

LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

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Growing Pains

THE story of *The Listener* in its first ten years may be found elsewhere in this issue.

A decade is a short time to be alive, even in print; but there are times when to be alive is a sort of miracle, and in its infancy *The Listener* had to live dangerously. It struggled as it grew: if there is virtue to be taken from conflict, the child should now have a certain toughness. Radio covers the whole of life; and this journal, if it is to reflect the interests of its readers, must speak of many things. We shall please everybody about the same time that the last criticism is made against radio programmes. Meanwhile it is instructive to glance through the files and to see what has been attempted, what has been retained and discarded. There have been mistakes, and undoubtedly we shall make more in the future; but if features are discontinued it is because they have ceased to be valuable or practicable. *The Listener* has made experiments: it has reached out widely in its special field, and it has come always to the discovery that the limits to what can be done—apart from the obvious limits fixed by official status—are determined by the community it serves. In ten years there have been notable advances in broadcasting, in education, science and the arts; and they have had their influence in our pages. If there are further advances, we hope to take part in them. Growth is never comfortable, and sometimes it can be painful; but it is also an adventure. The evolution of *The Listener* in the next ten years will be, as it has been in the past, an essential part of the story of New Zealand. And that is a story which, in spite of the pessimists, should be worth telling.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

A DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Sir,—It is regrettable that E. A. Olssen takes so many words to say that he does not like Dr. Beaglehole's review of Eliot's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* without succeeding in saying on what grounds he disagrees. It appears that your correspondent is one of the unfortunate admirers of Mr. Eliot's pontifical mannerisms and is irked by Dr. Beaglehole's forthright opposition to Eliot's sentimental attachment to "culture." Your correspondent offers only one point of actual criticism: he pours scorn on Dr. Beaglehole for saying that Eliot wishes to revive the 18th Century when Eliot does not even mention the 18th Century. If your reviewer were more widely acquainted with both Eliot's work and the history of Europe he would realise that that is in fact exactly what Eliot meant—though he may have refrained from saying so because he presumed he could rely on a minimum of historical knowledge in his readers.

The issue, however, goes deeper; and I wish Dr. Beaglehole had not been so lenient towards Eliot. Eliot is a newcomer to European culture, always desperately self-conscious of his colonial background; and lest he be found out, he had made himself the intransigent defender of all those cultural values which have actually already been discarded. The real vitality of Western culture, is about to create a society which is similar to modern democratic colonial society. Eliot fears that he might give himself away as a colonial if he approved of those values of Western society which correspond to the ideals of the New World. It is not surprising therefore to find that Eliot's style of writing is tortuous and that his thought processes are involved and incoherent. The form of his prose betrays the lack of integrity of the man. If his integrity were above suspicion he would face the issue of change and employ his gifts in finding out what new values we could aim at in our rapidly changing social pattern. But his pompous lack of imagination forces him to abide by the old. What a deplorable contrast to A. N. Whitehead, who said just before his death in the U.S.A. two years ago that he welcomed even the atomic age because it would reveal a new horizon to the human mind.

PETER MUNZ (Wellington).

Sir,—To "disentangle" a number of statements from their context and throw them together so that they are made to seem arbitrary and incompatible, as J. C. Beaglehole does in his review of T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, is indeed (as he half suspects) to gully the book. Dr. Beaglehole does not really discuss a single one of Mr. Eliot's assumptions or statements; he merely records his complete disagreement with them, apparently making different assumptions himself (with which he seems to assume the reader's agreement), and thereupon dismisses the book. For example, he quotes a passage, "The writer himself . . . paying lip-service to culture," and asks "Is that arrogance or mere pettishness?" Whatever else it may be, it is difficult to see that it is either of these, unless to someone who reacts to the ideas contained in it too violently to consider them coolly.

The trouble seems to be that Dr. Beaglehole dislikes Mr. Eliot's whole

position, and especially the political implications of some of his arguments. Well and good; but he does not examine the position and the arguments; he simply concludes that Mr. Eliot must be wrong, and rules him out of court. He complains that the book is a political tract, but fails to see that in reviewing it he has written one himself, putting one set of political prejudices against what he takes to be another set. He has, to put it plainly, made use of popular political prejudices to discredit the book. Not that he was wrong to bring in politics, for politics is the aspect of culture of which we are most keenly aware to-day; it was only a pity to blame Mr. Eliot for recognising that they cannot be kept apart.

The questions which the book raises are too complex and too important to be dealt with in Dr. Beaglehole's summary fashion, which I fear does the subject a disservice. It is reassuring to note that not all your readers have been misled by him.

CHARLES BRASH (Dunedin).

Sir,—Mr. Olssen has pointed out with effective pungency how Dr. Beaglehole, in his review, committed most of the errors of which he accused Mr. Eliot. To his comments I should like to add one point. Dr. Beaglehole, after asking: "What is the general theme?" sets out a number of statements that are, without exception, perfectly comprehensible in the light of Mr. Eliot's earlier writings. After this he imagines that the book is so completely debunked that he apologises for his lack of respect. Such wilful failure to understand suggests an unconscious realisation on Dr. Beaglehole's part that the very foundations of his equalitarian, progressive philosophy are being attacked. Indeed, his conduct recalls that of the Victorian clergy when confronted with Darwin.

D. M. ANDERSON (Dunedin).

THE ROYAL ODE

Sir,—I concur in the criticism made by H. E. Gunter on the winning entry. My further criticism is that the competitors were instructed to write something that would be "an expression of New Zealand's homage to the Crown." The judges have awarded the prize to an entry that has as much to do with that as Hamlet's soliloquy has to do with the production of butterfat. I imagine that Their Majesties will be considerably puzzled to discover what the winning entry has to do with them.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).

Sir,—A good many of your readers will have been amused to note your heading for the prize poem. There must be odd quirks in the minds of the judges which enabled them to admit the verses in competition for the much advertised "Homage to the Throne." One who lived for 30 years under Victoria cannot hope to be very enthusiastic about current verse, but the first 32 lines do give an interesting account of the coming of the Maori in a typical, if turgid, example of the "New Writing." At this point the poet seems to have remembered the advertisement and, conscientiously but without pleasure, to have sprinkled the words "king," "kingdom," and "crown" in eight lines.

Is it possible that the judges decided that thrones and homage have no place in New Zealand verse of to-day? Or was their real aim to set a record puzzle

for the country's composers? Yes, Mr. Editor, I was one of the other three hundred and eleven.

SEMPER FIDELIS (Mapua).

ARTISTS AND THE COMMUNITY

Sir,—How long have artists been cognisant of their own importance in the community? I mean collectively; one knows, ever since there has been any record of their lives, that they have mostly been aware of it individually. It would appear from their writings in your paper that in this country at least they are banded into a sort of mutual admiration society whose chief aim is to tell each other how much their respective works are appreciated by those whose opinions count: to wit themselves.

Apparently they take it for granted that they are the most competent persons to judge the respective merit of each other's work. I question this if only on the grounds that art is primarily concerned with the conveyance of ideas. Indeed one might go so far as to say that the artist is chiefly concerned with purveying his own particular and peculiar feelings and impressions. To accept the statement in the popular jargon of art that an artist is concerned with "expression" implies that he would express himself irrespective of whether he had the prospect of an audience or not. Knowing human nature one knows that such a case would be rare indeed.

If it be conceded then that the artist as such is primarily concerned with exhibiting his reaction to the experience of life, surely his best judges are any who chance in their acquaintance with his work to feel the implications; while the measure of his true greatness is determined by the quality of the responses evoked.

PHILIP A. HOWELL
(Christchurch).

LYSENKO CONTROVERSY

Sir,—I have noticed your article by Dr. O. H. Frankel on the Lysenko controversy. I would welcome many more on the same subject, but unfortunately I think Dr. Frankel is only trying to help to stir up confusion and an anti-Soviet feeling. He makes out Lysenko to be an illiterate man who has gained power by disposing of other men to get their positions. Dr. Frankel gives us four explanations to try to account for the death of Professor Vavilov and not one of them is satisfactory. Professor J. B. S. Haldane has already answered Dr. Frankel and the *News Chronicle* in Britain on the Lysenko issue. The workers who know Haldane, and the thousands of students who have listened to Haldane, know that he is not a "yes" man. Because of his political views Haldane has had to spend much of his own money that he should have received from the Government. Haldane still does not agree 100 per cent. with Lysenko, but he is not afraid that Lysenko will come to Britain to bump him off. Dr. Frankel admits that up until 1935 the Soviet Union led the world in research stations for plant and agriculture. Dr. Frankel tries to make us believe that Lysenko is so stupid that he would take a non-winter hardy wheat to the far north where it is below zero and that it would grow. Anyone knows that it must be crossed with another hardy wheat to give it at least a chance of growing.

J. COCKBURN (Taylorville).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS
D. Harvey (Auckland): *The History of Spiritualism*, by Arthur Conan Doyle.