LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

BROADCASTING AND DEMOCRACY

Sir,—Has "tirade" a new meaning known only to Sir Thomas Hunter? The *Oxford Dictionary* defines a tirade as "a piece of vehement denunciation or rant," a definition which cannot be applied to Dr. Gascoigne's talk. This is the type of emotive inaccuracy which, in part, makes limits on the freedom to broadcast necessary. The expression of all shades of opinion is, I suggest, inherently dangerous since it allows persons to express opinions without being compelled to give reasons for such opinions. Any radio speaker who is allowed to speak could say anything, and power of influence, of expression and construction could avail more than reason. Hitler was irrational, but his manner convinced.

Persons who set out to propose complete freedom of the air should be sure that they, at least, are precise. Moreover it is surely discourteous to dismiss such an important talk as part of an argument on some other topic, to label it as a tirade and advance not one good argument against the talk or in support of its dismissal as a tirade. Allow freedom of the air by all means, but prevent those from using it who are not willing to support opinions with arguments and facts. If Dr. Gascoigne failed in that, then Sir Thomas Hunter could easily have said so.

IPSO FACTO (Wellington).

Sir,—Your correspondent T. A. Hunter does not, I think, appreciate that a democratic instrument is properly one for the tolerant. "Dr. Gascoigne," he says, "delivered a tirade against the secular solution in education." This talk was a criticism of the value of secular education. Your correspondent did not agree with it, so it becomes a "tirade." Is this near-vituperation really necessary? It is natural for us all to value our own opinions, but I do not see the necessity to deride those who question them.

Apparently there is still resentment because the neo-pagan, pseudo-scientific series *How Things Began* was suspended. To have broadcast this one-sided (one might say, bigoted) series of lessons without presenting alternative theories would have been the undemocratic thing. As there was no provision for such criticism during the course of the lesson, and in view of the widespread opposition, the department quite properly suspended the series. It would appear that your correspondent is resentful because of the non-infliction of one of his pet theories upon the children of New Zealand. D.C. (Feilding).

Sir,—I sincerely hope that our broadcasting authorities will give urgent and earnest attention to the thoughtful letter from Sir Thomas Hunter. His arguments for a broad-minded and tolerant investigation of modern thought upon all that concerns the progress of humanity are impressive and logical. Bishop Barnes and others are doing a most valuable work in replacing tradition by truth, as they see it; and many of us would welcome talks, discussions, or sermons on the air, in which their latest research could be made known.

ENQUIRER (Whangarei).

A DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Sir,—Nothing would be easier than to return Mr. McCormick's intemperate abuse. But I shall say nothing about such things as his thoughtless gibe at A. N. Whitehead. Obviously the form of my first letter annoyed him; and I am willing to admit that it was probably too pungent. But perhaps if I state once more why I think that J. C. Beaglehole's criticism of T. S. Eliot was fully justified, the admirers of Eliot from Auckland and Dunedin will feel tempted to defend his views instead of abusing his critics.

T. S. Eliot has made at least one good point—namely, that culture is not a top-dressing to a society which has materially grown rich, but something inherent in society as such. It is the sum total of a society's manifestations and expresses itself as clearly in economic relationships as in religion. This has been true for over a hundred years. But I think Eliot is justified in stating it once more since there are only too many people amongst us who believe that culture is the final polish to a society.

There is, however, another reason why Eliot made this point. He wanted to persuade his readers that only one special kind of society has "culture" and that all other kinds of society have none. He believes that only a hierarchical society exhibits culture and that an egalitarian society does not. This seems to me a clear fallacy: if one agrees that "culture" does not mean "top-dressing," then one must admit that also our egalitarian society must have a culture. But Eliot wants to discredit egalitarian societies by maintaining that they will have no culture.

Apparently T. S. Eliot uses the word "culture" in at least two senses. In the first sense it means the sum-total of a society's manifestations; in the second sense it means the special values of T. S. Eliot (and of Messrs. McCormick and Olssen), i.e., a hierarchical order of society with a special form of religion. This confusion of the two senses of "culture" seems to me quite unpardonable in a book which was written to define the meaning of culture.

However, the main issue is Mr. Eliot's claim that hierarchical societies have a monopoly of culture. I feel that this view is due to his lack of imagination (it is very puzzling that so inspired a poet should show himself so unimaginative a thinker). He cannot envisage new values. The only values he knows are the ones his experience of certain types of European society have taught him. And because he cannot imagine any others he maintains that the old ones are values *par excellence* and that any new ones which differ from them can therefore be no values at all. This kind of thought which conditions us to be prejudiced against all new patterns of thought, will kill our civilization—if it is not already the sympton of petrification. We shall have a serious lesson to learn from Toynbee: we cannot retrace our steps any more than we can remain stationary. If we do not go ahead we will be fossilised.

PETER MUNZ (Wellington),

DRAMA IN THE BACKBLOCKS

Sir,—The article "Drama in the Backblocks" in your issue of July 1, is an interesting one, but my committee feels that Mr. McDougall is something less than kind to the Community Arts Service organisations in the smaller country centres. As the body responsible for the Kerikeri Memorial Hall this committee has received indignant protests from residents of Kerikeri because Mr. McDougall pointed the finger of scorn at our hall and referred to it as "a converted passionfruit pulp factory." It is generally known throughout the north that our hall was originally a factory, where the juice was expressed from passionfruit, bottled, and exported to England. We do not know where Mr. McDougall got the "pulp" from; perhaps he could not resist the urge for alliteration. Had Mr. McDougall seen the building before it was converted into a hall, he would realise how much has been achieved. Even then he would not know the voluntary work involved in making improvements, nor would he know the amount of money spent on essential building alterations and additions.

Only scarcity of labour and shortage of materials have delayed further improvements. When it is possible to carry out plans which have been prepared, we hope to bring the hall and stage up to the exacting standards desired by Mr. McDougall. Another representative of the Community Arts Service, Mr. Harold Baigent, drama tutor, recently stated that the acoustics of the hall are satisfactory. Kerikeri residents appreciate visits by C.A.S. entertainers and we have voiced our appreciation on many occasions. However, we feel it to be regrettable that, in the whole of his talk to *The Listener*, Mr. McDougall made no mention of the work done by country C.A.S. committees, or of the hospitality shown by local members of the organisation, who have billeted visiting performers in their homes.—J. KENDALL (Chairman, Kerikeri Memorial Hall Committee).

(Mr. McDougall did pay tribute to country C.A.S. committees, and to the hospitality of country people; but the hard work and hospitality of country people are not news to *Listener* readers and these references were omitted in cutting the interview to fit the space available.—Ed.)

THE MERRYMAKERS

Sir,—Can we have a little more of the "Merrymakers" from 1ZB on Friday evenings? This bright and popular programme is on the air for twenty minutes, followed by ten minutes of recordings and advertisements. If the time allowed this excellent children's choir were extended, it would be much appreciated, especially by country listeners.

W. H. ROBINSON
(Rotorua).

SCOTT OF THE ANTARCTIC

Sir,—Your reviewer of this film has strayed on to shaky ground when he suggests that the balance of presentation tends to distort the spiritual truth of history. He suggests that, in pre-occupation with detail, both studio and director "seem to have forgotten that . . . . material accuracy may breed spiritual error." As far as detail is concerned, people who are familiar with polar equipment and conditions, while appreciating the accuracy achieved, consider that it has been successfully subordinated to the human values of the story. The facts are that the technical advisers included both contemporary colleagues of Scott, and younger men who have inherited the Scott tradition and interpreted it in action in the same field. The interpretation is that of modern British polar circles in which there exists a fine blend of hero-worship, knowledge, and practice; and in which it is considered that defective judgment in some of the choices made contributed equally with unforeseen factors of bad luck to the final outcome.

The reviewer has pointed out the difficulties inherent in the making of such a film, but they were clearly foreseen by director, producer and actors who co-operated to overcome them with success for which high praise is due. The result is a balanced interpretation.

If one cherishes a conviction about any event in history or experience, a book, play, or picture will usually do something to it, and no doubt it is part of a reviewer's job to say how it affects him; but it is surely mischievous to suggest that the human value of a great story is distorted or obscured by presenting as much historical truth as is relevant.

R. A. FALLA
(Wellington).

CONTEMPORARY SPEECH

Sir,—As a working journalist, I should like to answer Richard Dennant's strictures on written English, published in *The Listener* of July 1. I agree that an orchestra *is* a body, but *they are* also men. *Station 1YA* can be similarly treated as a plural if considered as the embodiment of programme organisers, announcers, technicians and others. I can best put my case by quoting from that standard authority, H. W. Fowler's *Modern English Usage:*

> Such words as *army, fleet, Government, company, party, pack, crowd, mess, number, majority,* may stand either for a single entity or for the individuals who compose it, and are called nouns of multitude. They are treated as singular or plural at discretion—and sometimes, naturally, without discretion. *The Cabinet* is *divided* is better, because in the order of thought a whole must precede division; and *The Cabinet* are *agreed* is better, because it takes two or more to agree. That is a delicate distinction, and few will be at the pains to make it. Broader ones that few will fail to make are that between *The army* is *on a voluntary basis* and *The army* are *above the average civilian height,* and that between *The party lost* their *hats* and *The party lost* its *way.* In general it may be said that while there is always a better and a worse in the matter, there is seldom a right and a wrong, and any attempt to elaborate rules would be waste labour.

For my part, I hope that writers will continue to follow the tolerant tenets of the translator of Lucian and lexicographer of the *Pocket* and *Concise Oxford Dictionaries. The Listener's* staff are doing no damage to the English language.

J. O. BUTLER
(Auckland).

RADIO PERSONALITY

Sir,—I wonder if your listeners remember that radio personality Billy Hart, a popular recorder several years ago through Station 2YA. From Station 2UE Sydney, Billy presents a session every Saturday night at 9.30 (N.Z. time) under the title "At Home with Billy Hart." On a recent Saturday he broadcast a special New Zealand session which included the song that sealed his popularity here—"That's a Good Girl." At the end of the session Billy said he would be pleased to hear from any New Zealand listeners who cared to write him care of Station 2UE, Sydney. As *The Listener* reaches most homes I pass this information on.

BILLY HART FAN.
(Wellington).