

JUNE 10, 1949

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Oliver Duff

A TRIBUTE to Oliver Duff, who has now retired from the editorship of *The Listener*, would be out of place if it were not also an appraisal of the man and his work. Mr. Duff has shown many times in this column that men and ideas can be examined candidly without offending against truth or good manners, and although he would have preferred to slip unobtrusively into retirement, he is the last person to claim immunity for himself. We are grateful to Mr. E. H. McCormick for supplying a tribute in what may be described as the Duff tradition. It does not tell the full story; there is much else which, like the anecdotes Mr. Duff reserved for his friends, is not for publication. But that is true of all men, and few of them have a richness of personality which can overflow once a week into a column of good writing. It is a short column; but concise writing is always the hardest, and in his best vein Mr. Duff has been able to say a great deal in three hundred words. There is, of course, much more to him than a talent for saying what he thinks in clear and economical prose. The leading article became the sharp edge of a mind which elsewhere in the journal was a sustaining and directing influence. Behind the growth of *The Listener* can be traced a mature development of character. "Mature" is the proper word, for Mr. Duff's friends know that the final phase has not yet been reached. They look for writing which can be done, without restraint, in the full range of interest outlined in *New Zealand Now*. His achievement in journalism was to do something new in this country, and to do it so well that those who follow him must aim at standards which seem alarmingly high. Yet a creative task does not come suddenly to an end. We shall be thankful to draw upon the reserves of vitality which *The Listener* has acquired from an expansive and robust personality.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, JUNE 10

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS**A DEFINITION OF CULTURE**

Sir,—Dr. J. C. Beaglehole is widely regarded as a literary man, but I question certain of his statements and writings with regard to T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. Dr. Beaglehole's review of this book in *The Listener* went far enough, but he went even further in public at the recent Books Brains Trust, when he denounced the book as the second-rate writings of a first-rate writer. Further, he said that Eliot, a director of the publishing firm of Faber and Faber, was deliberately using his firm's honoured imprint in order to hoax people into buying what he must know to be a second-rate work. In your review he admits that he didn't know what to say about the book after he had read it, and so had turned to *The Times Literary Supplement*, but even then was not "much further forward." It is a happy thought that had the *Supplement* thrown a little light on the Eliot book, some of it may have been deflected through the doctor.

As it is, one can only regret the utterances which arise from a reviewer's frustration. The second-rate writings of a first-rate writer are, after all, more to be desired than a second- or third-hand review of them.

L. JOHNSON (Seatoun).

CIVILISATION ON TRIAL

Sir,—Your book reviewer M.H.H. is surprised that Professor Arnold J. Toynbee "should be anxious to prove that our present culture in the west has better chances of survival than its predecessors." M.H.H. prefers "to adopt the 'tragic' view of human destiny, which gives hope only to the climbing spirit." He jumbles together as "great religious leaders" — Confucius and Lao-Tse, the Buddha, the prophets of Israel and Judah, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammed and Socrates." Surely this reveals a tragic lack of differentiation, of perceptivity of the fruits of Christian civilisation. Should not the "logical" approach be a determination to do everything possible to foster and spread the Christian ethic and practice rather than to insist upon "the tragic view of human destiny?" This groping towards the notion of some diluted, nebulous, spineless "climbing spirit" will enable little headway to be made against the materialism of the world to-day.

J.T. (Remuera).

WOMEN'S HOUR

Sir,—I must express my appreciation of the Women's Hour daily at 11.0 a.m. from 2YA. It is most instructive and entertaining with one or two reservations. I much prefer to-morrow to to-morra, for example. I think the day I enjoy most is Wednesday, when very provocative topics are discussed by three most intelligent women. I like the questions to remain in serious vein rather than to be flippant and light (as recently suggested). But in a recent discussion one of the panel referred to women's pages in newspapers as being only suitable for those of "low mentality." Against this I must protest.

M.J.H. (Hunterville).

BRINGING UP BABY

Sir,—Mrs. Macaskill's talk and Mrs. Toplis' comment in *The Listener* form the familiar pattern of a presentation of new ideas in child-raising and the

horrified response of a parent intensely trained in another tradition. Everyone seems to have such definite ideas on that subject. I myself am grateful to the modern approach, which had persuaded me before my first baby arrived six months ago to be as much observer as trainer, and, quite aside from the fun it is turning out to be, I am becoming convinced that a baby comes provided with instincts which make a good deal of training unnecessary and even harmful. For instance, my baby is at the stage of wanting to give everything the taste test, and since his enthusiasm extends to what we more conservative adults consider proper food, like carrots, I am satisfied to let him gnaw away on whatever takes his fancy, including toys, blankets, even the fire tongs, but excluding the things that might really do him some harm. So far, there are no signs of the feeding problem we have been hearing so much about ever since parents thought it was their duty to keep children from putting things in their mouths and feed them a diet on schedule. I am sure that if Mrs. Toplis would some day watch her child completely absorbed in making mud-pies she would realise that to the child, mud-pies are as serious as meat-pies to the mother.

As to the proper costume for serious play, perhaps a little girl who is told to go play in a pretty starched and ironed dress feels much as her mother would if someone gave her a satin evening frock to get tea in, with the admonition that it cost a lot and she would be ungrateful to get it dirty!

ELIZABETH PALTON

(Christchurch).

NOT MR. SEDDON

Sir,—In the issue of *The Listener* for May 13 was published a photograph purporting incorrectly to be that of the late Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon.

This error is much regretted, but it is due to the fact that the negative bore the identification given by the photographer. A negative is difficult to identify for certain, and when it was selected by your representative, we had no further occasion to check its accuracy. We tender our apologies to the descendants of Mr. Seddon, and also to those of the Rev. Dawson, whose portrait it actually was.

I should be glad if you would give space to this explanation in your columns.—C. R. H. TAYLOR (Librarian, Alexander Turnbull Library).

BACK TO DIXIE.

Sir,—I would like to express my appreciation of the type of music presented by the "Auckland Dixieland Seven," from Station 1YA on Tuesday evenings. It is a welcome change from the sloppy sentimentality of most present-day recordings to listen to this group of musicians who typify the spirit of the early days of genuine Dixieland jazz. ERROL J. RAE (Wellington).

THE ROYAL ODE.

Sir,—With dismay I read in *The Listener* of May 27, the Royal Ode by Ruth Frande. On a third careful reading of the so-called poem I found myself baffled as to its meaning, and unable to understand one single line in the whole forty-line effort. To me there is neither beauty, music, nor rhyme. I

could detect neither feeling nor inspiration. It struck me as a mere intellectual exercise in the modern style of verse-writing, in which style I have come across some truly lovely things.

As a reader of poetry for the last fifty years, as a student of poetry and as a verse-writer myself, I may claim to know something of what I am talking about. Ruth Frande's "Royal Ode" can surely give but scant pleasure to even the most conservative readers of poetry. H. E. GUNTER (Palmerston North).

STUDIO RELIGIOUS SERVICE.

Sir,—May I offer my congratulations, as C. M. Maclean (Wanganui) has done, to those who were responsible for the conception and broadcasting of the Presbyterian service from 2YA on Sunday, May 1. I, too, felt the scholarship and thought that had gone into the script. It was indeed inspiring to hear profound truths expressed so reverently, and I too sincerely hope we shall hear more of this type of service.

May I add my appreciation of our announcers. Their voices and enunciation and their respectful attitude to subject and public are a credit to our country.

E. FREEMAN (Wellington).

GRAND OPERA.

Sir,—Could not something be done for the Opera loving listeners. The station libraries must be teeming with records of international tenors, sopranos, etc., which would provide great pleasure for thousands of New Zealand listeners. One only has to read in the papers of the crowds turned away because they were unable to gain seats during the recent tour of the International Opera Company to realize the popularity of Grand Opera. If we had, say one hour each Sunday night set by or even half an hour, it would help in no small way to satisfy the Opera-starved public of New Zealand.

OPERA LOVER (Petone).

WEATHER FORECASTS.

Sir,—Like "Nib-Nab," I (and most of the people I know) miss the Dunedin weather through our minds having left the uninteresting remarks about Taihape and Wairarapa . . .

If every time one's station returned to the air after a weather report, our local announcer would say, "You have just heard the Dominion Weather Report. Repeating the local part of it, etc. . . ." the change of voice would bring us back to the matter in hand, and before switching off we should have the information for which we switched on.

JOHN ADAM NASON (Dunedin).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"Gee Whiz" (Christchurch): Outside our terms of reference.

Miss M. Preece: Would you please send us your address.

Carol N. Rowe (Palmerston North): Thank you. Your appreciation has been passed on to the officers concerned.

Thomas I. Wright (South Dunedin): Our last information was that adjustments were still being made to the reflector, but we hope to have more news soon.

"Would-be Musician" (Wellington): Letters for publication (even friendly ones) should carry the name and address of the writer.

Technically Interested (Christchurch): Owing to telephone lines suitable for the transmission of music not being available, it is necessary to receive 2YA at Gebbie's Pass and rebroadcast through 3YA. Fading from 2YA cannot be avoided and it may, at times, produce a harshness of tone momentarily.