

## A DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Sir,—For a number of reasons, we must all be grateful to your correspondent, Dr. Peter Muntz. Following Dr. J. C. Beaglehole, he has finally exposed the pretensions of this Eliot who has hoodwinked his contemporaries for a quarter of a century. The fellow is now revealed as a *nouveau riche*, his extensive writings as a shoddy facade built up to conceal his humble origins. True, he often refers to his native "colony," but this is merely the trick of a master charlatan, the device of an artist in hypocrisy—an artist in nothing else, I need scarcely add.

As a dabbler in criticism, I owe a special debt of gratitude to your correspondent who, in one flash of insight, has disclosed the formula sought after by philosopher-critics through laborious centuries. How simple it is when it is set down and how ridiculous that it occurred to no one before the Muntz era! If a man's style of writing is tortuous, if his thought processes are involved, he clearly lacks integrity and his writings are therefore worthless. We may now dismiss not only Eliot but such obscure artists as Donne, Coleridge, Henry James, James Joyce, and also, I fear, Karl Marx. Conversely, we are now free to admire the prose style and character of Willie Jones of Standard Four, author of the prize-winning essay, "How I Helped Father Build Our Fowlhouse." There is simplicity for you, there is coherence, there is integrity! (I confess to some misgivings about the specimen of prose Dr. Muntz has provided for our inspection; but to pursue that subject further would be ungenerous to our benefactor.)

Again, as a "colonial" myself, I must thank Dr. Muntz for adopting the prophet's mantle to assure us that "The real vitality of Western culture is about to create a society which is (sic) similar to modern democratic colonial society." It will soon be possible for us "colonials" to move at ease in a Europe divested of the irritating, even intimidating, expressions of an "unreal" vitality. In place of restaurants we shall find fried-fish shops; cathedrals will have been converted into picture palaces; and where centres of humane study once flourished we shall meet with schools of "social work" and political "science."

My final words of acknowledgment must be reserved for Dr. Muntz's revelation of the death-bed utterance of A. N. Whitehead. If I may indulge myself in a fancy (spun from a long-discarded European mythology) I find satisfaction in the spectacle of Professor Whitehead's arrival at the portals of Heaven, there greeted by the souls of those expunged at Hiroshima. I hear their mild voices raised in timid approbation: "We thank you, prophet of the Atomic Age; our mental horizon surely has been widened."

E. H. McCORMICK  
(Auckland).

## "ISRAEL IN EGYPT"

Sir,—To those radio listeners interested in the broadcast of *Israel in Egypt* on June 8, I should like to explain that I was unable to appear owing to illness contracted on May 30. I make this explanation because, although my name was advertised in *The Listener* and in the radio column of *The Press* of June 8, the 3YA radio broadcast did not even state that I was being replaced, when announcing the tenor soloist. I might mention that on Saturday, June 4, a

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

North Island station made it clear to its listeners that, because of indisposition, I had to be replaced as soloist for the Royal Wellington Choral Union. That statement earned my grateful appreciation.

THOMAS E. WEST  
(Christchurch).

(The following comment has been supplied by the acting Station Manager of 3YA: "Station announcements made before the broadcast gave the names of the four soloists taking part in the performance. It is regretted that the reason for the substitution of the tenor soloist was not mentioned in connection with the broadcast.")

## SAM CAIRCROSS

Sir,—It is regrettable that your correspondents who criticise the work of Sam Cairncross should do so on inadequate reproductions instead of originals; the camera at the best is a poor medium through which to assess the work of an artist. For instance, judging from photographs of Mr. Schoon's work one gathers that he is merely an illustrator, whereas if one were to see his canvases he might be considered as a member of the more dignified group of artists. The pontifical judgments of your correspondents under the circumstances are more distressing than the cheap art that clutters the walls of our academies.

The extent to which Cairncross merits our serious attention was, I think, displayed at the recent private exhibition of his work held in Wellington. The composition of "On the Hooks" destroys the superficial resemblance to Rembrandt's "Flayed Ox," and is an important piece of work. It puts the backbone of New Zealand on canvas for the first time. A more effective production as a work of art, in my opinion, is the "Dead Rabbit," which, for conception, composition and vitality, reaches a standard not previously attained by our artists. That Soutine has handled the same subject in no way detracts from Cairncross's effort. In fact, observers who have seen the work of the European artist consider Sam's equally good. I can only say I find it completely satisfying.

Two other canvases at the exhibition show that Sam has moved a long way from his 1947 work, and indicate that he is still developing. One, "Haining Str." captures all the ugliness of a disappearing Wellington sore spot. And he does so without the slick amateurishness of the local academicians. The second, a still life has much of the solidity of Cezanne with a control over his technique that makes for convincing work.

Important as his work in oils is, it is possible that in his drawings the artist displays the individuality and genius

that will make his work live. The outstanding drawing of the exhibition, in my opinion, was that of a "Chinese Girl." Most of Cairncross's contemporaries have tried their hand at Chinese subjects; but he has done more than dabble in the exotic. He has succeeded in giving us a personality in which femininity and strength combine to give an ageless quality to the drawing and make it a completely satisfying experience. That is the quality of "great art." This is characteristic of his best work in crayon; it is also present in his oils, and is a justification for regarding Sam Cairncross as the most promising artist yet to appear in New Zealand.

RODERICK MACIVOR  
(Wellington).

## BOOK REVIEW SESSION

Sir,—It was a pleasure to hear Professor Algie's talk in a recent ZB Book Review. This session appears to be the meeting place for a mutual admiration society of a few publishers and a few writers in our "neglected" local market, but for once a person well known outside this disappointing circle was permitted to speak. Most New Zealanders realise, when they think about it, that local writers are poorly rewarded. But is this Book Review helping them to think about it? We are shown that books, like soap tablets, have a personality on the air. We feel that the reviewers and the authors are usually great pals, and that the ZB Book Review will tell the public the truth. We feel it, but we do not believe it. Listening might be easier if the reviewers were humble; if the authors' "explanations" lacked vigour, if the chairman—who is usually well-experienced—would concern himself with why some books are "good" and others "bad" and leave the detailed work for the rest of the speakers.

P. CORBETT (Auckland).

## GRAND OPERA

Sir,—In your issue of June 10 "Opera Lover" (Petone) makes the naive suggestion: "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." I would recommend him to scan and use the programmes given him each week in your paper. Had he been doing so, he would have seen that, for years now, there has always been at least one grand opera put over the main stations every Sunday night. Thus the very issue of *The Listener* which prints his letter advertises Borodin's *Prince Igor* over 4YA on

Sunday evening, June 19, from 9.22 to 10.30—eight minutes more than he begs.

During the week also, operas in full or by instalments have been consistently scheduled for the main stations ever since your paper started. In addition, a very large part of each day's output—often advertised, often not—is grand opera numbers. All this without mentioning the flood of opera put out daily by the smaller stations. I would have thought the opera-lover rather over-catered for, more especially as grand opera is by no means the highest form of musical and literary art.

F. K. TUCKER (Gisborne).

## CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Sir,—In a partially disinterested way I have been following the weekly correspondence on cruelty to animals. However, a recent letter by N. M. Bell has provoked this reply. Mr. Bell says that "The real cruelty done to animals . . . is the ruthless slaughtering in the prime of life of weaker living beings solely for the benefit of the slaughterers." One is led to the conclusion that the author is a strict vegetarian whose pets (which we assume a writer showing such benevolence to the lower animals must have) are forced to ransack garbage tins in order to obtain their normal diet of meat. One can't help congratulating Nature for showing considerable forethought in providing our fellow vegetarians with at least one commodity, milk, which does not necessitate the wilful murder of the donor. Further thought would show that N. M. Bell's home would not contain any useful by-products of the slaughtering industry such as glue, soap and frying fat (anyway, there wouldn't be anything to fry except fish and eggs). No leather volumes would grace the bookshelves, and your correspondent's shoes would probably be shod with ersatz leather. He says that "the slaughter-house is the greatest blot on human civilisation." Perhaps he would prefer a population of bovines and porcines roaming the land under the benevolent gazes of our friends, the vegetarians. I fail to see how the fatalistic philosophy of this correspondent regarding the future social suicide enters the discussion of the strong killing the weak. The point at issue is whether or not primary produce should be used for the maintenance of the community. I would say that there appear to be no indications that the familiar red and blue striped carcasses (so beloved by Sam Cairncross and Rembrandt) will disappear from our sawdust-strewn shops for many years.

CORPUS DELICTI (Dunedin).

## FIRST RUGBY TEST COMMENTARIES

LISTENERS will be able to hear Winston McCarthy's running commentary on the first Rugby Test, relayed direct from South Africa, if they tune in to 2YA at approximately 1.0 a.m. on Sunday, July 17. If they don't want to sit up all Saturday night, or even to set the alarm clock for that time of a Sunday morning, they will be able to hear a recording of the commentary which will be re-broadcast from the main National stations at 9.0 a.m. the same day. Although broadcasting conditions between South Africa and New Zealand are still far from perfect, they are expected to improve with the approach of finer weather. Nevertheless, listeners should not be disappointed if they find it difficult to distinguish every word. Winston McCarthy's commentaries on provincial matches (as distinct from his short reviews of play heard on the morning after each match), although not broadcast direct to New Zealand from South Africa, are all being recorded over there and the recordings flown to New Zealand, where they are being broadcast from 2YA after the 11.0 p.m. News as soon as they arrive.

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"Peda Pulaki" (Warkworth): The star Sirius.

F. W. Davis (Paeroa): Many thanks. Your suggestion has been adopted.

Listeners' Own (Gisborne): The programme department is making inquiries.

J.W.S.S. (Auckland): You are right, but these things are sometimes done intentionally.

"Ready, Aye Ready" (Gisborne): The talk was given by Douglas (not D'Arcy) Cresswell.

J.I. (Dannevirke): Your questions were probably answered on page 7 in our issue of June 17.

The Flea (Wellington): It was not sung in any opera, but was one of many songs composed by Moussorgsky.