

LISTENER

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Democracy's Strength

THE most encouraging feature of Mr. Roosevelt's speeches is not his repeated declarations that America will support Britain but their clear indication that America does. Russia might decide to support Britain, and if it did its support would be welcome; Spain might; Yugoslavia might. But that would be support from the outside. Support from America is support from the inside—the support not merely of one democracy for another, or even of one English-speaking community for another, but of one family for another that eats at the same table and breathes the same air.

Although we must not make the mistake of supposing that Americans are a British community living in another hemisphere and under another flag, it is a bigger blunder still to forget that the American republic and the British commonwealth have both the same way of life. Love of liberty made them both as love of peace disarmed them both; and if our enemies choose to add that love of ease has also demoralised them both, we must take that jibe and not forget it. For we were being demoralised by ease, and if our enemies had been cunning enough to allow that process to go on, a day might have come when recovery would have been impossible. But that sickening danger has passed. We know now what would happen to us if we failed, and we know what would happen to our civilisation—that way of life which, with all its faults (no one could be so dull as not to shudder at them), at least aims at humanity and justice. And because our way is also America's way, there is a unity between us that cannot now be broken.

Nor does any of this mean that the struggle is all altruism on one side and all selfishness on the other. To the extent to which self-preservation is selfishness, Britain is selfish. To the extent to which union for a common end is opportunism, America is opportunist. But to the extent to which there is any Christian way of life among nations both are fighting a crusade, and President Roosevelt meant neither more nor less than that when he said that America was more than the sum of all its parts, and could not be transferred alive to an alien control. The strength of democracy is the fact that it cannot, like tyranny, surrender and still live.

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.

A LONG TIME

Sir,—With reference to the second sentence of your leading article this week (January 24), might I be permitted to point out that never is a very long time.—"ETERNITY" (Auckland).

MODERN POETRY

Sir,—In the opinion of your reviewer, J.G.M., Anton Vogt is a poet with something to say, but if the extracts he quotes in his review of "Anti All That" are a fair sample I would advise this aspirant to the heights of Parnassus to stick to prose, it will work out about the same. Shakespeare, Shelley and Keats also had something to say and couldn't they say it! Just listen to this piece of word music from "The Tempest" and then compare it with the so-called "poetry" of the moderns:

*Full fathom five thy father lies:
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange;
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell;
Hark! now I hear them,
Ding, dong, Bell.*

Lines like these make lovers of real poetry lick their lips with relish and beg for more.

—"CYMBELINE" (Onehunga).

DEFINITION OF POETRY

Sir,—Those correspondents and readers who have been trying to arrive at a definition of poetry may be interested in this extract from a BBC discussion between Walter de la Mare, Stephen Spender, and Desmond Hawkins. De la Mare, as most readers will know, is one of England's older living minor poets; Spender is one of the younger poets; and Desmond Hawkins has written both poems and novels.

—"LOOKER-ON" (Wellington).

HAWKINS: You know, you're teasing me into asking you again for a definition. What are the qualities that make a man a poet, that make his writing poetry? What makes the Muses "willing"? Must he have some fineness of moral perception, or some special power of intellect? Or is it a peculiarly sensitive emotional sensibility, or some technical skill—a flair for word and rhythm?

DE LA MARE: A poet in mind, no doubt, may be deficient in sense, in cleverness, in moral fibre, in good nature, in goodness, in any of the virtues. The best method, the richest effect—and it has been proved by every poet—is secured by the use of verse, of metre and rhythm. For one reason because metre and rhythm most clearly and fully reveal the mainspring and wellspring of every living creature. For another, because since what is being said may lie a shade or two beside or beyond mere reason, because it springs out of the deeper mind, between wake and dream, this metre and the obedience it implies, keeps it in freedom but within bounds. The poem itself then resembles a happy child in a garden, a boy with a Heaven-sent teacher, a Mozart at his harpsichord, a Saint in Paradise. Not a bird in a cage. And yet, I wonder.

SPENDER: You said that you thought neither of us would attempt a definition of poetry, De la Mare. All the same, one remark of yours suggests as good a definition as I have seen. You talked about "the intrinsic harmony and accord between the thing said (whatsoever that may be), and the self that says it." A prose statement means, or should mean, precisely what it says. Therefore it can be parsed, the meaning can be separated from one particular arrangement of words and stated by another set of words. But what it says is only one element of a poetic statement which besides its prose meaning, means its imagery, its music, its mood of emotional tension, its ambiguities, and every effect which it produces.

HAWKINS: Would you say that is impossible in prose? SPENDER: No, not impossible, because prose, especially much modern fiction, such as D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, tends towards the uses of poetry, just as poetry always contains a thread of meaning separable into prose.

HAWKINS: If I understand you properly, you mean that you can exhaust the meaning of prose—but not of poetry.

SPENDER: Yes, poetry is like a language of life within certain conditions where people are experiencing a sense of the wholeness of life, whereas prose is specialised and dealing with separate branches of activities within life. Poetry is the language of the whole soul within a given situation. What it says, the rational part of it is only one part of what it expresses.

NOT A NEWS LETTER

Sir,—For some time I have noticed a BBC talk announced for Friday nights by Sir Frederick Whyte entitled "London News Letter," but until recently I have never been able to listen in at that time. The first time I did hear him, however, he gave an interesting talk of the type that is usually entitled "Britain Speaks," that is, comment on the war situation. So I tried him once or twice since, and although he is still scheduled as "London News Letter," he still gives a talk of exactly the same type as plenty of other BBC speakers. Is the fault yours or that of the BBC? I might say that the one type of journalism that has been developed to the highest degree in England, is the London news letter which appears in practically all the provincial papers, intimate, informal, and above all, "newsy" with the doings of the folk of London town. There must be hundreds of capable writers of London news letters, and now if ever we want to hear about London folk, Sir Frederick Whyte has taken the title but delivered different goods.—ABC (Wellington).

VERBAL FLY-FISHING

Sir,—If I may yet further use your valuable space, I should like to reply to "Winchester" (Auckland), with regard to his letter in this week's *Listener* (January 10). Firstly, I should like to deny that I affected to despise ancient writers. I have the greatest admiration for them. Secondly, "Winchester" confirms my opinion that he must be a "snob." Thirdly, as he challenges my ancestry in his reference to my apparently being "a good honest son of the proletariat," I shall ask him if he can claim one of semi-royal tradition, dating back over 2000 years as I can? Fourthly, I shall be glad to accept the loan of his two books which he insinuates might teach me an appreciation of culture, that is, of course, if I have not already read them. Fifthly, I wonder if "Winchester" would give me the opportunity to try and appreciate his own culture by doing a sonnet, provided that you, sir, would give it space in *The Listener*, I to nominate the subject? In fairness to him, I am willing to endeavour to do one; he to nominate a subject. The subject I suggest at random is "Summer Night."—"NEUTRAL" (Petone).

(We shall not refuse space to the Muse if she asks for it in worthy words.—Ed.).

CONGRATULATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Sir,—Having listened to English programmes for five years, I was surprised to return to New Zealand and find superior programmes. Congratulations; congratulations to 4ZB on its Sunday Radio Matinee; congratulations on the reduction of the Children's Hour.

Improvements? Oh, yes! Better co-operation between YA and ZB stations, so that when YA is talking, ZB is singing. An occasional 7 p.m. till 9 p.m. early dance session. A few talks on topical subjects such as latest aeronautical developments; improvements in radio and recording, such as the new photo electric cell gramophone; advice on aerial design. The average person is satisfied with a low standard of listening. Help to raise that standard with a radio session called "Radio Marches On!"

And now for you, Mr. Editor. The magazine is excellent, but how about a few joke drawings and more regular film notes? They are superb; and should not be missed from a single copy.—ENCHANTED (Oamaru).

GRATEFUL TO "MARGARET"

Sir,—It was with regret we heard that "Margaret" had given her last talk for a time at least. As a listener to the YA stations since 1929, I have found "Margaret's" talks always of a high standard, given in such an interesting manner, and dealing with matters of everyday concern to the ordinary average woman. Unfortunately I've missed many of the talks, but when possible have always listened to and thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated them. I hope that at some not far distant date we shall again be hearing "Margaret's" voice over the air. Meanwhile, many thanks.—"GRATEFUL LISTENER" (Murchison).