

LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday Price Threepence

MARCH 27, 1942.

Christianity In Our Time

SOME of us in our youth read "best sellers", the subject of which was the sudden return of Christ. We not only read them: we brooded over them in the silent watches of the night, knowing our own unworthiness. Nothing that we had ever been or done ourselves, nothing that anyone else was or could be, would meet with approval if Christ entered our homes or met us on the highway. It is an odd memory in 1942, whether we consider it in relation to the change in ourselves or switch our minds to the things that are happening all around us. But there are some, a minority, who still believe and still hope, though they may call things now by different names, and those faithful few at the present hour are calling New Zealand to repentance.

It is dangerous ground for a secular newspaper. Nothing that we can say will go far enough for those who still have faith, and the smallest sign of interest in religion will amuse or offend agnostics and cynics. But we take the risk. The "Campaign for Christian Order", launched in all churches, Protestant and Catholic, on Sunday, is an attempt, whatever else it may be, to give New Zealand better men and women. To its sponsors it is necessarily much more than that—an attempt to give New Zealand believing men and women; but that is not a reason why outsiders should hold aloof. The best men any of us know in the world, and the best women, are Christian in spirit even if they hesitate to call themselves Christian in belief. The best societies of men and women, those with most humanity and the finest tradition of liberty, are to-day Christian and not Pagan. We can see it even in this brutal war for which the Christian nations must accept their large share of blame. And if we can see it we need not be ashamed to say that we do see it.

Nor need we hesitate to support a campaign for Christian order because some will support it for other than the highest reasons. It is not only the Devil who feels saintly when he is sick. We are all poor fish some of the time, and if many are turning to God to-day because they are afraid for their lives or their property, that is not a good reason for hardening our hearts in case sentiment or early associations threaten to soften them. If this is a campaign for righteousness—and if it is not it is difficult to imagine what the goal can be—it deserves the sympathetic interest of all those who believe that there is no other test by which a nation can be great.

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.

CLEVER SWANS.

Sir,—In confirmation of black swans making nests large enough to float in safety during floods, as described by Mr. A. P. Harper from 3YA recently, I have seen the same kind of swan nests on a lake in Northland. The lake lies in swampy country. The swans build huge nests at the very edge, a slight rise in the lake level sets them afloat, and they sail away, driven hither and thither by the wind.

It is amusing to watch the swans stretch up their long necks, their heads always up-wind, take a look around and withdraw again; also later, to see the cygnets "sitting out" on the framework of their homes. I think swans, like ducks, have a real sense of fun.

May I mention another interesting example of the cleverness of swans? Two inflated motor car tyre-tubes were placed, for the benefit of bathers on a lake near my home. Next morning the owner was astonished to see a couple of white swans "seated" inside the tubes and paddling themselves around with evident enjoyment. He discovered that the swans dived underneath in order to come up inside the tubes, and to get out, they paddled the tubes to the steps, then clambered out. They did this regularly for a season. —ROB (Ahipara).

NON-VIOLENCE AND ALL THAT.

Sir,—Your correspondent "Remember Amritsar's" citation of an early Christian policy of non-violence as a contributing cause to the conversions of their Roman conquerors is not in accordance with historical fact. Some of the oldest Christian documents, the letters of Clement and Ignatius, tell of schisms

and bitter strifes in the early churches, and as J.M. Robertson somewhat mildly puts it, "that is the constant note of Christian history from first to last." From the Peter versus Paul conflict, to the bitter and fiery struggles from Gnosticism to Arianism, history tells not of non-violence, but of fierce passions and sanguinary strifes. When we consider that (according to Gibbon) Christians probably formed no more than a twentieth part of the population of the Roman Empire even by the year 250 A.D., we may readily understand their submissiveness to the Roman conqueror. Their own safety and very existence demanded it. All this, however, had no bearing on the acceptance of Christianity as the established religion of the Roman Empire. In the year 324 A.D., mainly as a political expedient, as all available support was required for the coming war, official sanction enabling Christianity to enjoy equal privileges with pagan religions was given by Constantine. But the complete "conversion" of the Roman Empire was to take place at a later date in the year 379 A.D.—as a bargain and a bribe. Then the newly formed church adopted persecution methods and ruthlessly suppressed by banishment and even death all rival sects. So with complete power came complete intolerance, which, in the centuries to follow was to be the hall-mark of the successful religion.

LIONEL COONEY (Auckland)

Sir,—I wonder if "Remember Amritsar" sees the irony in the use of his nom de plume in a discussion on non-violence in India. For the violence at Amritsar was not all on one side. The way in which we are sometimes bidden to remember Amritsar suggests that the bidders ignore what happened before General Dyer fired on the crowd, with the probable result that many people picture the shooting as an unprovoked attack. This it was not. On the day before General Dyer arrived in the city, to quote the article on Dyer in the D.N.E. "without provocation a mob killed five Englishmen, gutted several public buildings, looted two banks and beat a lady missionary, leaving her for dead." When Dyer arrived, authority was apparently powerless; the mob was in control. I am not raising the question of General Dyer's conduct, and don't intend to discuss it, save to say that very few people would justify all his actions. I write in the interest of historical truth. A.M. (Wellington).

Sir,—Permit me to thank you for the space you have granted me on this subject; also to thank "Remember Amritsar" for the spirit in which he writes. Surely the incidents that caused the order by General Dyer could hardly be called non-violence and it would be just as fair to say that the shooting made the repetition of such incidents unlikely. As to whether Gandhi is a realist, that is a matter of opinion. Surely for non-violence to succeed the people of the whole world would have to believe and practise it, for so long as there are nations who try to gain something by violence the only deterrent would be a latent or potential power of violence that they would fear to bring into action against them. If the whole of Australia and New Zealand believed in non-violence and practised it, then we should soon be subjects of Japan, and we should have no right to decide for ourselves. We must remember that very few people in this world are Christians or ever will be. India has many nations and religions, some of whom would grant less freedom than India as a whole gets now. True Indians should have the right to decide for themselves, but the question is how? If Hindus were allowed to decide for Moslems, we could look for some pretty hard fighting and bitterness. The friction in Ireland and India to-day is mainly due to the totalitarian ideas of the largest section of the community who do not wish districts totally different in religion and nationality to have the same right as they claim for themselves.

REMEMBER R. AND H. (Carterton).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT
"Slightly Nautical" (Wellington).—Perhaps he was as ignorant as we were.

The Year's At The Spring

By WHIM-WHAM

"A Soviet broadcast . . . gave the lie to German statements about the severe weather, the exaggerated German reports obviously being designed to excuse the lack of successes".—Cable news item.

"We had to face . . . a winter such as has not been known for forty years. What is to come can only be easier".—Hitler speaking in Berlin.

[In Spring the Fuehrer's Fancy turns

To new offensive Plans;

His Thoughts in that sweet Season aren't

Like any other Man's;

The tender Leaf, the opening Flower,

Speak to him not of Love, but Power.

[In Spring the Fuehrer tells his Flock

That Winter's Worst is past;

Goering shall come galumphing back

With Stalin's Scalp at last.

The Herrenvolk, morosely pensive,

Await that promised Spring Offensive!

A WARMER Sun will soon appear

And melt the Russian Snows

Where Panzers limp, and in Reverse

A battered Blitzkrieg goes.

Can Adolf too turn on the Heat

To warm the Herrenvolk's Cold Feet?

"LAST Winter was the worst for Years!

We fought and froze together,"

Mein Fuehrer, what a Time to choose

To talk about the Weather!

The Weather is too cold? So what?

Or is the Pace perhaps too hot?