

NEW ZEALAND
LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday Price Threepence

MARCH 7, 1941

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES:

115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.I.

Post Office Box 1070.

Telephone, 46-520.

Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

For Subscription and Advertising Rates see Page 40.

Food In Its Place

IN a recent issue of the "Manchester Guardian" a correspondent suggested that one of the good things the war had done was to put food in its place. Most people will feel that it has done the very opposite of that. It has put food in the wrong place, namely into everybody's head and heart. When meals are as reasonable a certainty as day and night and the succession of the seasons we can afford to forget them. But we think a little anxiously about pleasures that we may at any time lose.

It is of course true that some people think of food almost without ceasing. So do some of drink, and some of other indulgences. But they are not healthy people. Health is the absence rather than the presence of obsessions of all kinds—especially of such an unnecessary obsession, in normal times, as the arrival of the next meal. And even in war-time we face nothing worse in New Zealand, and in fact in any British country, than the temporary disappearance of something to which we have been accustomed. We run no risk of starvation, or even of prolonged hunger. The present ration in England, for example, after the submarines have done their worst, is bread *ad lib.*, fats 12 ounces a week, sugar 8 ounces, meat 32 ounces, bacon and ham 4 ounces, tea, coffee and cocoa to the limit of our pockets. That means hardship for gluttons only.

Food can, however, get on people's brains without touching their hearts, but in that case its victims are women only. In spite of the example of Mary and Martha, most women insist on cumbering themselves with "much serving," but even in their case the war should not mean complications. Since most of their worrying is brought about by embarrassment of riches, their problem should be eased when their choice is narrowed down from a multitude of possibilities to two or three. And as for the men in such homes, a healthy man forgets his food when he is working, but responds as automatically to a rattle of dishes as troop-horses when the trumpets call "Feed!"

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.

VERSES WITH A MORAL

Sir,—Will you please let me know where I could get a copy of the verses quoted by the speaker at 22B "Man in the Street" session on Sunday evening, January 26? I did not catch the title, but it ended with the words "The man who delivers the goods." It would be better still if you would kindly publish the verses, as I think they have a moral that a good many of us lack in our behaviour.

—"RANGING" (Carterton).

By the courtesy of the speaker, we are able to give the poem in full.

THE WELCOME MAN

*There's a man in the world who is never turned down,
Wherever he chances to stray;
He gets the glad hand in the populous town,
Or out where the farmers make hay.*

*He's greeted with pleasure on deserts of sand,
And deep in the aisles of the woods;
Wherever he goes there's a welcoming hand—
He's the Man Who Delivers the Goods.*

*The failures of life sit around and complain;
The gods haven't treated them white;
They've lost their umbrellas whenever there's rain,
And they haven't their lanterns at night.*

*Men tire of the failures who fill with their sighs
The air of their own neighbourhoods;
There's one who is greeted with love-lighted eyes—
He's the Man Who Delivers the Goods.*

*One fellow is lazy and watches the clock,
And waits for the whistle to blow;
And one has a hammer with which he will knock,
And one tells a story of woe.*

*And one, if requested to travel a mile,
Will measure the perches and roods;
But one does his stint with a whistle or smile—
He's the Man Who Delivers the Goods.*

*One man is afraid that he'll labour too hard—
The world isn't yearning for such;
And one man is always alert, on his guard
Lest he put in a minute too much.*

*And one has a grouch or a grudge he'll repay
He's a victim of humours and moods,
But it's hey for the lad who has tried M.R.A.
He's the One Who Delivers the Goods.*

NEW ZEALAND LITERATURE.

Sir,—It is common ground in this discussion, I think, that local colour is no substitute for good writing and character-drawing and that there has been too much use of local colour in New Zealand literature.

G. R. Gilbert, however, seems to be in danger of going to the other extreme and under-rating the value of local material. "A great writer is a great writer anywhere." Granted. But a great writer has to write about something or somebody, and an army of great writers have gone for subjects to the things and people about them, the things and people they know. Mr. Gilbert recognises this for he says, "If a great writer is born or lives in New Zealand he writes of New Zealand people." This has been true of a very large proportion of great writers from Homer to the present day. Tolstoy is by universal consent one of the greatest of novelists. He gives you a sense of the universal. But Tolstoy is primarily a Russian novelist who writes of Russian life—the life he lived himself. It will hardly do to say that the Russian element in his books is "quite incidental." Isn't Balzac primarily a novelist of French life? Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, all wrote of the life they knew. Jane Austen took a small, secluded corner of life and made it immortal.

These writers didn't begin by saying to themselves: "I'm going to be universal; therefore I will

avoid describing this landscape and that custom." They simply went ahead and wrote, and as they wrote they took anything that suited their purpose from the life around them, be it man or bird or tree or song.

They succeeded because, roughly speaking, they raised the particular to the level of the universal. But they would not have succeeded had they not felt intensely about this particular. This, I feel sure, is what Mrs. Andrews meant. For the most part,

More letters from listeners will be found
on Page 15

New Zealand writers must write about New Zealand, just as English writers must write about England and American writers about America.

Poetry as well as prose can give the local and the particular an unusual significance. Horace writes of scenes in and round ancient Rome, but we still read him. Shakespeare is a world genius, but at heart he was an Englishman, steeped in the sights and sounds and speech of his country. Really the fairy story of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is enacted, not in a wood near Athens, but in a wood in Warwickshire. The play is English at Bottom. Keats got the idea of the Nightingale Ode (so I believe) in an English garden. The bird and the trees were familiar. Are New Zealanders to be warned against writing poetry to the riro-riro by name, lest they should run the risk of being thought locally minded? We know the nightingale only by association, but we know the riro by sight and sound. Incidentally, a musician from Europe said he thought the riro the sweeter singer. Very well; let us jolly well write as much as we like about the riro, but it must be sincere, passionate writing, the fruit of close observation and deep feeling, not mere pretty decorative stuff. Then it may happen that someone in New Zealand will write about the riro as Keats wrote about the nightingale.

My contention is that New Zealand writers must think more and not less about New Zealand. They must steep themselves in New Zealand—study her, understand her, love her—and by New Zealand I mean everything New Zealand, animate and inanimate. From a full mind and heart wisdom will proceed. After all, we have the highest authority for believing that a man cannot love God if he does not love his neighbour. I suggest that the principle be applied to literature.—ALAN MULGAN (Wellington).

MODERN VERSE.

Sir,—Like J.G.M., I have followed with some interest the controversy which his review initiated, but I think it would have been much more interesting if, in its early stages, the protagonists had defined their terms. It would be interesting, for example, to know what verse means to Anton Vogt—and what it means to Llewellyn Etherington. Is it, may I ask, something which rhymes and/or scans and is, in that, distinct from prose, or is it, anti-all that, a new way of writing prose in which a paragraph is sub-divided and the sub-divisions are laid on top of one another like kindling-wood?

And since everyone is going properly anthropophagous, I might as well have a piece of J.G.M. for the way he dismisses tree-ferns and tuis and the bush. These are perfectly fitting subjects for a New Zealand poet, in fact so much piffle has been written about each of them it's high time a real poet reclaimed them for us. I suppose miles of rubbish has been written about skylarks but that does not detract from the value of Shelley's effort.—BORSTALIAN (Auckland).