

NEW ZEALAND
LISTENER

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EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES:

93-107 Featherston Street, Wellington, C.1.
Post Office Box 1070.
Telephone, 46-520.
Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.
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Backs To The Wall

IT must be clear to most people now, however it appeared at the time, that the reverse in Norway was the best thing that has happened to Britain in the whole course of the war. It was a tragedy for the relatives of the men who fell, a disaster for the Government, but to the nation at large it was a blow that shook every foolish parrot off his perch. And most of us had been parrots.

How we ever got it into our heads that we could win a war by saying so it is not worth trying to find out; but if it had not been in our heads it would not have dropped so often from our tongues. We had not only given hostages to fortune. We had forgotten that we had given them, and that fortune favours those who keep awake.

Well, we are awake now. The blindest and dullest know that we are fighting with our backs to the wall, and that not merely our nation but the whole world is passing this week through one of the decisive periods of history. If we lose we go back three hundred years. If we win we return to 1918, shaken but still free, and able to start again.

Meanwhile it would be shameful not to salute those men who had the courage to start again eighteen months ago. They were deceived, they were disappointed, they were shamefully outmanoeuvred, but they saw it and they turned back; and if they had not then preached preparedness as fearlessly as they had previously preached appeasement we should already be lost. Mr. Chamberlain may not be a great man, but he has passed on a great tradition, viz., that the leader himself is nobody and nothing, the public safety everything; that a man who has served in the highest office ennoble himself by serving in a humbler office; and that there are neither persons nor parties when the State is endangered. He is a poor man who feels no emotion to see a leader effacing himself with such dignity.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

Letters sent to "The Listener" for publication should be as brief as possible and should deal with topics covered in "The Listener" itself. Correspondents must send their names and addresses even when it is their wish that these should not be published. We cannot undertake to give reasons why all or any portion of a letter is rejected.

"ROOKIES"

The Editor,
"The Listener."

Sir,—The letter signed "S.C." awakened my interest in the origin of the word "Rookie," and I feel I must endorse "S.C.'s" contention that the word is an old British Army word for recruit.

It was on the evening of a day in October, 1915, that I first heard the word, and it was addressed to a party (of which I was one), by a lance-corporal of the East Surrey Regiment. We had just arrived at the barracks in Dover, where we were to undergo training; and although the term made us feel very raw, after about three months we were applying it to other new arrivals. Then we felt quite "old sweats."

Perhaps "S.C." will remember the 9th East Surreys who formed a part of the 24th Division, which formed the apex on which the full fury of the German offensive broke itself in March, 1917.

Yours, etc.,
EAST SURREY.

Nelson,
May 9, 1940.

(We thank all those correspondents who have written to tell us that there were "Rookies" in the Great War. However, we now know, and cannot afford space for further reminders.—Ed.).

MODERN MUSIC

The Editor,
"The Listener."

Sir,—I was pleased to get an answer by R.J.H. suggesting that the next time I heard a good swing band I should listen a little intelligently. No one with any intelligence would listen to the music of which I am complaining. I have no quarrel with Jazz music that harmonises; any lover of music can appreciate this.

I also thank R.J.H. for his information about the people who have turned to Jazz, some of them, he says, having graduated under such famous masters as Stokowski. One is tempted to say "How have the mighty fallen."

I cannot help thinking that the noise of train whistles, grinding brakes, and the scream of tram-cars, etc., have been incorporated in a certain type of our modern music, which has been aptly called "noise in a hurry." The Maori is a maker of harmony and rhythm, and it is always a pleasure to listen to his singing. (Thank heaven he doesn't croon). There are no doubt many people who remember the Maori Battalion singing on Gallipoli on August 6, 1915, before taking No. 2 Outpost. This was indeed memorable.

It is intensely annoying, after listening to a good piece of music, to have one's ears suddenly assailed with (if I may coin the word) Epsteinian noises. It is like the effect produced on us when we are driving along a beautiful country road, round a corner and are confronted by a hideous sign exhorting us to buy so-and-so's petrol. One offends the ear, the other the eye.

Yours, etc.,
ANZAC.

Otorohanga,
May 7, 1940.

HYMNS WANTED.

The Editor,
"The Listener."

Sir,—When I was a lad we used to get on Sunday nights a sacred concert. Men in camps love that kind of stuff, and I have been in some camps in my time. Now, right now, is the time—give us a hymn for the sailors and soldiers, and one for workers in

camps. Put the hymns or the number in *The Listener* so we can sing all together. Men in camps like hymn singing. We swear and cuss but we like singing, and we love to hear the Army band and their singing on Sunday mornings.

Yours, etc.,
49 MILES AWAY.

Auckland,
May 10, 1940.

ENGLAND'S HONOUR.

The Editor,
"The Listener."

Sir,—Without occupying several pages (which I cannot venture to believe you would supply) it would be impossible for me to expose and refute all the false statements and inferences put forward by "Locksley Hall" and Mr. Seymour.

"Locksley Hall" claims that England greatly profited by her default; Mr. Seymour that she thereby incurred calamitous losses. Both cannot be right. Neither is right.

Both claim that England's action was dishonest. As for myself, I deeply regret England's default, but it was quite inevitable.

No answer has been attempted to my contention that repayment of the debt could be made only in goods. Nor is any answer possible. Equally certain is the fact that the United States demanded payment in gold, well knowing that that metal did not exist in anything like sufficient quantity for the purpose, and they should have known that the gold would be of no use to them when they had got it. Their tragically ignorant policy has upset the financial balance of the whole world.

I would remind my attackers that England paid more than all other debtors of the United States put together, and she forgave her own debtors double the amount of the American debt which she avoided.

Also it should not be forgotten (1) that various States in the Union have heavily defaulted to Great Britain; (2) that by devaluation of the dollar the United States robbed English investors of 40% of their holdings of American securities. When the loans were made President Wilson said, "We seek no material compensation for the sacrifice we shall freely make." Senator Kenyon said: "I hope that not one of these loans will ever be paid and that we will never ask that it be paid." Many other prominent politicians made similar speeches. It was not until 1922 that any demand was made.

Most Americans recognise the insurmountable difficulties with which England was beset, and the fact that 84% of them desire that victory shall be hers seems to indicate that resentment is very slight. The fact is that the huge United States is sheltering behind England (with one-third of her population) and is leaving her to fight the battle of freedom alone. Should England suffer defeat the United States will most assuredly "get it in the neck."

"Locksley Hall" and Mr. Seymour are welcome to their place in the ranks of those whose pleasure it is to display their hatred of England and do their utmost to besmirch her name and detract from her greatness. I blush for them.

As for me, I make bold to say that I am an Englishman, and that the enemies of England are my enemies.

Yours, etc.,
E. EARLE VAILE.

Auckland,
May 19, 1940.

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

"Listener."—Have you heard of Herr Hitler? Send me your address, and we will tell you about him.