

** For Women -*

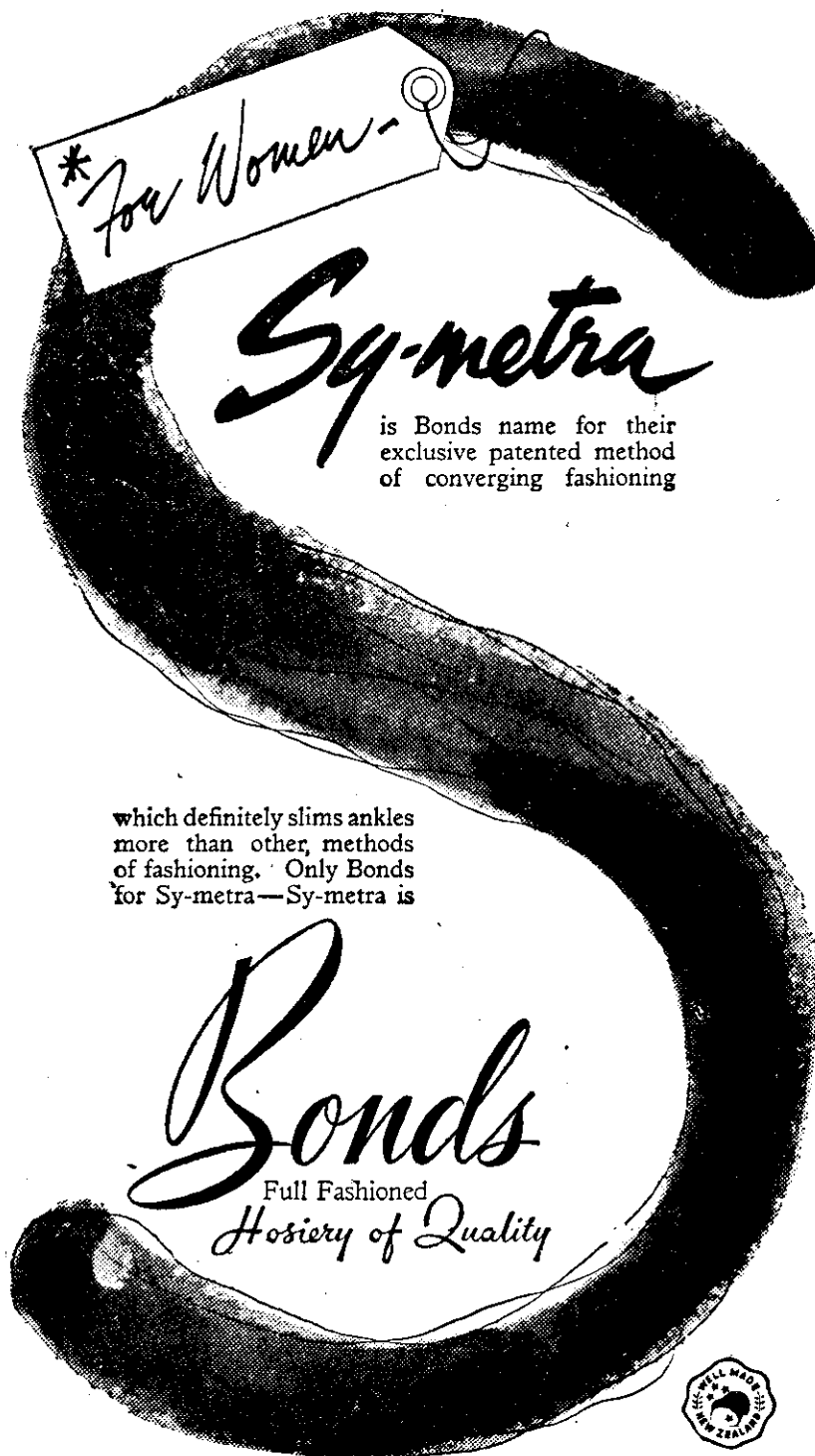

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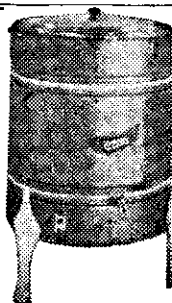
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LONDON LETTER

(continued from previous page)

Twenty Questions, a radio version of "Animal, Vegetable or Mineral." Its place as the most popular broadcast of the week has been taken by Wilfred Pickles' *Have a Go*, which I believe is now being tried as an export to New Zealand. Pickles has a huge following here; he is writing his autobiography at the moment, to catch the market.

The Writer Wronged

THE State's complementary wrongs of taxing authors as if for income on what is really their capital, and of "communising literary property after less than two lifetimes" (G. B. Shaw's phrase) are up for discussion together at present. A letter to *The Times* from Mr. Shaw has raised the one matter, and the suggestion of the late Rupert D'Oyly Carte that the Savoy Operas should be nationalised to save them from vandalism when the copyrights expire has raised the other. They are closely related in effect.

Mr. Shaw pleads for a renewal of the arrangement (not now in force) by which authors could average their income over three years for tax purposes, and claims that a man who attempts to live by writing is a gambler at odds no book-maker would touch. How writers envy their fellow gamblers on the turf and the Stock Exchange whose gains are untaxed, he sighs.

A writer may spend ten or twenty years of his life in working up to one book which will reward him for those years, only to see most of the royalties go in tax, as if they had been earned all in one year. In Australia, the sheep-farmer, who has to reckon with droughts and flush years, is allowed to average over a period of two or three years; but the writer may not, and so the author of *The Harp in the South* is said to have lost most of the prize which she was to have won from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and royalties too. This for an example near to home, though I cannot check the details from here.

Mr. Shaw also asks: "Why is property in turnips made eternal and absolute when property in ideas is temporary and conditional?"

The writer has to gamble against tremendous odds; when they do turn in his favour, the State snatches the prize from him, however he may have deserved it; he follows a profession that has no pension; when he is dead and his copyright runs out, the property is seized without compensation and left to anybody to exploit and mishandle (in the tricky field of reprint publishing). Officially, it "passes into the public domain." Mr. Shaw calls this "throwing

it out of the window and into the street."

Charles Morgan (also in a letter to *The Times*) makes an attempt to appeal to the Government's baser instincts in the matter; he points out that at present many English authors of world-wide fame could earn thousands of dollars for Britain by accepting some of the enormous commissions that are offered to them, but which they refuse because they would get practically nothing for doing them.

The suggestion has already been made that instead of surtaxing successful authors, the State should tax reprints of books on which copyright has expired; or that it should tax reprints and set up a fund on the proceeds to help writers. This latter method bristles with difficulties. But not with nearly so many as face the unlucky writer who works for years without reward and then sees the fruits of all his patience go in income tax simply because they all ripen within one arbitrary fiscal year.

The Savoy Operas

IN the case of the Savoy Operas, there is another factor involved. It is not merely that throwing the copyrights into the public domain might throw money into the air for whoever could catch it, but that in their production the works might be vandalised. D'Oyly Carte was anxious to protect the standardised productions and see that Gilbert and Sullivan could not be jazzed up or played about with. This is different from the proposition that the gains from free exploitation of dead authors' works ought to be taxed to offset the difficulties of living authors; but it might involve some of the same problems.

Hannen Swaffer has collected a symposium of views on this question. Here are snatches out of some of them:

Sir Malcolm Sargent: "The operas are indeed national assets. If they could be protected by an Act of Parliament I would be all in favour."

Bernard Shaw: "All copyrights should be nationalised on their expiration. This cannot be done by throwing them out of the window into the street as at present. . . . As a playwright, I have to compete with Shakespeare, who charges no author's fees. I might as well be a linkman or a water-carrier competing with municipal street lights and taps in every scullery."

John Masefield: "I trust that the fumbling hand of the bureaucrat may be kept off any work of art anywhere for the little life remaining to me."

Sir Alan Herbert: "Much as I like the Savoy Operas, I think a little fresh treatment of them would not be a bad thing."

Sir Kenneth Barnes (Principal of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art): "I feel that the public taste and not the Government should really be the guardians of good tradition."



FOR "The Yeomen" fresh treatment?