

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER

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The Home Guard

MOST people suppose that the Home Guard is a new thing in British history, but all that is new about it is its sensational growth. Although Britain has never before experienced total war, provision was made early in the Napoleonic wars for total defence. It is true that the Levy En Masse Act of George III. broke down almost as soon as it was passed, but its purpose was the defence of the realm by all "His Majesty's liege subjects."

There is, however, no historical precedent for the assembling and arming in a few months of the host now standing on guard in England. It took four years in the reign of George III. to raise 214,000 men. Nearly two million men have been raised in the reign of George VI. in a little over six months—eight times as many in one-eighth of the time. And it must not be forgotten that when the call went out for these men England had just taken the biggest blow in her military history—the almost complete loss of all the rifles, guns, tanks, stores, and transport waggons of her whole overseas army; that the Home Guard's 1¾ millions were uniformed and armed simultaneously with the raising, training, and equipping of a new regular army of approximately the same size; and that there is now not a road, bridge, or beach in the Kingdom that has not been prepared for defence.

Remembering that, what can we say of New Zealand? We have started. One in every three or four eligibles has come forward to train. Many others will come forward when real training is possible. But we deceive ourselves if we think that we have done much more than that—or, without a new impetus, ever will.

Some Home Guard Commanders realise what is wrong, but others seem to have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Home Guards are not school cadets. They are not parade-ground soldiers. They have neither the time nor the inclination to acquire precision and snap.

Instead of imitating regular soldiers, who need discipline and must have drill, the Guards should be examining their duties on the ground on which they will have to carry them out. It is far more important, and far more interesting, to ask where and how attack may come than to be wondering whether a turn is made on the left foot or on the right and which hand goes in which for "Stand At Ease."

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.

ANTI ALL THAT

Sir,—My mangled corpse rises in protest:

1. Against Llewellyn Etherington—about 30 out of 36 pieces of rhyme and scan.
2. Against J.G.M.—half-a-dozen bits name such typically New Zealand background as the pohutukawa, our Centennial, the Christchurch Cathedral, and John A. Lee.
3. Against Isobel Andrews—even those that don't, do apply to New Zealand if they apply to anything at all (I haven't claimed that they all do).
4. Against anyone else—an anticipatory protest.

—ANTON VOGT (Wellington).

MODERN VERSE

Sir,—I notice there has been a discussion in *The Listener* recently on the subject of modern verse. Like Llewellyn Etherington of Auckland I must confess that I have not read the small book of New Zealand verse J.G.M. reviewed, but I did see that it was "difficult" and "cut its corners." J.G.M. mentioned this as though it were a merit rather than a fault, and it is just this point that prompted me to write.

The cult of obscurity and difficulty in verse is taking a long time to die the death it must inevitably die. It was Mallarmé, I think, who created in France the notion that all good poetry must be difficult, because it must derive from intricate intellectual operations and not such a simple and natural thing as inspiration. Human instinct and inspiration itself, in fact, must be repudiated.

Paul Valéry, who is generally reckoned one of the greatest of modern symbolists, has even gone so far as to make the following extraordinary statement: "If I must write, I would infinitely rather write a feeble thing thoroughly conscious and with entire lucidity of mind, than give birth to the most beautiful masterpiece by the flavour of a trace or of something outside of myself."

It all amounts to a confession of aridity of heart, and one result has been a flight from life by these modern poets into the clear, pure air of their own intellects. T. S. Eliot has sought compensation in Royalism and Anglo-Catholicism.

Finally let me say that poetry is much more than a stern intellectual exercise. The sooner the moderns forget their cult of obscurity and speak to the common people in language the common people can understand, the better it will be for everybody.

—"FIAT LUX" (Wellington).

NEW ZEALAND LITERATURE

Sir,—I was interested to read a letter by Isobel Andrews of Wellington in which she says, inter alia, that a sincere and resolute attempt at putting the New Zealand scene into words might accomplish much. In my opinion, the whole appeal of moralists like Thomas Hardy, Sir Walter Scott, Olive Schreiner and the Brontës lies in the faithfulness with which they have reproduced the familiar scene. Often these portrayals are so accurate that one can almost smell and hear the scents and sounds of the particular landscape which the writer had in view. It is true that the writer in these cases writes best of those things which he knows and intimately understands. For this reason I think that young New Zealand writers who have real talent will, as a matter of course, use their native land as a background for their work, and thus in time, give us a truly distinctive national literature.

New Zealand is a new country, and for that very reason its opportunities are endless. So far we have been reared almost exclusively on the finest examples of English literature. No one would be so foolish as to deny that this is not a great inheritance, but it seems strange that as yet, the pungent atmosphere of our own country has not been more adequately captured.

For that which we wish the future to hold, we must begin to build now. No nation ever became great without the severest mental labour and the most arduous physical toil. Those who most bewail the lack of artistic pursuits in this country are the first to suspect anything with the New Zealand stamp upon it. This is a grave mistake that if persisted in, will destroy what little originality we possess now. Among my own acquaintances I number several young aspirants to literary expression whose talent is real. They make a "sincere and resolute attempt at putting the New Zealand scene into words," but they accomplish little, because editors are few, and it appears that the New Zealand scene is distasteful to them. There are pens in this country only too eager to write, musicians who would rush to their instruments at the slightest invitation, and brushes that palpitate for paint. Are there any reasons why New Zealanders should not develop their own possibilities, and, if so, what are these reasons? Why is not more encouragement forthcoming?

—"SADI" (Hamilton).

(Abridged.—Ed.).

STOKES OR STOKOWSKI?

Sir,—Dr. Edgar Ford, a visiting music examiner, is the latest to circulate the myth that Leopold Stokowski's real name is "Stokes." I feel sure Dr. Ford will not persist with this story when he knows the facts, which are (a), that Stokowski's birth certificate reads "Leopold Antony Stokowski," and (b), that his father was Polish and his mother Irish.

—"INTERESTED," (Wellington).

BBC MAORI

Sir,—Someone in London has slipped badly in not advising the BBC on the pronunciation of New Zealand place names in general and the pronunciation of Maori in particular. The other night the BBC announcer put the emphasis on the first two letters of Otago and made it rhyme with "hot." In the Christmas broadcast from the Second Echelon the BBC announcer put the emphasis on the second syllable of pakeha and made it sound like "key."

—W.R., (Wellington).

TWO SINGERS

Sir,—There are two singers who are often on the air, and who have great personality. I have been watching in *The Listener* for photographs of either of them, but so far have not seen any. The first singer is Jack Daly. He has a wonderful rich brogue. Is he a real Irishman, and if so, is he Northern or Southern, and where does he record? I don't know a note of music myself, but would like to know how he stands as a singer—I mean in his particular class. The second singer is Arthur Tracy. Is he blind? Also, what is his nationality and where does he record?

Somewhat these two men have the same wonderful quality in their voices which a number of great singers lack. What is it?—"CURIOUS" (Thames).

(We know little about the Irish baritone, Jack Daly, beyond the fact that he has a large number of Regal-Zonophone recordings of Irish and other ballads to his credit. How Arthur Tracy came to be called the "street" singer was a pure accident. At a party in New York years ago Tracy was singing and the host asked who the "sweet" singer was. A radio talent scout present said he was just one of the boys, but what did the host mean by "street singer"? "I said 'sweet' not 'street'," replied the host. "But that would be a dandy title for a radio artist," said the scout. A gruelling audition followed a few days later, and Arthur Tracy deserted vaudeville and musical comedy for fame and a long contract as a radio star. He was born in Philadelphia, where his father and mother were both prominent in church and club music circles, his father being a well known professional singer. Arthur began singing publicly at ten. At fifteen he bought all the Caruso records and studied the great Italian's technique. At the Pennsylvania University later he soon became better known for his singing than for his proficiency as a student of architecture. At the suggestion of the Dean he transferred his activities to the Curtis School of Music where he studied voice and violin. He was engaged to sing in "Blossom Time," "The Student Prince" and other operettas. After five years of theatrical singing he came into his own when the alert manager of Vincent Lopez heard him and steered him over to Columbia Broadcasting. He later went to England for seven weeks engagement and stayed for over four years. Arthur Tracy's picture appeared in *The Listener* of January 31.)