

## The King's Illness

THE King's illness has been so widely and so deeply deplored in the daily newspapers that *The Listener* can do little but repeat what has already been read. It is not necessary to say again that the news has brought anxiety as well as disappointment, or to remind our readers again of the uneasy link between man's proposals and God's. But it may be worth pointing out that it has pleased Providence not only to accept our plans but to accept them in a way that the nation did not expect. For this is not the postponement that most of us carried as a possibility in the back of our minds. It has always been realised that the Royal family's journey might be delayed for another reason—a reason that has not yet been removed; it is everywhere accepted that all journeys, those proposed by King and those proposed by commoners, are subject to the retention of health and strength, in other words are "God willing" journeys. But God is so often willing that we are shocked when He is not. We allow for the veto of men, but only formally for the No of Fate, and are usually thrown into confusion when it comes. The wise woman in George Macdonald's novel who said that "God is aye agen planning" is the kind of person most of us find a nuisance. Most of us in fact find God a nuisance, or Providence, or Fate, or whatever we call that power beyond ourselves which can make nonsense of all our cleverness. But it is worth pausing a moment or two to consider how ridiculous our wisdom and strength always are when destiny takes a hand against us. A little pressure on an artery of a humble man in Buckingham Palace and months of planning by whole nations go suddenly out of gear. There is no reason to doubt that the irregularity will be corrected—that the King in a month or two will be completely well again, and that New Zealand and Australia will still see him. But whether the visit is delayed or indefinitely postponed the moral is the same—God is often against the kind of planning in which most of us so confidently indulge.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## "THE NEW ZEALAND VOICE"

Sir,—Into the maelstrom of controversy that will no doubt develop from your publication of Mr. Andrew Morrison's entertaining broadcast on the "New Zealand Voice," may I toss the following:

One thing that has charmed me particularly during my tour of the Dominion is the high level of the speech of New Zealanders. Speech in England is a thing of extremes, from the absurd affectation of the ultra-Oxford accent to the slovenly carelessness of low class speech. The standard speech is that spoken generally by educated people in London, and that standard is probably more closely approached in New Zealand than in any other part of the world. One may miss the variety of dialect, but in Dunedin one can hear as pure Scots speech as is heard in Edinburgh.

The tourist paying this tribute to New Zealand speech was none other than Dame Sybil Thorndike, in an interview given to the *New Zealand Herald*.

J.W.H. (Wellington).

## THE NEW ART

Sir,—I have been wondering where are the bewildered people whose letters you spoke of (*Listener*, 8.10.48). Subsequent writers on art have not expressed bewilderment, but certainty. They praise; they condemn. They quote authorities; yet they are in conflict. Will this not cause the bewildered still more bewilderment?

Perhaps it is unbecoming for a bone of contention to up and speak for itself—but if someone were to say just what perplexes him in this troublesome art, might there not be more benefit than in watching the random course of a battle among experts?

M. T. WOOLLASTON  
(Upper Moutere).

## THOSE CROSSWORD PUZZLES

Sir,—I have been hornswoggled into assisting in the solution of your crossword puzzles by my wife, otherwise I would not get a look at *The Listener* for at least a week. Now to obviate all this bother I have two suggestions to make: (1) That you offer a prize of £100 or so for the solution of your puzzle; (2) that you supply the crossword puzzle in the form of a loose-leaf supplement.

My reason for suggesting the prize-money is that I will have to assist in the solution in any case, so I may as well be paid for my trouble. I am sure there are many overworked husbands like myself who will appreciate these suggestions.

"ORCHARD ROAD"  
(Brown's Bay).

## OLD VIC FAREWELL

Sir,—There has been some comment on the opening of Miss Ngaio Marsh's admirable compering of the Olivier broadcast programme. She was understood to suggest that in respect to visits from theatrical companies New Zealand had been a desert, to whose inhabitants the Olivier season was something new. Naturally there were murmurs in which memory spoke of many such seasons in times past. I suggest that Miss Marsh said rather more than she meant. She had particularly in mind years immediately past, which have certainly been

barren. Unfortunately these years of a world twisted out of shape pile up, and generations have arisen that have no personal knowledge of the old life of free intercourse of things of the body and the mind, when one could travel as easily as one could buy and sell. Service in this country by theatrical companies from Britain, Australia and America, was part of that intercourse. We expected new flesh and blood entertainment just as to-day we expect new movies. It does not abate a jot of our appreciation of and gratitude to the Oliviers to say that there were strong men before Agamemnon.

It is noteworthy that when this little society of ours was much smaller and poorer, it was well provided with

## 2YA TRANSMISSIONS

WORK which is at present being done on the 2YA aerial tower at Titahi Bay has made it necessary for the station to operate during daylight hours on a temporary aerial. As a result, the station's daylight signal may have been weaker than usual in some districts, and this may continue for another week or two until work on the tower is finished. Transmissions at night, when the normal aerial can be used, have been unaffected.

Shakespeare and classical comedy. In my centennial history of Wellington (1939) I said of the seventies and eighties that "Wellington saw more Shakespeare in a given time than it has since unless we except the courageous enterprise of Mr. Allan Wilkie in recent years." H. E. Nicholls, lover of the drama and indefatigable amateur, recorded seeing twelve performances of *Hamlet*, with nine different actors in the part, between 1875 and 1892, and seven of *Macbeth* between 1875 and 1883. Some Shakespeare plays were staged then that have rarely if ever been seen since. For example, I am as certain as I can be that *Henry IV* has not been played in my time, which means, that we have not seen the real Falstaff.

About the end of this period I saw my very first play. It was *Julius Caesar*, with an American actor named Milne in the lead. A few years later we had *Henry V*; George Rignold was majestic in presence and magnificent in voice. The screen version is the finest picture I have seen, but the stage production had its points. I cannot attempt to go over the various companies that gave us plays of all kinds in the intervening years. We were not served as well as we should have been—Shaw, for example, was almost entirely neglected for a long while—but we had many memorable experiences. In one year, 1912, we had Oscar Asche with *Kismet* and three Shakespeare plays; H. B. Irving (son of the famous Henry) as *Hamlet* and in non-Shakespeare parts; and Ethel Irving, a London star of high standing, in plays by Somerset Maugham and A. E. W. Mason. Besides visiting stars, we saw young players who were to make their name. Edmund Gwenn (the Earl of Loam in *The Admirable Crichton*) was

one. Of the then living players who provide the illustrations for my edition of the Collins *Shakespeare*, at least ten came to this country. I have seen twenty-two of Shakespeare's plays done by professionals, and twenty of these have been in New Zealand. Some of them I have seen several times. Of the other two, one I could have seen here.

The players who did most for Shakespeare in this country, at any rate in my time, were the Wilkies. I am without a complete list of what Allan Wilkie staged, but the list includes several

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"rare" plays—*Henry VIII*, *The Tempest*, *Much Ado*, *The Winter's Tale*, *King John*, *Richard III*, *Measure for Measure*, *Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. We should also remember Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson during the 'thirties, and Fay Compton in the play about Queen Victoria. By then the legitimate stage was feeling more and more the competition of the screen and the pressure of rising costs. The old days in the theatre were good days. If the world recovers its sanity they will come again. Meanwhile we have our memories, and the last of these is of the Oliviers and their company.

ALAN MULGAN (Wellington).

## BREAKFAST AND DINNER MUSIC

Sir,—May I offer my support to those listeners who have complained of the quality of the breakfast and dinner sessions broadcast from all stations. Although I long for a little music earlier in the day I find I must wait patiently till 2.30 for the classical hour, and then get no more till evening. By this time my listening faculties have deteriorated and the later programmes have only half their real value for me. Since many other listeners must be in a similar position, it ought to be possible to give us something really worth while with which to start the day.

N.C.J. (Murray's Bay).

## MUSIC FROM ASHBURTON

Sir,—May I wholeheartedly support W. H. Graham in his appreciation of the Ashburton Study Group? I tuned in to 3YA about nine months ago and heard this delightful singing and since then have not missed a performance. I have never heard such artistic and beautifully harmonised singing from any overseas stations. I would like to suggest that the National Film Unit should make a sound film of this choral group.

F.E.I. (Christchurch).

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"Pommy" (Matakana): You should address your complaint to the Marketing Department.

"Quiescent" (Feilding): Your suggestion has been forwarded to the appropriate quarter.

P. M. Campbell (Christchurch): Prelude in D Minor, Op. 28, No. 24, played by Hurd Hatfield.

L. Johnson (Seatoun): We don't mind you being rude to us, if there is reason in your rudeness. It would assist your protest against "inaccuracies and misconceptions" if you made some attempt to substantiate the charge.

Roy C. Smith (Hawera): To give effect to your suggestion would entail more space and labour than you realise, and more than we have to spare. Books reviewed in our pages are generally available from leading booksellers or, in some cases, from publishers' representatives. The address you ask for is: British Council Representative, c/o High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, Government Life Insurance Building, Brandon Street, Wellington.