—I listened with interest to the first broadcast of this programme and thought it achieved its aims. I feel, though, that more stress should be put on accurate information. This session certainly tested nobody's I.Q. except perhaps the one who formulated the questions. Nevertheless, it was exercising and entertaining and to a certain extent informative.

My only criticism is that 15 minutes is not long enough for this type of programme.

B.R.G. (Wellington).