

LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

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To Moscow And Back

THE article we print on pp. 20-21 is not meant to be prophetic. We do not expect that Napoleon's story will be repeated by Hitler. Napoleon's army marched on its feet and carried its baggage and guns on horse-drawn vehicles. It lived on the country while it advanced and did not expect to turn back in thirty days. The journey to Moscow was as badly organised as it was ill-conceived; Napoleon's single unqualified blunder, as he afterwards admitted in the plainest language.

But Sergeant Bourgogne is still a portent. If he had not recorded his experiences only scholars would now know what happened on the retreat, and even they would see it through a glass darkly. Now everyone can get the facts for two or three shillings, and having them begin to understand what winter fighting in Russia means. We say again that the story will not be repeated whatever happens to the German advance; but winter will come again; and winter in Russia to armies in the open is something that neither science nor planning nor victory nor hope can rob of horrors that it would be almost impossible to magnify. The worst horrors that Sergeant Bourgogne describes, or records—for he attempts no fine writing—came out of the north wind; and the north wind still blows and will blow; it still travels over the forests bringing snow and 27 degrees of frost; and it still blows from October till March almost everywhere north of Moscow.

And after the wind and the snow nothing exhausted the French so much, or terrified them so much, as the fact that the enemy were seldom within reach and never more than a few miles away. Those who fell behind were seldom seen again. It was death to get isolated on the flanks, to move too far ahead, to get lost in the forest or crowded into a burnt-out village. The crossing of the Beresina was so horrible that even Sergeant Bourgogne was sickened, though he had thought himself already beyond feeling. For as Napoleon himself said, Russia "overflows on you if you lose; she retires into the snow if you win; and suddenly comes out again like the head of the Hydra." And Russia is just as big to-day as in his day, just as cold, just as persistent, and a hundred times more united.

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.

WAGNER'S OPERAS

Sir,—The arrangers of our classical recitals are in the habit of neglecting the greatest of dramatic composers, Richard Wagner, regardless of the fact that their programmes cannot get on without him; and it occurred to me, could this neglect be deliberate? Was the solution to be found in Wagner's nationality? Since I should hate to accuse persons I have never met of stupidity, I hope I may be mistaken. To music-lovers Wagner is just Wagner—that is, the best thing that ever came out of Germany (much the same as Gilbert and Sullivan — Shakespeare excepted—is the best that ever came out of England). And it never occurred to me to put him anywhere but where he belongs—in the common Heaven of music, along with Mozart, Beethoven, Handel, Verdi, Rossini, and the rest. Richard Wagner, except in his relation to the national music, had and has no more to do with Germany than I in New Zealand have had with the Gold Coast or the Yukon. He is less connectable with Adolf's peregrinations than the Man in the Moon.

Then, if my suspicions are ungrounded, let us have more of him; not merely the *Tannhauser* Overture, and the Act 3 Prelude from *Lohengrin* (usually murdered on the Wurlitzer). Let us have *Parsifal*, the *Ring*, *Tristan*, and especially let us have the *Meistersingers*. As to the question of detailed recitals, undetailed ones are useless to all but experienced critics.

DAVID ALTON (Mount Albert).

THE LARGEST ORGAN.

Sir,—I have specifications of several of the largest organs, and what is claimed to be the largest is in Wanamaker Store, Philadelphia. It has five Manuals, 227 Speaking Stops, 34 Couplers, 102 Combination Pistons, 17,954 pipes.

The largest Church organ is in Liverpool Cathedral, England. It has 5 Manuals, 168 Speaking Stops, 49 Couplers, 5 Spare Stops, 10,934 pipes.

I think either of these would put the Salt Lake City organ in the shade.

W. GAISFORD (Christchurch).

A QUESTION

Sir,—A simple question. Why doesn't the National Broadcasting Service of New Zealand conduct a series of talks on the post-war social order on similar lines to those now being given from the ABC in Australia? (See *The Listener*, September 26). Or is the NBS perhaps too occupied with such vital topics as "Titles and Distinctions" and the right way to address a baronet?

RECONSTRUCTION (Wellington).

MUSIC WITHOUT WORDS

Sir,—On Saturday, September 27, listeners throughout New Zealand enjoyed a musical treat in the broadcast from 3YA of Bach's "Peasant Cantata." Will you allow at least one Auckland listener an opportunity to place on record his appreciation of the really memorable performance of the Royal Christchurch Musical Society? I cannot allow the occasion to pass, however, without suggesting that my enjoyment was perhaps partly due to the fact that no announcer intruded into the music at intervals to tell us what the cantata was about. In decided contrast to the good taste of this presentation is the rendering of grand opera that we have to put up with from the national stations. Can there really be listeners whose enjoyment of *Il Trovatore*, for instance (not my favourite opera, but the last to be heard

from 1YA, on a recent Sunday evening), depends on a New Zealand announcer, telling them every two or three minutes what the story is about? Would it not be much preferable to have a few minutes "story" at the beginning, and then give the opera "straight"? Perhaps other listeners also have views on this point.

A. K. TURNER (Auckland).

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Sir,—Your correspondent, "Anti-Blues" suggested that classical music belongs to a past era. In case others think the same, may I have space to point out that the word "classical" means "belonging or pertaining to the first class—that is, the highest standard or quality." Classical music has nothing to do with fashion, either old or new, for it is still being written by living composers, and will still be written by others to come. It is not a matter of era, but of quality. Light music, pretty tunes, catchy songs, and dance melodies, are all necessary, and have their own place. Many people who like classical music, can also appreciate these. But they are written primarily to please the ear, or for dance rhythms; whereas classical music is a language which reaches beyond the ear and speaks to the spirit. It is not a language of dreariness—it can express pathos, merriment, joy, sorrow, comfort, humour. There are those who understand it instinctively, others who learn to know it only after long and patient training, and many who never understand it at all. In England, not long ago, a working man who had always derided classical music, wandered in to a symphony concert because he had nowhere to go. He came out afterwards, sought the conductor, and said with amazement: "Guess I never caught on before, but you've got me now! I'm a blinkin' highbrow, and I never knew it!"

CLASSICAL (Papatotetoe).

BLACK RECORD

Sir,—No doubt you wish to end this correspondence, but I should be obliged if I could reply to the letter in which "Audax" reiterates his contention that permanent officials should resign if and when their advice is ignored by Cabinet or any particular Minister. In 1935, the Labour Party took over the government of the Dominion with a policy opposed in many ways to that of the previous Government. Now it is fair to assume that the political opinions of the civil service are divided in the same proportion as opinion in the electorate as a whole, and that being so, both Governments must have received advice which was not acted upon. Yet not one of the heads of departments has resigned on the score of policy, so far as I am aware, nor would any sensible man expect him to.

I am not in the confidence of the British Cabinet or Foreign Office, as "Audax" appears to be, so I cannot say whether Sir Robert Vansittart was responsible for the Hoare-Laval policy, but I would refer "Audax" to Virginia Cowle's *Looking for Trouble* (pages 105 to 107), for proof of Sir Robert's anti-appeasement attitude, and of how he was removed in 1937 from his position as head of the Foreign Office, and practically side-tracked. As for the mass cruelty of the Germans, could better proof be provided than their actions at the present time?

In spite of the "boldness" of your correspondent's pen name, he still abstains from signing his real name.

W. MACBETH (Christchurch).

(If *Audax* wishes to reply he may do so. Otherwise this correspondence is closed.—Ed.)

POINTS FROM LETTERS

"TEAM-WORK" (Ross) writes to say that if the serial *Teamwork* could be broadcast twice weekly instead of only once "many others besides herself would be grateful."

"ANDANTE CANTABLE" (Devonport) sends us an account of an open-air classical concert at the Lewisohn Stadium in New York which was attended by 24,000 people, with another 2,000 clamouring to gain admission. We have not space for the full story, but agree with our correspondent that this event "should interest those who think that classical music has lost its popularity."