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LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(Continued from page 5)

THE GUMDIGGER

Sir,—“A.M.” in a very generous review of *The Gumdigger*, remarks of William Satchell's *Land of the Lost* that “Mr. Reed mentions this book briefly . . . and apparently does not think much of it.” May I be permitted to say that any quarrel I may have with the book is based, not on its merits as literature—although to my mind it is somewhat melodramatic—but on its depiction of the gumfields and the gumdigger. To an old digger its descriptions of the gumfields are hardly convincing, and the reader gains the impression that the gumdiggers themselves were, in general, as some of the characters say, “the dead-beats of the world,” and “the scourgings and scum of humanity.” Any digger of the eighties and nineties knows that, while many were ne'er-do-wells and dissipated their earnings, many others were hard-working men of a fine type, and not a few graduated from the gumfield to farms and businesses. There was but little serious crime.

As an old-time digger, of whom there are now few left, it is my hope that *The Gumdigger* may assist, in however slight degree, in providing a little first-hand background material for some future great novel of the gumfields, and there is probably no one who could write this better than “A.M.”

A. H. REED (Dunedin).

LYSENKO CONTROVERSY

Sir,—In *The Listener* of May 6, Dr. O. H. Frankel devotes a lot of space to the case of N. I. Vavilov, formerly president of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences in the U.S.S.R. and obviously infers that the Soviet State was responsible for Vavilov's death. But readers are none the wiser. Vavilov was “shot during the war while trying to escape,” “died in North East Siberia,” and “died at Saratov in 1942.” Dr. Frankel evidently doesn't know himself. He can only speculate. Biologists in fear of meeting the assumed fate of Vavilov, would hardly speak as did Zavadovsky and other geneticists at the Academy discussion last August.

The truth of the matter is that the Vavilov school failed to produce strains equal to those already existing in Russia, and consequently, its leading exponents have been removed from key posts but they still retain important positions and even their chairs in the Academy. Lysenko and his followers have succeeded in winning due recognition for their work, but not without a hard fight against the orthodox geneticists who prevented Lysenko's theories being applied in the institutes under their control.

Is it only in the Soviet Union that the State “takes sides, judges and condemns?” In the U.S.A. the State is spending millions of dollars in research for perfecting atomic and other weapons of war, and scientists and professors are being witch-hunted out of universities for supporting Wallace's Progressive Party. How “free” is the scientist under such conditions of political and social pressure?

The important practical results obtained by Lysenko deserve a better review than that given by Dr. Frankel. Lysenko asserts that the nature, heredity of animals and plants can be changed by modifying the conditions of existence and acquired properties handed on to the next generation. Here are a few

examples which appear to support his theories: Record yields in such crops as wheat and rye have been announced. Frost-resisting varieties of winter wheat from summer varieties have been obtained and are now cultivated in Siberia, where formerly winter crops did not grow at all. A new race of “Kostroma” horned cattle giving outstanding yields of milk is claimed. This race underwent organic and physiological changes brought about by changes in the conditions of existence.

Lysenko's suggestion about cutting up potatoes for seed was not part of the genetics controversy. Lysenko did suggest the changing of the planting time of potatoes in the South of Russia from spring to summer and as a result brought about a remarkable improvement in the harvest, but Dr. Frankel does not refer to this important contribution.

N. GOULD (Northcote).

(This letter has been condensed.—Ed.)

QUIZ PROGRAMMES

Sir,—May I make a plea for greater accuracy in the various quiz programmes? Admittedly the entertainment angle is the most important one to consider in many of these programmes, but at the same time it is to be expected that standards of accuracy should be very high. Some answers accepted as correct seem to be the result of sheer inaccuracy on the part of the person providing the question and answer. For example, with the big New Zealand quiz, we heard that the first trans-Atlantic flight was made by Alcock and Brown, whereas in actual fact (vide *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and others) the American seaplane N.C.4 made the crossing a little earlier. Other mistakes seem to be due to old questions being used, as for example when we are told that Mackenzie King is Prime Minister of Canada and that France is the example of a great democracy where women have no vote. Such statements were true a couple of years ago, but not now.

Then there is the compère who misreads his answers and tells us that Cordell Hull won the Nobel Prize for literature; or who adds of his own accord when accepting as correct that the Sokol Festival is held in Prague. “Yes, at Prague, in Holland;” or who, not being too conversant with history, agrees that the Bill of Rights (passed in 1689 near the end of the Stuart period) was passed at the beginning of the Stuart period, apparently confusing it with the Petition of Right of 1628. BOWMAN (Epsom).

BRINGING UP BABY

Sir,—Mrs. Palton seems to have missed the point of criticism I was making of Mrs. Macaskill's talk. The difference of opinion was not with the fact of the child's playing in mud and water so much as the unstable nature of mud and water that in this case provided the whole basis for a mother's application of child psychology. Here was a mother who did not want her child to play at a certain thing, but gave in to the child for the sake of peace and harmony.

My contention is that a little less of child psychology and a little more of parent psychology would have been better for discipline and training, and it could have been accomplished without the child's realising it. Surely there

(continued on next page)