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115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.I.

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Lying To America

IN a sensationally outspoken address last week in Canada, Mr. Herbert Agar, a leading United States editor, called on the British to cease "lying to the United States" if they wished to win the war. By lying he meant pretending—cracking too hardy, holding chins too high, denying that they were really in peril when the earth was cracking under their feet. Beyond a certain point, Mr. Agar argued, this was playing straight into Hitler's hands. The war could not be won without America, and Americans would never join in while Britain seemed safe.

On the day on which that warning was uttered Germany divided the Russian armies in the Crimea, and General Wavell made a public pronouncement on the defences of the north-west frontier of India. In other words it was made clear to those who had eyes to see that the British Empire as well as Russia might soon be in the gravest peril. But it has not even been hinted yet that the Government or people of the United Kingdom feel undue alarm. The situation will of course have been discussed privately with Washington. There can be no such thing any longer as reticence between the Governments of the two great democracies. But a democracy is a state in which action comes from the minds and wills of private individuals. Mr. Roosevelt can never be more than a thought or two ahead of Congress, and Congress no more than a debate or two ahead of the American people. America comes in or stays out on the decision, not of Washington, but of the farmers, planters, manufacturers and labourers represented in Washington.

It is to those people, Mr. Agar now declares, that the truth must at once be told. They must know, not merely what dangers threaten the British, but in what peril they stand themselves, and pride has so far combined with prudence to keep the truth away from them. In our anxiety not to tell the Americans that they ought to be in we are denying strenuously that we need them. And now we have this blunt intimation from the Americans themselves that if we are too proud to tell the truth we had better prepare for the consequences.

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.

THE CAPTAIN RAMSAY CASE

Sir,—Of all the attacks now being made upon our beloved Britain, and all that she stands for in the life of the world, none surpasses, in subtlety and satanic slime, that which is being persistently directed against British aristocrats, nobility and gentry. It pretends to be directed only against "privilege," against the power of an alleged "ruling class," against the "haves" in the interests of the "have nots," against "the old school tie" as a symbol of "class-conscious superiority." It avers that its only desire is to have Britain's life directed by the best possible. But what it really does is to foster the idea that gross unfairness abounds in British life. It suggests that the son of the labouring man is not given a fair chance. It would have Britons think in terms of ability going to waste in the lower ranks of society, while futility, in the upper classes, is allowed to make a stupid muck of British affairs. It lampoons the British nobility and gentry as a collection of brainless fools who are allowed all too much influence on the life of Britain. In short, it stirs up class-consciousness, resentfully, to the detriment of British unity and solidarity, at a time when everything which might hinder our being fully one with each other should be put aside.

There are fools and knaves, alas, in every class, but to single out for special attack those Britons who have been brought up on "noblesse oblige" (privilege carries with it responsibility) is to do Britain poor service. The suggestion that "nobility and gentry only need apply" in the selection of Conservative Party candidates in Britain is simply untrue. I myself worked, years ago, towards the election of an ex-elementary-schoolmaster, the selected Conservative candidate in the constituency in which I lived.

You quote, in your editorial article (31/10/41), and in your reprint of matter from that periodical, *The Economist's* assertion that Captain Ramsay was selected as a candidate for Parliament only because he came from "the right class." What right has *The Economist* to make any such assertion? It had no entry into the minds and motives of the selection committee, and without such entry this assertion is merely supposition. It has no value, no necessary relationship to the facts. All that you print from *The Economist* is class-consciousness-provoking pro-

paganda. That a periodical of the standing of *The Economist* can lend itself to such propaganda goes to prove the strength of the interests behind the attack on British nobility and gentry. One wonders who inspires all this, and what the real objective is. In whose interests is it to defame the British "upper classes," to try to divide Britons by class-conscious diatribes, to gird at "privilege" in British life (to the ignoring of the deep sense of responsibility which most privileged Britons have)?

My one and only aristocrat friend once said to me, "The only way in which a man like myself can justify his existence is by free, ready, and willing community-service." Is Britain to be deprived of people of his sort because some of his class forget "noblesse oblige" and lead useless lives? There is nobility to be found, even as things are, in every class of the community; and there is much need for more leisure for all that true culture may have chance of life among us; but British life will be the poorer if this attack on nobility and gentry succeeds.

C.C.C. (Cambridge).

Sir,—All of us are strongly tempted to dismiss the opinions of our opponents as those of fools. But in our better moments we know that to call a man a fool is not to answer him. You publish in *The Listener* of October 31 an article from *The Economist* which describes Captain Ramsay as "a complete fool." Your own editorial supports *The Economist*. Yet neither *The Economist* nor you adduce evidence to prove that he is a fool. The evidence does prove that he holds ideas that are hated at present by the great majority of Englishmen. But those ideas need to be shown wrong by argument, and cannot be so shown by mere abuse.

The dictionary tells me that a fool is "a silly person, simpleton, person whose conduct one disapproves of." You have proved that Captain Ramsay is a fool in the last sense of the word, but not in the commonly accepted sense in which you doubtless intended the word to be taken.

The Economist suggests that he was a fool because he did not "keep his mouth shut." Yet Mr. Fraser has recently advised us that now is the time to speak the truth as we see it. If Captain Ramsay is a "complete fool," that is to say, a silly person or a simpleton, why has the British Government troubled to lock him up in Brixton Gaol?

If you had been content to show that Captain Ramsay held wrong, unreasonable, and unpopular opinions, I would not have had any protest to make. But I do protest against what seems to me to be a departure from your usual standards of liberality in controversy. Captain Ramsay may be wicked, he may for all I know be a fool, but you have not proved him a fool by just saying he is one.

FEEBLE-MINDED (Christchurch).

(Aren't we all?—Ed.)

SUNDAY AFTERNOON PROGRAMMES

Sir,—We would like to inform your correspondent L. D. Austin, that it is not just a superstition that some people listen to the Sunday afternoon radio programmes. We should also like to say that out of our quite wide circle of acquaintances, we know of a number who listen to these programmes with great enjoyment. Speaking for ourselves, we look forward to Sunday afternoon, when we can really enjoy some worthwhile music. For instance, last Sunday afternoon, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony from 1YA was a real inspiration. As we are not among the fortunate ones who reside in Wellington and are able to attend the Sunday afternoon concerts mentioned by your correspondent, the radio is our only opportunity for hearing good music.

The programmes which we cannot bear for long are usually at the breakfast session. We do not ask for Beethoven symphonies for breakfast, but we would like a little more, say, of the Gilbert and Sullivan type of music.

TWO BUSINESS GIRLS (Nelson).

FINAL REMINDER

Message To Men Overseas

WE remind all readers who wish to send us sample messages for soldiers overseas, that entries must be posted not later than November 15, 1941 (Saturday of this week).

For the best of these messages we shall pay one guinea, and for the next two half-a-guinea each.

You may send as many entries as you wish, but each must be accompanied by a coupon cut from "The Listener." It will be understood also that this competition is open to everybody — not merely to those who actually have relatives or friends overseas.

Address your letter to the Editor, "N.Z. Listener," Box 1070, Wellington, C.I. (Coupon on page 46).