

LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

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Opinions Without Facts

STRANGE things happen in war; and must happen. Tails wag dogs. Blood comes out of stone. Misfits become the people society suddenly wants. The office boy gives orders to his employer. The banker is taught which foot is right and which left. The steward inspires the depressed survivors in the lifeboat. The fashion-plate works long hours to feed, clothe, and cleanse slum children. But these things are not stranger than the thought that it is no longer permissible in any British community to announce the facts, but is everywhere permissible to say what they mean.

There are, of course, occasions—big and usually solemn—when the facts are told promptly and in full. We were told about Dunkirk as it happened. We knew at once when Wavell was surprised in Benghazi. There was no postponement or garbling of the news when the fleet was decapitated near Singapore. We know, and will always know, when disaster shouts as loud as that. But we do not know, and therefore cannot follow, the course of intervening events. Every newspaper in the Empire expresses opinions about them. Every armchair strategist tells us what they mean. We hear over the air, and at once forget who tells us, that this or that commander is a fool. We read, and in a week do not remember in what paper, that Japan has no air sense, no mechanical skill, or at least no modern machines. Then we suffer a disaster that we have never yet been able to inflict on the German fleet, and at once become authorities on naval tactics. We demand new Ministers, new service chiefs, miracles in arms production, right-about turns in strategy.

Since the first shot was fired there have been perhaps two or three regular British commentators who have seldom been made silly by later events. But the air has been as free to the others as to them, the newspapers have been as free, there has been as free a use of public platforms. No Minister of Information or Director of Publicity has attempted, or thought it right to attempt, to differentiate between informed and ignorant comment. He would be a bold man if he did. But unless we constantly remember that he does not, and constantly remind ourselves that most war comment is, and must be, the blind leading the blind, since only a handful in every country have the facts, we shall go on suffering shocks and depressing surprises.

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.

"BUSHIDO"

Sir,—I evidently owe you an apology for my bad handwriting which has caused you to quote me on page 4 of your issue of January 9 as saying "bushido" means the war or road of the warrior." What I wrote, or intended to write, was "the way or road of the warrior."

I am sorry I can see neither point nor meaning in your editorial note to the letter. Of course, the farmer would be primitive to take his family to church in the sledge he uses for other very practical purposes. So he would be if he took them on stilts, or roller skates, or in a wheelbarrow. But what has all this to do with the use of horse-drawn sleighs in regions which are covered with feet of snow for months every winter? I am sure many of your readers could supply better examples of Japanese primitiveness: open sewers and drains in big cities, the collection of night soil at all hours of the day, slopping over pavements and streets, and poisoning the air for hundreds of yards; the conditions in which girls and women work and live in silk-reeling factories; the selling of daughters to houses of ill-fame, etc. There is no doubt the Japanese are primitive, but the most primitive rat of a gangster is a menace to society

if he has a tommy-gun, and the Japanese have armed themselves with all the most scientific inventions of the genius of other races.

I think it is dangerous to have any idea that there is any analogy between "bushido" and European "chivalry." This idea of "bushido" was largely the invention—for foreign consumption—of Dr. Inazo Nitobe, former editor of the Osaka Mainichi English language newspaper. It is also dangerous to comfort ourselves with the thought that they are primitive unless we realise that primitive peoples in possession of deadly weapons are very dangerous.

In point of fact, the primitiveness of the Japanese nation—the feet of clay—that Freda Uttley writes of—will be plainly evident just as soon as the Allies are in a position to strike back.

ALEX. ASHTON (Hataitai).

MUSIC IN RUSSIA

Sir,—Perhaps readers of *The Listener* would be interested in a paragraph I read in a recent English weekly: "Recently a symphony concert was broadcast from Leningrad to Britain. A quarter of an hour before the concert was due to start not a single musician had arrived at the studio and the radio engineers, began to get worried. The musicians arrived ten minutes before the concert was timed to begin, placed their tin helmets in a pile, and took their seats. Several minutes later Britain heard a masterly performance of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. The point is that every single member of the orchestra does civil defence. Only fifteen minutes before the beginning of the concert they had been putting out fire bombs. If the concert had been televised the English people would have seen that one of the musicians had a bandage round his head. He had been wounded by bomb shrapnel a few minutes before. No one listening to the excellent performance would have thought that these were volunteer firemen who had just taken off their helmets."

J.T.P. (Wellington).

"OUR TOWN"

Sir,—I should just like to tell you how very much "G.M.'s" remarks on the film *Our Town* were appreciated by myself and two companions, as, having read numerous critics unanimous in their praise of *Our Town*, we went eagerly to see this long-looked-forward-to production. Needless to say, we came away from the theatre disgusted, infuriated and incredulous that some person equipped with scissors and evidently very little intelligence should be allowed to wreak such havoc with so outstanding a screenplay, as the few scenes which we were permitted to see so clearly revealed. At the time this film was screening, I heard of no other complaints, so was quite overjoyed to find that there was someone else who felt the same way about *Our Town*.

May I say in closing that, however acute the paper shortage may become, I hope you will always manage to squeeze in a space for your film reviews.

N.E.H. (Wellington).

POINTS FROM LETTERS.

W. T. HAMPSON (Newmarket) was shocked to see a Government periodical announcing that "our fate is in the hands of five men." It is, he says, in the hands of God. "Who works through His Messengers, those Mighty Elder Brothers and Sisters of ours, the Ascended Masters and Great Ones of Light."

"MUGGINS" (Devonport) writes to say that although the many "fictitious serials" heard over the air are enjoyable, "educational life stories" can be very interesting "as well as being a benefit to those at school."

"JUST A CRIPPLE" (Mananui) would like a competition for country listeners only—"the city people" she says, "seem to have the best of these things"—and for the same reason she would like to see the serials that are now broadcast from the smaller stations "put over the main YA stations."

I Saw U Saw

(By WHIM-WHAM)

[U Saw, Prime Minister of Burma, has been detained in England and will not be allowed to return to Burma. It was learned that he had been in contact with the Japanese authorities since the outbreak of war with Japan.—Cable news item.]

Who saw through
U Saw? Who
Exposed the Crime
Of that Prime
Minister of Burma
Just in Time?

Who found U Saw
Not a true Saw,
Playing fast-and-loose Saw?
Said, look here, Saw
Make yourself clear, Saw
Whose Saw
Are you, Saw?

When you foresaw
There would be War, Saw,
You saw fit
To turn a Bit
Pro-Japanese or
Ready to appease, Saw!

That won't do, Saw!
We saw U Saw,
Heading for Trouble, cross
Over to the Foe, you
Know that we know you—
Nothing but a Double-cross,
Double-cross-cut Saw!
Oh, Tut, Tut, Saw!

What was it THEY saw
That gave you away, Saw?
An indiscreet Pen, Saw,
Caught by the Censor?
Something that Few saw?
Never mind how—
Burma is now
Needing a new Saw!