

Brass Bands

WE are pleased to find space in this issue for an appeal for more sympathy for brass bands. Although our correspondent is in error when he says that we made no reference at all to the contest in Auckland, we could have given more space without risking a complaint from some other correspondent that we had given too much. We gave all the information we had—all, that is to say, with which we were supplied—but we do not suggest that our responsibility ended there. We say simply that owing to staff difficulties we could not at the time cover the event more adequately. But when our correspondent goes further and says that "the bandsman is looked down upon" we must say in reply, first, that the charge is not true, and second, that if it were true, his is not the best method of meeting it. His reference to "waterside bands" (in quotation marks) is particularly unfortunate, since no one cares who produces the music he hears if he likes it. If there were any social issues involved the position surely would be that no one likes a watersider so well as when he is making music. It may have surprised some people—but if it did that would only be because they should have known better than to be surprised—that the best players of sacred music in Auckland were watersiders; but even if it surprised them it must have given them a great deal of pleasure. It is not because of their occupation that bandsmen are ever criticised or ignored, but because there is a fairly wide aesthetic gulf between the music usually played by brass bands and that usually played by the "cellists, harpists, and so forth" in symphony orchestras. Our correspondent is however right in saying that if the coverage we gave bandsmen were "on a par with their keenness and unselfishness" we would have space for nothing else. We might even, if we did that, have a considerable circulation, but it would come from one section of the musical public only, and it is our difficult task to cater for all sections.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

BRASS BANDS.

Sir,—I beg to express my regret at the most inadequate coverage given by your journal to the New Zealand Brass Bands annual contest at Auckland.

This is a most important event to thousands of bandsmen throughout New Zealand, yet I was unable to find one small reference to the contest in any of your columns. As this takes place only once a year and many bandsmen are unable to attend, some sort of preview in regard to this event should surely have been forthcoming and would have been appreciated by the bandmen staying at home. As a matter of fact, a column every week devoted to brass band affairs would be read avidly by your bandsmen subscribers.

Reporting of brass band matters is very poor throughout the Press of New Zealand, but a journal like *The Listener* devoted to broadcasting programmes and the people who go to make them would be the most logical place to find reference to such an occasion.

In no musical sphere will one find a keener musician than a bandsman; in fact, many musicians could well emulate his keenness and his team work. It is unfortunately true that the bandsman is looked down upon. Why? Are there too many "waterside bands" and are they socially inferior to violinists, cellists, harpists, and so forth? I think not, yet they are practically ignored. My complaint also concerns the NZBS. Last Sunday I, in common with many more, was listening and enjoying the Hymn Test when the commentator stated there may be time for one more band before the Children's Service commenced at 5 o'clock. Why could not this service, being of purely local interest, have been diverted to 1YC or 1YD so that listeners as far away as the South Island could have heard their bands competing on the more powerful 1YA? Why do not the Broadcasting authorities let us hear the "A" and "B" grade tests in their entirety and divert the normal programme to the smaller stations? This is what happens when Parliament is sitting in Wellington, and I think most people will agree that a band contest is much more educational and cultural than listening to Parliament night after night for weeks.

I would conclude, Sir, with a plea for more news about the bands and a little more support for the bandsman and his activities. If the coverage was on a par with his keenness and unselfishness, you would have room for nothing else in your otherwise excellent journal.

BAND CONDUCTOR (Masterton).

(We refer to this letter in our leading article.—Ed.)

TWO SHEEP STATIONS

Sir,—*"Sundowner's"* articles have a particular appeal to me as my own interests, on a more provincial level, take me into odd corners of this district whenever opportunity offers. His recent account of visits to two Canterbury sheep stations happens to parallel a similar kind of visit I have just paid to a sheep station, not so famous, perhaps, but equally historic. I find myself amazed by the contrast in our mental states and, may I confess, frankly prejudiced in my own favour?

Why on earth should a grown man visiting anyone for information have such reservations in his mind as he describes? Furthermore, why on earth the naive surprise that a family who have lived in a place for a long time should be proud of it and interested in it? My own experience tells me to expect that my interest will be shared or at least appreciated, and this does not only apply to farming but even in the destructive atmosphere of sawmilling. And after all every serious farmer must be something of a naturalist, for farming is essentially applied natural history. The answer perhaps is in *"Sundowner's"* reference to *Tutira*—I get the impression of a slightly bookish flavour, as though knowledge were not real until it is in print.

If my aim were merely to express surprise this letter would not be worth writing. The difference in our attitude of mind rings a bell in answer to a question that has been in the back of my mind for some time, and particularly since reading Professor Lipson's book on the working of democracy in New Zealand. His contention is that equality is the predominant driving force of democracy. I think he makes his case—we are impelled rather by a hatred of injustice than by a sense of brotherhood, and one feels the lack of that sense of fraternity that makes the co-operative movement for example such a power in the North of England, in contrast to its struggle for existence here.

What I am concerned about is this, that too much brooding over possible injustice makes neighbourliness, in fact, impossible, so that while the traditional greeting remains "Good-day, mate," the unvoiced attitude becomes "I wonder where this joker has got the edge on me." And so in building the classless society we re-erect the barriers in our own mind as fast as we break them down, and become, so to speak, internally class-ridden. This may offer a clue as to why our new world seems to be turning sour on us, and *"Sundowner's"* article has helped me to understand the reasons.

There are no two ways about it. Either all men are brothers or all men can be pigeonholed by race, language, occupation, or politics. May I tell of an incident which showed me clearly at the time which side of the fence I was to come down on?

A party of New Zealanders, abandoned on the French railway system, have sighted an unattended case of army rations lying on Etaples platform. As they are in the act of helping themselves they suddenly find a large bearded French soldier looming over them. For a moment the situation looks awkward, but the combined resources of the party eventually solve the language problem. No, he is not the owner, but could we spare him a tin of bully? It is a trivial story perhaps, but something clicked in my mind then that has served me ever since in different parts of the world—that all men are brothers.

ERITA (Havelock North).

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Sir,—I do not wish to be abusive, but I would like to say, "enough of this sentimental twaddle about dogs!" The truth of the matter is that we New Zealanders are more hygienic than the English, not more cruel.

I lived in England for nine years. While living in Wallasey ("the bedroom of Liverpool") I was revolted by the common practice of dog lovers. Almost every little suburban home had its pet dog, who slept inside. But in these blocks of houses with their tiny backyards a problem arose: where could the animal satisfy the major call of nature? Quite simple. Each morning it was taken for a walk and the pavement, preferably in front of a neighbour's house, was used for the purpose. It was almost impossible to walk along the pavements without slipping and becoming befouled.

And now to a loftier scene. I have walked along the main street of Cambridge and seen a haughty young lady calmly stand until her large dog (on its lead) had left its disgusting deposit on the pavement (not in the gutter). Then with superb insouciance she walked away.

I have stayed at a boarding-house in Cornwall where the huge hound of a fellow guest fed noisily from his master's plate on the floor beside us. The plate was then replaced on the table to be washed with the common stock.

Truly their ways are not our ways, and in those respects I hope they never will be.

ETHEL M. DUFF (Christchurch).

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Sir,—I fully agree with Joseph McEvoy that a grave omission has occurred in that the Wellington group of the National Symphony Orchestra has not yet given us a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. His suggestion that the players should manage both the instrumental and vocal parts has the merit of originality and opens up new vistas for the work of the orchestra. Even the hardest worked horn player should have enough breath left to join in the chorus when he is not otherwise occupied. As for the violinists, they are simply wasting their time by sitting and playing, when their vocal chords could resound in giving us some of the finest music Beethoven ever wrote.

But why stop at that? Any violinist worth his salt would often combine the first and second violin parts by the simple expedient of double stopping, thus freeing some of his colleagues to augment other sections of the orchestra. Could we not emulate those great show artists who manage to play the mouthorgan, the piano, and the drums simultaneously, by introducing the same principle into symphonic music? Surely a trained musician should be able to manage two instruments at the same time!

I always finds the enforced idleness to which the tympanist is subjected between his often widely spaced entries most aggravating. Most musicians can play the piano. The tympanist may not be very eminent as a pianist, but surely he could play the solo part in a piano concerto instead of doing nothing. After all, what Liszt can do, he can do.

VERSATILE (Wellington).

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENT
S.H. (Musselburgh): Our thanks, but the subject was fully covered in our last issue.