

TENNYSON'S PLAYS

Sir,—Tennyson lovers will have welcomed the report in *The Listener* on the success of his *Queen Mary* as a radio play. I should like, however, to comment on the statement that Tennyson's plays were not a success on the stage. By ordinary standards of success in the theatre they may not have been, but as poetical drama goes (or doesn't go) they were. No other user of this medium in Tennyson's time drew so many people to the theatre. Lytton had far more popular success, but his plays, though "good theatre," are largely fustian. We might have to go far beyond the nineteenth century to find poetical drama of Tennyson's quality that made as considerable an appeal to the playgoer. Here are some facts. *The Cup*, produced by Irving, drew crowded houses in London, and ran for over 130 nights. *The Falcon*, played by the Kendals, ran for 67 nights. *The Foresters* had a long and successful run in New York. According to Tennyson's official biography, *Queen Mary, Becket, The Cup, The Falcon and The Foresters* were "all more or less successful on the stage." In the nineties, Irving considered *Becket* one of the three most successful plays produced by him at the Lyceum, and a better play than Shakespeare's *King John*. It was at the end of a performance of *Becket* that Irving had his fatal seizure.

Tennyson's plays have an important bearing on the appraisal of him as a poet. It has been a fairly common criticism of him that he was a sweet singer with no great intellectual equipment. The evidence to the contrary should be quite conclusive. Much of it can be summed up in the fact that Tennyson was the first poet since Lucretius to tackle science seriously. The plays were products of his middle and old age. He did not begin *Becket* till 1876, when he was 67. Long before this, according to some critics, he had declined on to the cushions of a Court poet. The English historical plays show something quite different, a man of vigorous and enquiring intellect and great industry (he did a lot of research) who, with old age in sight, set himself to the big and noble task of writing a series of plays depicting the development of his country. The historian J. R. Green said of *Becket* that all his researches into the records of the twelfth century had not given him so vivid a conception of the character of Henry II and his court as was embodied in this play. Tennyson was a great poet who went on developing to the end. The author of *Locksley Hall* would appreciate the calling in of radio for the revival of *Queen Mary*, his own favourite among his plays.

ALAN MULGAN (Wellington).

GERHARD WILLNER

Sir,—It was heartening to read L. D. Austin's letter repudiating the opinions so vulgarly expressed by "A.B." in his article on Mozart and particularly in reference to the playing of that composer by Gerhard Willner. It is possible that "A.B.'s" experience of artists of international calibre is not very wide, and that he does not realise that in Gerhard Willner he has an artist indisputably of this standing—a fact which appears to have been totally disregarded, not to say unappreciated, in *The Listener*.

There are many who regard "A.B.'s" article as savouring of malice aforethought, and in a reputable paper such

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

as the official organ of broadcasting, it is a moot point that a paid contributor should enjoy this licence to discredit, safeguarded by your little paragraph and by means of anonymity. One would have more respect if such means were disdained.

Meanwhile there are very many music lovers who heartily endorse L. D. Austin's letter and rejoice in the fact that in our midst we have two such fine artists as the Willners.

E. M. LIVINGSTONE

(Christchurch).

(In other words, contributors are malicious if they express opinions with which our correspondent is unable to agree.—Ed.)

MOZART FOR TO-DAY

Sir,—I hasten to assure Ida Carless that the Mozart two-piano work performed by Jocelyn Walker and Leslie Souness, as mentioned in "A.B.'s" *Radio Review*, was indeed a two-pianoforte concerto and not a sonata. The sonata Miss Carless refers to is presumably the one in D Major, K.448; the work performed that afternoon was the concerto in E Flat Major, K.365—an unfamiliar work. An interested friend of mine tuned in to that particular recital and followed it with the score on her knee.

HENRIK I. (Wellington).

"PILGRIM'S PROGRESS"

Sir,—A word of appreciation ought to be expressed for the great pleasure and inspiration of the recordings of "Pilgrim's Progress" just completed at Station 2YA. John Bunyan certainly came alive in the vivid dramatization of his immortal dream. The rich yet homely language, steeped in the Biblical imagery, was most ably preserved and presented by the radio players.

It is quite significant, as indicating the perennial freshness of Bunyan and the relevancy of his thought, that our modern historian Arnold Toynbee should find the symbol of modern man's predicament in the figure of Bunyan's Pilgrim. In his section on "The Disintegrations of Civilisations," Toynbee concludes by quoting Bunyan's description of Pilgrim seeking an escape from the City of Destruction as representing the plight of man in this atom age. With these words Toynbee concludes: "According to John Bunyan, Christian was saved by his encounter with Evangelist. And, inasmuch as it cannot be supposed that God's nature is less constant than Man's, we may and must pray that a reprieve which God has granted to our society once will not be refused if we ask for it again in a humble spirit and with a contrite heart." (D. C. Somervell's *Abridgement*, p. 554.)

REX GOLDSMITH (Hawera).

THE REFERENDUM

Sir,—Your leader of July 29 demonstrates an editorial middle-class morality. You purport to advance the argument of the plain man. I feel you do just that.

I am less concerned with your assumptions than with the tenuous manner in which you reach your conclusions, for you cling to the shadow of an argument which has demonstrably failed in the past 150 years of western civilisation. To go further, you would have little difficulty in agreeing with

the fountain-head discourse on the subject, the discussion of Socrates and Glaucon which in practical terms has given us Hitler, Stalin and of course the "bomb."

War, as Randolph Bourne has so succinctly put it, is the health of the State. You will oppose this view, yet your editorial leads inevitably to it, for submit what you will it is incontestable that conscription is preparation for war at the bidding and for the good of the State.

Your world view claims realism as its virtue, it seems to me a static one, the impact of forces, their action and reaction. Is this the real world, the dynamic evolving organism, both microcosm and macrocosm? Yet you wish to impose a rigid conscription system on the vortex of change that surrounds us. Your argument relegates the creative impulse of the individual, the criterion of culture and progress to the normalcy of the slave herd.

'May I plead the claim of the free man, the man who chooses freedom and

ments by simply referring to "Uncle Toby's Argumentum Fistulatorium."

I must thank Mr. Mouat for expounding so clearly the theory of ethical relativism which he shares with Bertrand Russell. It is interesting to learn that he holds treachery to truth to be morally reprehensible for Englishmen, but not necessarily for "the lesser breeds without the law," because, as he puts it, "morals depend on the people they belong to." This idea was put forward by Russell's prototype, Protagoras, and refuted by Plato in the dialogue of that name. According to the relativist theory, if you fall in with the code of your social group, your conduct will be morally good. This means that if you are a Thug, as Mr. Mouat explains, "it will not be immoral to steal or to murder." And if you are a Nazi, I suppose, you may obey the Nazi code and exterminate every Jew you can. And if the Nazi code prescribes treachery to truth, then treachery to truth will not be morally reprehensible. I fear that Mr. Mouat has yet to show on other than Theistic grounds that treachery to truth is morally reprehensible.

G.H.D. (Greenmeadows).

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Sir,—I would like this opportunity of thanking "R.W.C." and congratulating him or her on the attainment of new anagrammatic heights. Malefactors "hidden in a calm forest," Thomas Price's mixture producing "atmospherics" (but not, I hope, flatulence), "I ran a mile too" into amelioration: these are some of the gems in the last crossword puzzle. To my mind, however, the possibility of a "funeral" providing "real fun" is the choicest of them all. To the writer it presents a picture of a game of poker being played in the first mourners' cab. Thanks again, "R.W.C."

H.A.I. (Auckland).

RICHARD SEDDON

Sir,—I am collecting material for a biography of Richard John Seddon, and should be grateful if any of your readers can help by affording me access to unpublished letters or other material of biographical interest. Any documents sent me will be examined and, if necessary, returned to their owners as quickly as possible. The utmost care will be taken of them.—R. M. BURDON, 222 Main Road, Karori, Wellington.

PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

Sir,—I am grateful for the recent broadcast from 2YC of this work. It gave New Zealanders their first chance to hear this quite unknown and very attractive piece. May we hear it again a few times? I recommend hearers next time to take down their Browning and follow the poem. There are not many unset passages, and the breaks can easily be spotted. F. C. TUCKER

(Gisborne).

(More letters from Listeners will be found on page 15)

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

M. Turner (Auckland): There are difficulties, but your suggestion will be considered.
D. MacKenzie (Christchurch): The talks will be broadcast in the evening from other stations, but not immediately.

Request *Listener* (Taumaranui): The complete list is read so that listeners who have sent in requests will know at the start of the session if their recordings will be presented.