

LISTENER

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The Red Army

THE army of Russia had a little less notice than it deserved in some quarters last week and a little more in others. It is of course a magnificent army, better trained and equipped than the best informed experts believed it could be, and a hundred times better led. If the supreme test of a military machine is its capacity to take blows without cracking it must indeed be one of the best machines the world has ever seen; and it certainly is the biggest. But we must not forget that its successes so far have been counter-attacks, its failures crushing defeats that have brought it near to irretrievable disaster. It is encouraging beyond anything that has so far happened to us in this war to see the Germans now driven from village to village and leaving guns and lorries as they go. But they are Russian villages and not German.

Germany was ready when the first shot was fired, Russia only nearly ready. Germany certainly seized the initiative by treachery, as her ally Japan did later, but Russia was only half surprised, and yet caught with many of her troops out of position. It is necessary to remember these early facts if we wish to get the present phase of the struggle into proper focus, and to be as grateful as we ought to be for the things that have been brought to light since—the magnificent courage of the men, the daring but never reckless leadership of the generals and their staffs. Let us in fact admit quite frankly that if Russia were not at present on our side it would be difficult to imagine how the war could be won.

But let us also get the moral straight. The Russian army is as strong as it is because it has had the moral support through all its twenty-four years of the Russian rulers and the Russian people. Our armies are as unready as they are—that is, as weak—because no British soldier for fifty years has had the simultaneous support of the British Government and of the British people. Except in the most desperate crises we despise soldiers and laugh at them, make officers out of the idle rich, and then call on them to win victories over armies led by the best brains our enemies can find and train. By the grace of God they sometimes do win, but we dare not go on tempting Providence for ever.

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.

NON-VIOLENCE AND ALL THAT

Sir,—“Surrealist's” nom de plume is well chosen. He shows himself to be ridiculously ignorant of the history of the first four centuries of the Christian era. The secular historian is unable to explain the miraculous spread of Christianity in the Roman world, but that it did spread is a fact of history. The non-violence of the Christians was commented upon by Pliny in his letter to Trajan.

—H. H. FOUNTAIN (Tinwald).

Sir,—I am sorry that “Remember Rotterdam and Hawaii” chooses to regard my pen-name as evidence of a desire to use the Amritsar episode of a political whipping-post for Britain. I must just ask him to believe that, in my innocence I had no such intention; and if he reads my letter again he may perceive that I remembered Amritsar merely to support my suggestion that non-violent methods applied to the British rulers of India may have had a humanising effect on them and made the repetition of such incidents as Amritsar unlikely.

Your correspondent's argument that non-violence cannot succeed because “there has never been a perfect human being on earth” is just that “perfectionist theory” which proves such a convenient refuge for so many of the clergy in times like these. Man is not perfect (we all agree about that!) but some day, they seem to argue, a miracle will happen and he will be. Until then, however, nothing much can be done about it. Gandhi is simply one

of the realists who prefer not to wait for the miracle. It is exceedingly doubtful, says your correspondent, if non-violence only has ever succeeded. I might reply that, apart from a few such historic examples as the Quakers' relations with the North American Indians, it is exceedingly doubtful if non-violence only has ever been tried. As for the question about what would happen if Britain withdrew altogether from India, I am one of the increasing number who think that this is a question for India herself to answer. It's doubtful if India would ask for complete British withdrawal, but since the Indians are expected to fight and die in defence of the British Empire, they should at least have the right to decide for themselves.

—REMEMBER AMRITSAR! (Wellington).

OUR MAORI BROTHERS

Sir,—I think it is a pity that on two occasions recently you have published short stories calculated to annoy, if not offend, certain portions of the community. This week's “Picture in the Paper” is neither clever nor entertaining, nor is it good taste to choose a half wit Maori as the butt of an obscure joke. Our Maori brothers deserve better than this poltroonery.

But I send you a bouquet as well as a brick. Another recent story “Bomber Command” (Eileen Rhodes) is as choice a gem as I have read anywhere.

—DECENCY (Waipukurau).

[For the bouquet we offer our thanks. For the brick we can find no excuse. So far as a short story has a purpose—other than an artistic one—“Picture in the Paper” was a plea for a better understanding of the Maori mind by those responsible for Pakeha law.—Ed.]

TWO REQUESTS

Sir,—Two requests from the Far North. (1) Would it be possible while Thomas Matthews and Andersen Tyrer are in New Zealand to have another broadcast of the Mendelssohn violin concerto, broadcast from 2YA on February 10? I am certain that more listeners besides myself would be very grateful for an opportunity to hear it again. (2) Would it be possible to induce our singers to sing some English songs at times? I feel certain that the general listening public, like myself, are getting tired of the never-ending repetition of songs by Brahms, Schumann and the rest of the German composers.

F. BLOOMFIELD (Kaitiaki).

BRITISH COMPOSERS.

Sir,—3YL's band programme recently included an item by “The Kneller Hall Musicians” entitled “The Fanfare of Trumpets.” This recording comprised splendid short works by the best British composers and to my mind revealed perfectly the titles given to them, as they were played in turn—majesty, beauty, and merriment—with unmatched artistry. I have seldom heard an item over the air which conveyed, in better form, the true message of our national institutions and traditions. We are inclined to “bury” our British composers and artists in this field of music and what more appropriate time than the present to hear more of them?

—R. M. CURRIE (Christchurch).

POINTS FROM LETTERS

A.M.F. (Martinborough) thinks it is time to stop “quibbling” over Miss Scanlan's remark about Ireland and New Zealand. Since there is electricity “in the tinpot place” from which she writes, A.M.F. says, “we must know that so well-informed a lady as Miss Scanlan” meant “unlike” if she said “like.”

“CONCERTO” (Devonport) expresses appreciation of the recording of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 heard recently from 1YA, and suggests that the “great popularity this work enjoys in U.S.A.” is due in part to “a recording of a modern arrangement by one of the themes of the first movement of Freddy Martin's Orchestra.”

Overtures

[By WHIM-WHAM]

I CAN forgive the NBS

For certain Sorts of Foolishness;
I know that Others get a Kick
From Stuff that only makes me sick!
But who enjoys
That witless Noise
Which I for One will not excuse—
The Tunes before the London News?

THE News may go from Bad to Worse
Reverse may pile upon Reverse;
Or on the other Hand, it may
Be brighter than for many a Day—
The Overture
We must endure
Is still the same, a senseless Strum,
All Feedle-dee and Tum-ti-tum!

VAST human Tragedies are played
And human History is made
On every Front from which we hear
The Scraps of News that hurt or cheer:
If Music can't
Be relevant
In some sad Fashion to the War,
Then what the H—I is Music for?

WE do not hear of Funerals
Accompanied by Madrigals,
Or Dirges sung at Weddings—No,
Nor Jigs in Oratorio!
Then why, indeed,
Do we precede
Our Chronicle of World Events
With Sounds that have so little Sense?