

NEW ZEALAND
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Noxious Words

GROSSLY though our deeds belie us, we find ourselves in almost complete sympathy with the correspondent who writes to us to-day from Central Otago. Nor is it a case of wallowing in the muddy waters of repentance. We are ashamed, but we shall sin again. We are not strong enough to save ourselves. A hundred push us down the slope for every one who tries, like our correspondent, to arrest our descent. We know that we shall go on sliding and that the pit below us has no bottom. The most we can do is to thank him as we slip out of his hands.

Some of the words that he charges us with using he calls "pure vermin." That is kind. Others he describes as hybrids. That is polite. Still others he calls "filthy," and we can certainly not say that they are clean. But our correspondent is a farmer, lucky man. With good fences, vigilance, and some luck, he can prevent mongrel invasion of his stock paddocks and exercise some control at least over his crops. He is not exposed as we are, to what Fowler calls invasion from every direction—from above, from below, and from all sides, as well as from the centre—and is not left as we are without clear warning when the enemy comes. We are journalists and not philologists. We work in a hurry. We have sometimes to take what we are given. Sometimes we know, sometimes we do not know, that the sheep we hurry along is a goat. We are far more likely to be watching the clock than the goat's breech or muzzle. We know, too, that in the evolution of words goats become sheep if they live long enough.

In addition, we are New Zealanders. We know that language can be too pure, speech too perfect, pronunciation too English. The laws of language are not laws but conventions; temporary agreements; and to cling too long to them is to trade in superstitions. How soon a radio technician may safely become a radiotrician no one at present can say; but it should not take as long as it took cadets to become cads, or *mobile vulgus* to become the mob. We take comfort also from the warning issued a few years ago in Moscow (and repeated in H. L. Mencken's *The American Language*) that "Oxford English is an aristocratic tongue fostered by the governing classes to maintain their icy and lofty exclusiveness." There is something to be said for the combination of carelessness and ignorance that keeps ninety-nine out of every hundred New Zealanders in the same cart.

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.

NOXIOUS WORDS.

Sir,—Any new industry invents, adapts, or borrows words to describe new technicalities and functions. As such words creep into use without being approved by some authority on language, I suggest that in the new radio and broadcasting industry you, and others, do your best to root out any verbal horrors before they follow the example of the gorse plant. Here are a few specimens: *Clas-sicana*, *Chopinata*, *Organola*, *Overturiana* (*The Listener*). Surely these are pure vermin?

Rendition (NBS): Is this not incorrect and unnecessary? If we must have it, let us go the whole hog and speak of an encore as a rerenditioning.

Radiotrician (*Trade Advertisements*): This meaningless mongrel (presumably formed on a false analogy with electrician) is about as logical as trying to make a motor car by tying the hind leg of a donkey on to a pram. If spelt "radiatrician" (using one of the roots in the ponderous "pediatrician" which recently appeared in *The Listener*), it is more logical but remains a Latin-Greek hybrid. If radio technician—expert man—serviceman, etc., are not good enough, why not hold a competition for the right word?

While writing may I ask Gordon Mirams if he knows why film exhibitors state that films "will be commenced"?—why cannot they "begin" or even "start"? I note that G.M. has joined the army of anticipators. Much as I respect him as a film critic may I ask him whether he thinks "anticipate" and "expect" are synonymous and, if so, to follow A. P. Herbert's suggestion to ponder on the difference between "expect to be married" and "anticipate marriage"? "Expect" "foresee" and "forestall" could well replace the filthy "anticipate."

If G.M., the renditioners, radiotricians and Over-turianaphiles wish to start an argument on these examples I will not bite; firstly because I am no authority, and secondly because they are only random illustrations of the principle.

—A. J. HODGKIN (Moa Flat, Heriot).

(So far as G.M. is concerned he wishes to say that he dislikes the word "commence" as much as our correspondent and if it has crept into his page it must have been in a very unguarded moment. But he had no control over film exhibitors, who usually seem to go on the assumption that any long word is better than a short one.—Ed.)

WRESTLERS AND BOXERS

Sir,—I was amused to read the challenge by Fred Atkins. What hatred some professional wrestlers seem to harbour against boxers! But Atkins knows that he's treading very safe ground. It would not be necessary to be a professional wrestler to have the presence of mind to pull the legs from under a man who has boxing gloves tied on. Again our hero bashfully admits that he is not fussy about the weights of the boxers he proposes to teach a lesson. He knows there is only one heavy-weight boxer of any standing in New Zealand and that this one weighs only 13 stone compared with Atkins's 17 stone.

It's all just a cheap publicity trick to score off the manly sport on the flimsiest pretext.

MILO (Petone).

THE LARGEST ORGAN

Sir,—Your correspondent, W. Gaisford, of Christchurch, claimed that the largest organ was situated in Wanamaker Store, Philadelphia. This organ has 5 manuals, 227 speaking stops, 34 couplers, 102 combination pistons, and 17,954 pipes. I have always understood that the biggest organ in the world is that which stands in the Convention Hall at Atlantic City, New Jersey. It has 7 manuals, consisting of 487 keys, 32 pedal keys, 1,233 stop-tongues and

right jambs operating the pipes. There are 32,882 pipes. The bellows are operated by 7 electric blowers which total 404 horse-power. The hall in which it stands is so large that it could house a 13-story building, and it can seat an audience of 41,000 people.

V. W. HOSKEN.

CHINA'S COMMUNIST ARMIES

Sir,—Mr. W. H. Donald, in his interview with your paper, refers to the Communist Armies of China as "rag-tag and bobtail," and goes on to say: "I was with the Generalissimo when he chased them into the north-west." Whether an army which fights its way through another army — arming itself in the process from enemy casualties can be said to have been "chased" seems, to me at least, doubtful. A study of Edgar Snow's book "Scorched Earth" (Mr. Donald means to, and does insult Mr. Snow when he refers to him as an "armchair communist") suggests that Chiang Kai-Shek allows his hatred of Communism to outweigh his hatred of Fascism. Nor must we forget that France was betrayed by those who preferred Fascism to Communism.

The question that Mr. Donald and those who agree with him conveniently ignore is: How has the (rag-tag and bobtail) Eighth Route Army managed to hold its North China bases for three years, while the main Chinese army was retreating far into the west? They do not answer that question, but Mr. Snow does. His answer is combat efficiency. The combat efficiency of the Eighth Route Army was roughly 400 per cent. better than that attained on any other front. At the same time the Communist commanders report that they are paid for only about one-fifth of their forces, so that each man and officer receives an average of only about thirteen American cents per month!

Mr. Snow answers all the questions, while Mr. Donald just sneers. I suggest that Mr. Snow's statements carry more weight.

CHINA (Christchurch).

MUSIC WITHOUT WORDS

Sir,—May I endorse fully A. K. Turner's opinion about the broadcast of operas and the annoying interruptions of the commentator. The plot could be outlined before the beginning of each act, as Mr. Turner suggests. Moreover the listener is able to find a résumé of the opera in your columns—though not always quite intelligible or quite correct (as in the case of "Carmen").

It is certainly an insult to the intelligence of the audience to insinuate that it is incapable of following the story after these "preparations," without having somebody chirping in continually. In many cases the story as such is unimportant—anyhow in comparison with the music, so that even if minor details escape one not much harm is done. We are expected to get the right "opera-atmosphere" by factitious remarks as "ah—here is the conductor now," and we even hear the applause of the would-be audience. Does it improve this "illusion," if the music is interrupted all the time? Nobody would put up with it in a "real" opera house!

Various correspondents have asked why the excellent classical programmes in the early afternoon are not given in detail, when the ephemeral dinner music to which nobody is admittedly listening seriously, is listed item by item.

"IN ARTE VOLUMPAS" (Havelock North).

VAN DER VELDEN.

Sir,—It was interesting to see a story about the great artist Van der Velden in a recent *Listener*. A friend of his brought him to my home near Christchurch early in 1900. He tried to express his admiration for Otira with its bush-clad hills. "It is like a place" he said hesitatingly, picking his words, "it is like a place—where the Almighty does dwell."

CONSTANT READER (Cashmere Hills).