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They Also Fight

THE Prime Minister's return to New Zealand rounds off a tale of experiences such as no Prime Minister in New Zealand has ever known before. Mr. Seddon visited New Zealand soldiers in South Africa. Mr. Massey and Sir Joseph Ward visited a New Zealand army in France—a visit marked by some discomfort and not wholly free of risk. But by comparison with the journey of Mr. Fraser those were Cook's tours. The world was then civilised and in general subject to law. To-day it is a world of brigands, with no safety on the sea, little on the land, and none in the air. A Prime Minister is no longer a man who directs his country's activities from a safe place. There is no safe place for him anywhere while his countrymen fight. It is total war.

And total war takes us back, not merely to the Dark Ages, but to the beginning of organised history. It makes soldiers of civilians, and scatters death among women and children. And if there is no security for the helpless and the innocent, none for the servants of mercy, and none even for the halt and the maimed, there can be none for the men who have started the conflict and whose leadership keeps it going. In other words a Prime Minister must be as fearless physically as he is bold morally or he will lose contact with his people, and we may even be approaching the stage at which statesmen and generals will stand side by side on the battlefield. Although it is not likely that our military and our political leaders will ever again see Caesars, Cromwells, Napoleons and Washingtons returning to the scene—the Commissars of Russia, and in some degree our own War Ministers now in Egypt and the Far East, remind us that war means fighting with moral as well as with material weapons, and no escape for anyone.

But whatever the truth there may be, it is no longer possible to say or feel—if that ever was the full story—that statesmen make wars and soldiers fight them. Just as it's beginning to be as dangerous again to be a general as to be a private soldier, so the statesman who leads his country into a war is almost as likely as its humblest citizen to be himself among the casualties. And the citizen is in danger only when the war comes to him; the statesman, if he lives on the outer fringes of the conflict, goes, and must go, to meet it.

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 in 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.

BLACK RECORD.

Sir,—I am indebted to "Audax II." and to John F. Johnson for their sane contributions to this controversy. One could wish that the opposition showed more intelligent perception and less racial hysteria. There are none so blind as those who will not see. My arguments, unconditioned by my anonymity, still remain unanswered, as do those of my supporters, because there is no rational answer to them. No one can deny that Sir Robert Vansittart, through *Black Record*, tries to prove that to be German connects some inherent moral disability, setting the inhabitants of the Reich apart from all other peoples. We agree with E. A. W. Smith that Sir Robert does not propound a racial theory as does Goebbels, but if his attitude to Germans is not racialism of any equally grubby variety then the word has no meaning. Mr. MacBeth sees nothing ludicrous in a Diplomatic Adviser whose advice is not taken. I would point out that the foreign policy to which Sir Robert took no public exception led the greatest nation on earth to the verge of almost irretrievable disaster, and that policy was characterised by shameless trucking to the Fascist powers. Does Mr. MacBeth know, or has he forgotten, that Sir Robert was associated with Sir Samuel Hoare in formulating the Hoare-Laval peace proposals? Sir Robert's record of appeasement goes back a long way, and unless my opponents are willing to, or capable of, answering these criticisms, common-sensibly, they waste paper.—AUDAX (Auckland).

NEW ZEALAND LITERATURE

Sir,—Several writers to *The Listener*, and professor Sewell's talks over 1YA have done much recently to stimulate interest in New Zealand's literary future. Many of the ideas expressed by G. R. Gilbert in a recent letter strike the essence of the New Zealand writer's problem. It is good that we should assimilate the best in European literature, but to imitate it, as most of our writers have done, is essentially futile. The result can only be an art out-of-date. Too many New Zealand authors and poets think of our art as exiled. In "New Zealand Art" Eileen Duggan, writes:

"We are the wheat self-sown
Beyond the hem of the paddock
Banned by the wind from the furrows."

She sees New Zealand as culturally outlawed by great oceans from the source of her genius. Such an outlook has been the most pernicious influence on New Zealand literature. When Mr. Gilbert speaks of New Zealand writers as without roots, I think he only partly sees the truth. Many of our native writers, intensely in touch with our life, have had roots, despite themselves. Obsessed with the myth of "home," they have failed to recognise their true genius. In other words, nearly all of our writers have been following "false lights," possibly through blindly accepting the tradition of our early and exotic poet, Bracken.

G. R. Gilbert mentions Sargeson, Vogt, and Curnow as the fore-runners of New Zealand literature-to-be. But he does not do justice to our past. For example, in "Persephone in Winter," Robin Hyde wrote a few poems which breathe the very air of our land. And Katherine Mansfield in a few stories—in particular I think of "The Woman at the Store" in *Something Childish*—"finds" our national home.

Perhaps Mr. Gilbert only half-sees the problem when he says that our writers must write about New Zealand people and not our country. The difficulty of every poet who has tried to write on New Zealand nature has been insuperable. No native

poet has been sensitive enough or great enough to express New Zealand nature as only we see it, and so begin a native tradition. So our poets have written in the English tradition on the "rose" and the "nightingale" and merely substituted "kowhai" and "tui." Unless native writers strive to express a land through a people for poets to attempt to follow their example is to set up another "false light" in the already much befogged atmosphere of New Zealand aesthetics.—KEITH SINCLAIR (Auckland).

Sir,—G. R. Gilbert says that "practically without exception until the appearance of Sargeson, Vogt, Curnow and a few others," New Zealand writers "wrote like tourists, as though they had no roots—they referred to Home — and the natural surroundings of New Zealand were exotic to them." I should like to hear some comment on this by the ghost of William Pember Reeves, who could write the head off most, if not all, of our present-day writers. Quite a good deal of literature has been written by "tourists," from Sterne's "Sentimental Journey" to Stevenson's "Travels With a Donkey," and beyond. I am New Zealand born and bred, and I write. I call Britain Home, and I shall go on doing so. If Mr. Gilbert thinks I have no roots, and that the "natural surroundings of New Zealand" are exotic to me, he is thinking nonsense.—IRISH-NEW ZEALANDER (Wellington).

THE SUN

Sir,—In a very interesting article entitled "The Sun Caused the Trouble" which appeared in *The Listener* of August 8, there occurred this phrase: "when the rotation of the sun brought the same sun-spotting back to face the earth." Now, during my school days we were taught that the sun was "fixed," and I have always understood this to mean that the sun did not move upon an orbit, nor did it rotate. I understand, too, that the moon does not rotate, although it moves around the earth.

A note of confirmation on this subject would be much appreciated.—B.R. (Foxton).

As the correspondent says, the position of the sun is fixed. The article did not mean that the sun rotated round the earth. It did mean that the sun itself is not fixed or stationary. The sun also rotates on an axis of its own. Because it is not solid (only 1.4 times more dense than water), the period of this rotation varies in different latitudes of the sun from 24½ days to the equator to about 33 days at latitude 75 degrees. Roughly, the rotation occurs every four weeks, so that sun-spots might be expected to recur in four-weekly periods. If sun-spots were increasing in activity, radio interference might be worse four weeks after its first manifestations. If sun-spots were decreasing, an improvement might be expected.—Ed.

OUR FILM REVIEWS

Sir,—May I protest against L. D. Austin's attack on your film page? My husband and I have a small child and only on rare occasions are able to go to the pictures, but we are able to read *The Listener's* film reviews and thus keep abreast with the various films. We find the film review page the next best thing to seeing the pictures.—MRS. J. PEARCE (Lower Hutt).

POINTS FROM LETTERS

"DEHEL" (Kaiwaka) draws attention to the resemblance between Russell Clark's "prosperous author and shabby reporter" and Edgar Wallace and his secretary Bob Curtis.

"ANGLO-AMERICAN" (Dunedin) thanks "the Major" of 3YA for a "very fine presentation" called "The Spirit of America."

H. M. SMITH (Rangiora) supports Mr. Russell Wood's denunciation of American radio plays, and asks for more British productions like "Billy Bunter."

"ANOTHER MOTHER" (Tauranga), who says that she would sooner "listen to the learned doctor than to experienced mothers and old grannies," scoffs at the suggested connection between whooping cough and fat feet.

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENT

"HEELY-AGNES FAN."—Perhaps later.