

LISTENER

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Men and Merinos

SIGNOR GAYDA was working off an old score last week when he sneered at the "fighting will" of the retreating British troops in Egypt. It will be remembered that Mr. Duff Cooper was very rude to the Italian troops the day after Italy entered the war, and that Mr. Churchill was not exactly flattering to the Italian navy before or after the pitiable battle of Oran. But Signor Gayda doesn't know his job. It is no use telling his countrymen that the British are retreating. They must be presented on the run, a broken army fleeing in caporetish terror, or Italy will not understand.

Nor does Signor Gayda know the risk he is taking. The troops in Egypt come from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and India, as well as from the United Kingdom itself. Of the New Zealanders we shall say nothing. Signor Gayda may have heard the whoops of delight they gave when Italy's entry was flashed on a Cairo screen; but whether he did or did not they are our own poor country lads, and we shall not boast about them. We shall say nothing about the South Africans or the Indians. But does Signor Gayda know that the Australians, partly because they drink strong tea all day with cooked meat, and partly because they suffer from sheep madness—a terrible disease induced by confinement on a sea-girt continent with millions upon millions of bland-faced Merinos—no sooner get out of their country than they "look for somebody to clip across the jaw"? We are not exaggerating. We are quoting one of the profoundest social historians of the age, Mr. D. B. Wyndham Lewis, who has put it on record that although Australians, when they have been severed long enough from sheep, do become genial and harmless, they begin as "a flock of ramping Devils fresh from the Pit." And as Mr. Lewis points out, those in Egypt and Palestine are only recently "liberated from their ovine hell," so that the world will be "hearing from them."

Signor Gayda has, of course, little knowledge of sheep. Italy is richer in goats. But if he had read Wyndham Lewis, he would have known that to be imprisoned on a farm in the back-blocks with sheep for one's daily and sole companions, induces such a blind and savage malignancy that the Devil himself would be invited to "mix it" if he drew near.

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.

BERTRAND RUSSELL'S CONVERSION.

Sir,—Your leader on the conversion of Bertrand Russell indicates the change that has been taking place in the attitude of many of our intelligentsia towards the present war. Bertrand Russell has not been alone in his conversion. His fellow champion in the cause of pacifism, Professor C. E. M. Joad, wrote to the editor of the "News Chronicle" on May 22 and publicly confessed that he could no longer adhere to the strict pacifist position, but must, with all his strength and mind, support the call of his country in what is now likely to be the sternest crisis of its history.

When two such distinguished names publicly announce their change of attitude, one is encouraged to hope that Aldous Huxley, in the fastnesses of his refuge in Hollywood, will be the next convert.

Another well-known writer who has renounced the pacifist creed is A. A. Milne, whose book "Peace With Honour" has had a considerable influence in recent years. Soon after the outbreak of war he wrote an article in the "Fortnightly Review," in which he stated that in the face of the threat of Nazi tyranny, he could do nothing less than disavow his former position, and defend with all his might the cause of freedom and justice.

These pronouncements are truly indicative of a spirit that recognises that it is the common, low-brow, fighting man who is defending the freedom of the intellectuals. The spirit in which these fighting men are taking up arms is admirably expressed in a recent poem by Laurence Whistler from his book "In Time of Suspense."

"They are going forth,
Gravely, not caring if the flags are flown
Believing simply it must save for Earth
A way of life becoming to mankind,
A grace of centuries, a thing of worth . . ."

In reviewing this book in the "Observer," Basil de Selincourt aptly said that "such an attitude is impregnable because it makes no hollow claims."

C. R. BRADWELL (Christchurch).

(The fact that we have printed two letters on this subject—one on each side—must not be regarded as an indication that our columns are open for a controversy on pacifism.—Ed.)

PRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH

Sir,—In a recent issue of *The Listener* a whole page was devoted to Professor Arnold Wall's discussion of the pronunciation of the word "allies." Anybody may now be pardoned for mispronouncing English words, for it seems to me that if one lived to be as old as Methuselah one would still then be deficient in his pronunciation of English, for there do not seem to be any set rules to guide the learner so that the pronunciation of each word has to be learned separately. The task is endless, and, alas, hopeless, and life is far too short to be spent in mastering the pronunciation of several thousands of words. Take for an example the words *bone*, *gone*, and *done*: although they look alike they are pronounced differently. Even the well-instructed announcers of the BBC, according to Professor Wall, do not agree on the pronunciation of such a common word as "allies." I derive some comfort from the disagreement and take courage.

I have been pulled up by Europeans for mispronouncing the term *de luxe*. They say it should be pronounced like *de looks*. How was I to know, for all my friends pronounce it in the way I did?

A well-known character on the roads in our district has always been called *Polly de Lucks* and never *Polly de Looks*. If he is—*Polly*, by the way, is a "he" in this case—*Polly de Looks* then it will be necessary to have another christening ceremony.

According to Professor Wall's own statement, long usage by a majority of people of a mispronunciation makes it correct in time, so I think I'll stick to my old friend *Polly de Lucks*. By the way, if I remember correctly, it was and it is Professor Wall himself who condemned and condemns the *de lucks* pronunciation. There we are!

I don't, however, find *de luxe* in my English dictionary, so it must be an importation.

If Professor Wall could only devise some scheme for a simple and common-sense method of pronouncing English and its importations, I am sure the world would be very much obliged to him, and it would be a happier place in which to live. We have such a scheme in Maori, and yet every day we hear such place names as Taranaki and Waikato mispronounced by Europeans. It was my intention to give a few simple hints on Maori pronunciation, but as this letter is already too long I shall have to put it off for another time.

R. T. KOHERE (East Cape).

(We shall be glad to have our correspondent's simple hints on Maori pronunciation. In the meantime he will obtain a small book containing Professor Wall's simple hints on English pronunciation if he writes to the publishers, Messrs. Whitcombe and Tombs.—Ed.)

OUR FRONTISPIECE

Sir,—Since you took control of *The Listener* I have had occasion to write, approvingly, to your Ministerial Chief. As a subscriber since the original first publication, however, I feel that I must offer my protest against some of your frontispieces. May I be permitted to suggest that your valuable and

More "Letters from Listeners" will be found on Page 24.

widely studied publication could, in this respect at least, be more advantageously used, in the general interests of the Dominion. The incongruous rubbish—I suppose we are expected to assume it to be some sort of Art—which you offer to us this week (No. 56) on your cover page is an insult to your intelligent subscribers; you could have quite appropriately changed the name at the foot to Goebbels. Really, this and other submissions (your issue, No. 50, for instance) detract from the high quality of other portions of your issue.

Having submitted a destructive opinion, permit me now to give you a constructive one. I would suggest that you use this most valuable front page, occasionally, by incorporating suitable New Zealand scenic-tourist illustrations (with explanatory data), the purpose being to influence some of your numerous subscribers to visit these places when on vacation. Doubtless the Government Tourist Department would, willingly, supply you with a range of blocks of the innumerable beautiful spots in various portions of the Dominion. Then, you *would* be doing good service. I suggest that you do no service whatever to any section of your readers by the publication of such illustrations as those to which I have referred.

I would, please, have you to know that I wish the very best for your publication; hence my criticism.

W. J. BARDSLEY (Dunedin).

(We gather that our correspondent takes life seriously. So do we—so seriously that we can't afford to be "Little Sir Echo" to the Tourist Department.—Ed.)