

LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday Price Threepence

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The Small Boy's Birthday

WITHOUT printing it is difficult to imagine ships or motor cars; radios, aeroplanes, or hydro-electricity. The age of industry might have arrived without Gutenberg, but it could never have come so quickly. As a contributor claims on Page 8 of this issue, printing is man's most important invention. And it is more than that. It is man's most dangerous invention.

Man's ingenuity has always outdistanced his intelligence. Printing gave facility a start from which felicity has never quite recovered. It empowered the crank at the expense of the philosopher, just as the aeroplane empowers the maniac at the expense of the masses, and the radio empowers the propagandist at the expense of human integrity. It has united men in units huge beyond man's power of social organisation. For every Socrates whose work it has preserved it has discovered a million prosecutors to offer the cup of hemlock. It is the ally of distortion and perversion. Where there is one truth, printing circulates one hundred lies. It deals dangerously in dangerous material; the queer incalculable stuff of which men's minds are made.

And yet, for all the penny-dreadfuls that moulder in dead places, there are those few good books that men still cherish, as the libraries will show us this month when they celebrate the 500th anniversary of printing. When the aeroplane drops bombs, we are apt in these times to remember the horror and forget the machine marvel that carries it. When the radio cries havoc, it is easy to forget that it also makes music. When the presses deliver stupidity, we cannot easily look back to Shakespeare through the mask of our despair for man. But these hopes that appear through our fears are the beacons on which we must keep our eyes. History keeps them burning, and the future will light more. We must see them through the darkness of the present and remember always that mankind is not very much older than the invention he is celebrating next week.

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 Correspondents must send their names and addresses even when it is their wish that these should not be published.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.

MODERN MUSIC

Sir,—I have just perused two letters from readers of *The Listener*, in which the usual senseless attacks are made against so-called "crooners" and in particular, by one correspondent, against Bing Crosby.

In reply to "Old Fashioned," would it surprise him (or her) to know that the artist he describes as the "prime moaner of the lot," presumably Bing, is my favourite entertainer? I say that with the utmost honesty, so that "Old Fashioned" will have to broaden the limits of his comprehension, or perhaps bring it up to date. As for his reference to Fuller's Vaudeville, the singers of those days with their "stagey" style would definitely be out of place on the radio. A "crooner" is a singer whose style is adapted to the special conditions of microphone technique, and, as such, a comparison with vaudeville entertainers is rather pointless. Some crooners, e.g. Evelyn Dall, have successfully attempted stage work, by using amplifiers. Indeed, the microphone is now the rule in London revues. To return to Bing Crosby, it is obvious that "Old Fashioned" did not see Bing in a vaudeville role in the film "Starmaker." In this picture, Bing assisted by talented children, put over a vaudeville show that no Fuller's show could even have hoped to approach. Moreover, the popularity of the film was unquestioned.

"Another Average Listener" considers that "crooners" are an insult to intelligent listeners, but does not explain why. As he says, music in the early morning should be bright and cheerful, but Oscar Natzke is hardly either. Richard Crooks is played to death, and Peter Dawson has a monotonous "what-a-stout-fellow-am-I" style. I recommend him to listen to 2ZB for a bright morning session. The lighter touch introduced to the YA miscellaneous programmes is also appreciated, particularly the Crosby session at 2YA at 9.30 a.m. on Saturdays.

"Crooners" in general are far from being all good. Many I consider terrible. Even Bing has made several "not-so-good" records, and his many imitators are not in the same street. Only Bing Crosby imparts to his songs what Lotte Lehmann called "verve." I therefore suggest that listeners such as your two correspondents, should learn to review their entertainment with tolerance. What they like, I hate, and vice versa, and I do not see why I should be deprived of my entertainment, seeing that my licence fee is also 25/. It is they who are the moaners, not Bing. "PLUV" (Wellington).

"VULGAR IS AS VULGAR DOES"

Sir,—In your issue of November 1, under the above heading, there appeared a letter which, though ostensibly designed to impugn my journalistic ability, must be regarded as an actual compliment. I arrive at this conclusion because the writer of that letter, Mr. Joseph C. McEvoy, of Dunedin, presumably unable to answer my arguments against certain trends in Modern Music, but determined at all costs to find fault with me, falls back upon the jejune expedient of assailing my prose style. Now let us see how he is hoist with his own petard. In accusing me of descending to "vulgarity and illiteracy" when I occasionally employ the vernacular, he says that I have no justification for being "unethical" in my prose. This illustrates the correspondent's ignorance of English, for, as all educated persons know, the words "ethics" and "ethical" relate solely to the science of morals, and have nothing to do with the shortcomings of literary style.

So, perhaps, Mr. McEvoy, when again he essays—as it were—a McEvoy-lent attack upon me, would do well first to safeguard his lines of communication.

Regarding his indictment: I am charged with using, writing, or otherwise uttering, divers grave violations of the speech or language of our sovereign lord the King—to wit, viz., i.e., that is to say—(1) "Sez you!"; (2) "Oh yeah!"; (3) "I never said no sich thing!"; (4) "Lady, you done me wrong!"; (5) "etc."

To the first count, Mr. Editor, I plead guilty, but beg for leniency on two grounds—(a) That "Sez you!" is a pithy, succinct, convenient and generally accepted term of jocular derision; (b) That I inadvertently acquired the phrase by involuntary and subconscious aural absorption. Sez me!

I return pleas of not guilty to counts (2) and (3), my defence being that they are ascertainable quotations from the classics. "I never said no sich thing" was a favourite retort of the notorious Mrs. Sairey Gamp, as all well-read people are aware.

Not so widely known, perhaps, is the fact that Charles Dickens was also the probable originator of

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"Oh yeah!" If I remember rightly, it occurs somewhere in his "American Notes." I haven't seen the text for years, so cannot vouch for chapter and verse; but the passage struck me forcibly when I read it, and, as far as I recollect, it ran like this:

"Every traveller on American railways talks to you, or to anybody else who hits his fancy. If you are an Englishman he expects that the railroad is pretty much like a British railroad. If you deny this, and enumerate the points of differences, he says 'Oh yeah?' (interrogatively) to each. Then he guesses that British trains don't travel so fast, and when you reply that they go faster he again says 'Oh yeah?' (still interrogatively), and evidently doesn't believe you. After a long pause, he may remark that Yankees are reckoned to be considerable of a go-ahead people, too—upon which you say 'Oh yeah!'"—and so on.

For similar reasons I plead not guilty to count (4), where obviously I was citing a more modern classic, namely, a film entitled "She Done Him Wrong."

Now, Mr. Editor, we come to the fifth charge in the indictment, and I submit that it is the most serious of all—viz., "etc."; the implication being that the rest of my "vulgaries and illiteracies" are so many that the complainant cannot specify them. There is here, Sir, more than a hint of "malice prepense"; but, as I have had previous experience of newspaper controversy with Mr. McEvoy, his innuendo does not surprise me.

In conclusion, I must add that in estimating the number of my "admirers" at 100,000, the correspondent surely makes an over-statement. Without knowing the exact figures I scarcely think they total more than 99,999—excluding, of course, Mr. Joseph C. McEvoy. —L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

WOMEN AND COURAGE

Sir,—If I had at any stage made any criticism of women's courage, in the sense of which your correspondents complain, the letter from "Not Very Brave," which appeared on November 8, would be a good and sufficient answer. Like your correspondent, I have heard that there was once a mutiny in India, that nurses look after patients in bombed hospitals, and that some women even catch rats. However, since in no single word or line have I disputed these matters, I can only thank your correspondent for substantiating one of my arguments by quarrelling with another that never existed, except in her own feminine imagination.

—THID (at present in Wellington).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"Fed Up".—You have our sympathy; but you may not have our columns for an anonymous attack on a public servant who is not free to reply.

"Wizzo".—We'll think about it.