

AMATEUR THEATRE

Sir,—I was interested to read the article, "Drama in the Backblocks," in the July 1st issue. The efforts made in Auckland rural areas to "sell" the idea of drama are commendable. Here in the Buller Mining District's Community Centres' area we have had a similar scheme in operation, with really outstanding results.

It is generally acknowledged that in the last few years interest in drama—serious, intelligent interest—has grown tremendously. It is not generally realised that the greatest growth has not been in the cities (where dramatic activities have become more polished and less haphazard), but in the small towns and villages, where tiny groups have whipped up a latent enthusiasm until thousands of people have found in "amateur theatricals" the means by which they can make use of their artistic and creative ability.

Beginning is the greatest hurdle such groups have to overcome, and few instances can be found of small drama groups having formed and then slipping into oblivion. With the growth of our community centres comes the opportunity to form affiliated drama clubs which can exchange visits and ideas.

The idea of presenting a play in the towns where community centres have been newly formed, with a minimum of properties and a set which could be quickly adapted to any stage, was originated by Mr. Colin Hansen, who felt that a company could be found prepared to undertake a tour of the district to places which normally do not get an opportunity to see plays performed. This idea was enthusiastically received by us and so the company, which decided to call itself "The Company of Five," came into being.

The company's chief difficulty was to find a suitable play; it had to be more than cheap comedy, less than serious drama, with a small cast (because few people could be found who were able or prepared to give up weeks of spare time to rehearsal and week-ends to travelling) and a setting which required the fewest essentials.

It had to be a play which, while at the same time being interesting and amusing, could be simply done, so that local groups could copy the production methods used or profit by the mistakes made, but, above all, see that something could be done with little. The search ended with *The Mollusc* and the set was then designed so that the major part of it consisted of "suggestion" rather than the real thing.

It may well be asked what good all this activity is to the community and to the individual. At the lowest valuation it is a pleasant and sociable hobby and brings the carpenter, the teacher, the baker, the clerk, the coalminer and the farmer together to work as a team for a common purpose; it takes them out of themselves and makes them look at a different kind of life through someone else's eyes. We already have proof of the success of this venture. People from each of our nine community centres are now asking for more live drama, and three clubs have already sprung into being.

In conclusion, Sir, may I say that this same group of people has, in conjunction with the Westport Dramatic Society, experimented with arena staging in the presentation of Priestley's play *I Have Been Here Before*. It would seem that

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

this type of production is one which could be used extensively in our poorly equipped country halls.

We wonder if such enterprise and missionary zeal, as displayed by the Company of Five, have been in evidence in any other district in New Zealand.—THOS. MUIR, Organiser-Secretary, Buller Mining District's Community Centres.

(Interest in the amateur theatre is undoubtedly growing throughout New Zealand. We have given it practical recognition by devoting a great deal of space in this issue to special articles on various features of the movement.—Ed.)

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Sir,—The Discussion Group on 2YA *Speaking for Ourselves* consistently distinguishes itself by ignoring the basic issues of questions. Can a scientist be a Christian? The answer to this commenced of course with no attempt to avoid the confusion which resulted from no one knowing what Christianity is—or attempting to define it. One speaker suggested that science was in conflict with dogma, faith and ethics, but probably the first two of these. No attempt was made to define dogma or faith. One must ask—what dogma? What did they mean by faith? Everybody seemed to assume that the conclusions of a scientist were more likely to be correct than either the philosopher or the theologian. Why?

The whole panel then agreed that a scientist could believe in Christian ethics and not in Christian dogma. Now this is rubbish, pernicious rubbish, widely held though it is. Christian ethics are dogma. The Ten Commandments are dogma and ethics. The one cannot be dissociated from the other and without a dogmatic basis why believe in the ethics of Christianity at all?

One speaker naively suggested that one need not be a member of a Church to be a Christian. If Christians are followers of Christ, then there is only one answer to that question—Christ did not think you could be a Christian and not a member of a Church. One cannot have it both ways. On the whole the panel suggested it was difficult for a scientist to be a Christian, even if a number were. The evidence adduced for this suggestion was not only insufficient for a philosopher, but for a scientist, and quite unworthy of such a group—particularly when *Speaking for Themselves* in public. IPSO FACTO (Wellington).

MUSIC FOR MILKERS

Sir,—“Music while you Work” has been accepted as a valuable aid to manual work. From the earliest times men and women have sung or chanted at work, and now the radio provides the same rhythmic aid. In this country thousands of dairy farmers and their wives are up and about half an hour at least before sunrise doing a monotonous manual job, milking the cows. Frost or rain, flood or dusty drought, the herd must be milked. Many sheds are fitted with radio, man and beast enjoy it when available—and that's just the catch. Station 1YZ Rotorua has an excellent coverage, as is shown by their request session, and is the centre of a large dairying district. As such it is ideal for cheering along the morning chores if bright, cheerful music such as one gets in the daily “Music

while you Work” session could be provided from say half an hour before sunrise. And by the way, as request sessions are always so crowded, why not have from 5.0 a.m. to 8.0 a.m. one or two mornings a week a request session for country folk? What a pleasure getting-up would be with a cheery tune and a cheery fire!

MRS. EARLY RISER
(Whakatane).

THE ORDINARY READER

Sir,—D. Hall, in his review of Ivy Compton Burnett's works, writes of the ordinary reader as semi-mythical. I should say that an ordinary reader was one who read as naturally as he ate or breathed, as he dreamed or thought, as he talked or listened; and who took advantage of the author's opening of certain doors to enter another's mind. Fortunately there are still many ordinary readers, but unfortunately authors are tending to write for the extraordinary reader: those who read to review, those who read to digest a book and make it more “wholesome” for the public, and those who read to find material for radio talks and plays—not to mention those who look for points with which to pierce holes in other people's skulls to infiltrate their own doctrine.

I have read several of Ivy Compton Burnett's books as an ordinary reader and have found them smooth, easily and quickly read, though I have reached the age when even the gawky expression of a genuinely felt emotion pleases more than the most brilliant and well-cut epigram. As the reviewer writes, she has created a world of her own, but I doubt if she has created her own characters. The children could have come straight from Saki's pages. In fact many of her adults have never grown up: “They take their revenge but the bitterness of their wound is not assuaged.” AN ORDINARY READER (Dunedin).

EARLY NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—As an old colonial who thinks he knows his New Zealand, I wish to add my tribute to “Dowsy's” by expressing the great pleasure I have had in listening to Douglas Cresswell's breezy broadcasts on the good old days. His intimate knowledge of the subject is remarkable and meticulously accurate, not only in general outline, but also when he is portraying the personal characteristics of the prominent pastoral and agricultural pioneers, many of whom, together with their estates, I knew in my youth. Mr. Cresswell has undoubtedly made an outstanding contribution to our islands' story, artistically rendered and delightfully enlivened by flashes of humour. I join with “Dowsy” and others in the hope that Mr. Cresswell may be heard in many more broadcasts.

J. E. GREEN (Onehunga).

DAYLIGHT RECEPTION

Sir,—I notice that in a recent issue of *The Listener* a correspondent remarks that the new Rotorua station is better than 1YA. I should say it is, and why all the more distant listeners to the many daylight sporting fixtures don't rise up in their wrath and demand an explanation is a mystery. Or is it only here?

It all started with the universal change of frequencies, before which it was a matter of indifference whether

one got his news or weather report or the running of the Auckland Cup from 1YA or 2YA. But what a change when 1YA came down to the 750 kc. level! Daylight reception practically vanished. For the first few days we excused the thing on account of necessary adjustments being made, but surely by this time something should be done. Here in the King Country at this time of year at 5.0 p.m., Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill and 3YZ come in at full strength, while one twists the dials from 3YA to 4YA without noticing 1YA en route. With the Empire Games in the offing, it would be as well if 1YA sent out a car fitted with an aerial and an ordinary household 5-valve receiver to locate “blind spots” in the North Island, and then return to their old 650 kc. again and let 2YC have the 750 kc.

At night time, of course, it is quite all right, and there are no complaints. But why the sudden loss of power when we want to turn 2YA down in daylight? There are no complaints about any of the other stations.

ONE OF THE 5,000 LICENCEES
(Ohura).

BRIDGE ON THE AIR

Sir,—I think this feature was long overdue, and I cordially agree with “J.C.R.'s” remarks about the first lesson. As a contract bridge player of many years' standing, may I be permitted to say that the two gentlemen who are conducting the session were very unwise to introduce psychic bidding in the second lesson. It was rather like asking listeners to run before they were able to walk. Both of them are very fine players themselves, but I think they would have been better advised if they had concentrated more on giving a series of simple graduated lessons.

H.B. (Auckland).

WOMEN'S SESSION

Sir,—I would like to express my appreciation of the women's session from 2YA each morning. I look forward to this half-hour, especially the panel on Wednesday. It is so interesting to hear the ideas of three such intelligent people on a wide range of subjects. I especially enjoy Mrs. Garland's contribution, as she seems to voice my own sentiments so often.

D.Y. (Wellington).

“FIRE ON THE SNOW”

Sir,—I have listened with very great pleasure to Douglas Stewart's “Fire on the Snow” and can find only one fault in the broadcast—the voice and interpretation of the commentator. I think that a male voice would have harmonised better with the voices of the male actors. Would it be too much to hope that some day we will hear the voice of Peter Scott reciting the blank verse? I. MACKENZIE (Hastings).

GOOD READING

Sir,—What a delightful reader of his own script was D. W. McKenzie in his “A map of New Zealand from the air.” What could easily have been a dry-as-dust talk, was alive, bubbling with vitality all the way through. Do ask him where he learned reading, and send bunches of your radio readers to learn. At present emphasis is almost always on the wrong words in every sentence. L.B. (Christchurch).