

LISTENER

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Walt Whitman, American

IT would be interesting to know how many listeners heard and how many welcomed the BBC tribute to Walt Whitman last week. Whitman has been dead for fifty years, and the fame he enjoyed during his lifetime was not of the kind that usually lives on. For every reader who revered him as a poet ten reviled him as a sensualist and ten more for what he himself called his barbaric yawpings. Those who admired him seldom approved of him, and some of those who approved imitated him and left out the spark. Nothing seemed so likely as that a lapse of half a century would remove him from the literary scene altogether, only scholars and critics remaining aware of him. Yet the BBC thought it worth while to broadcast a tribute to him throughout the English-speaking world.

And the BBC was right. Whitman was not only a real, but in some respects a great, poet. He was as fiery a democrat as Burns, as genuine a "Comrade" as Lenin or Lincoln. Thoreau gave clearer reasons for his devotion to liberty, Emerson gave self-reliance a more coherent philosophy; but neither Thoreau nor Emerson loved liberty more than he did, and he outdistanced both in rallying common men. But his supreme political achievement was his rallying of the spirit of America. An American to him was a man who had turned his back on privilege and embraced liberty; who refreshed himself in the open air; who took his hat off to no man; who maintained contact with animals and trees and birds; who had bold thoughts and strong and natural passions. All this he expressed both in prose and in verse, occasionally (though admittedly not often) in verse that will outlive nearly everything that has so far been written in English in any of the New Worlds.

To remember him to-day is therefore to remember nearly everything that is best in America politically and socially. It is to bring Britain closer, and New Zealand closer, to a hundred and thirty million democrats whose battle-cry is the same as our own. It is (in almost his own last words) to bring us all back from our "persistent strays and sickly abstractions" to the standards of average decent men and brothers. We are not glorifying one who is dead, and beyond reach or need of us, but (as his hero Lincoln put it at Gettysburg) trying to get some good from him for ourselves.

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.

LAST CAVALRY CHARGE.

Sir,—In a recent issue you quote the *Philadelphia Record* as saying that the Battle of Omdurman 42 years ago was the last cavalry charge in the history of war. Is that true? Weren't there any cavalry charges near the beginning of last war; aren't the Russians using cavalry now? Perhaps one of your readers can supply the information.

SABRE (Wellington).

THE WELSH LANGUAGE.

Sir,—I read with interest an article in a recent *Listener* entitled "Bad Luck for a Welshman". The young man, Cyril Lewis, has gained for himself a reputation that Welshmen all the world over are proud of. We pray that he will be spared after this war is over to continue his career as a singer and receive all the laurels he is entitled to. But what surprised me was that his sister, Mrs. Presley, of Auckland, in excusing her brother for not being able to speak the National tongue, said that the Welsh language is hardly more commonly spoken than is Gaelic in Scotland. I don't know what part of Wales Mrs. Presley comes from. There are some parts of Wales

Churchill, Curtin, and Casey

By WHIM-WHAM

[The Australian Prime Minister, Mr. J. Curtin, said that as far as he was concerned the incident concerning Mr. R. G. Casey's appointment as British Minister in the Middle East and to a seat in the British War Cabinet was now closed. He intended to table formally the correspondence.—Cable from Canberra.]

WHAT Churchill said to Curtin
May for ever be uncertain,
And History may be hazy
About what was said to Casey—
And, indeed, it's more than strange
That the Matter of a Change
In a Ministerial Post
Should have stirred up such a Host
Of Statements, Imputations,
Correspondence, Explanations,
Rumours, Hints, Expostulations!
Was it Curtin lost his Patience?
Was it Casey who began it?
Or did Churchill wholly plan it?
Oh, the very Waste of Time
By such Statesmen seems a Crime!
Does it matter if the Error
Was committed at Canberra,
Or if Washington or Downing
Street was guilty of the crowning
Indiscretion? Need we mention
There's a War that needs Attention?
But now the Squabble's ended
And the Breach (if any) mended,
I reflect with Satisfaction
On Democracy to Action:
Though, if Wrangles must occur,
We should very much prefer
Them to pass away discreetly,
Settled swiftly and completely,
Not with Correspondence tabled,
Statements made and Comments cabled—
Still, if that can't be evaded,
Let the Facts be all paraded,
And let Demos disentangle
Every Angle of the Wangle!
It's less Confidence-destroying,
Less annoying, when enjoying
Information in such Cases
On an All-or-Nothing Basis!

such as Pembrokeshire and the border towns between England and Wales where English predominates. But it would be quite safe to say that 60% of the people in Wales can and do speak the Welsh language. If you took a census of the churches in Wales (or chapels as we call them) you would find that eight out of every ten still conduct their services in the Welsh language. The National Eisteddfod, which commands an attendance of 20,000 people, is conducted entirely in Welsh. I write this merely to correct a wrong impression which may be conveyed to your readers.

WELSHMAN (Hastings).

NON-VIOLENCE AND ALL THAT.

Sir,—I cannot prevent "Surrealist" from twisting the facts of history to suit his own ends, so I will merely conclude by saying that it is the secular historian's conception of Christianity that is elastic and accommodating and not mine. Nobody denies that there are grievous flaws in the Christian Churches to-day, but it still remains true that Christianity alone has the remedy for the world's ills, and that nothing else has.

H. H. FOUNTAIN (Tinwald).

Sir,—"Remember Amritsar's" statement that "the Indians are expected to fight and die in defence of the British Empire . . ." is a gross perversion. Surely Indians may be expected to fight in defence of India? If not, who should defend it, when it is gravely threatened? Indians fight incidentally for the Empire, in the sense that the whole embodies all the parts. Had it not been for the combined strength of the peoples comprising the Empire, can it be doubted that India and other individually weak members would long since have been victims of aggression, and in India's case, of internal disorder as well? Are such members to be left to their fate if attacked, or shall we all stand together? India gets at least as much from the Empire as she gives. Let us not forget that the battle of Malaya and Java is also the battle of India, Australia and New Zealand, and when India, Australia and New Zealand fight in Libya or the East, they fight for themselves.

REMEMBER MANCHUKUO AND SIAM (Thames).

MAINLY APPRECIATIVE.

Sir,—I thoroughly enjoy my *Listener* and it reflects great credit on you that your magazine is something more than a radio programme. It brings to us in New Zealand some of the world's most interesting news. Could this perhaps be extended to include a little about recent radio developments?

G.M. is also worthy of the highest praise for his witty and unbiased film criticisms. He ranks with Lejeune. And though I am not a parent I find the New Education Fellowship session of absorbing interest. But as a ZB fan I would like to draw attention to a reform long overdue—the deletion of quack medicine advertisements. "Uncle Scrim's" excellent health talks are often preceded or followed by such advertisements, and *The Listener* is also a culprit in this respect.

L.M. (Oamaru).

SCIENCE AND CIVILISATION.

Sir,—Professor C. E. M. Joad's reflection (*Listener*, February 27) is one of those half truths which too easily pass. It is doubtful if before industrialism people toiled either so steadily or so arduously. Certainly people imposing themselves on primitive peoples have to take action to get them to work. One way is to compel payment of taxes in money, another to educate them to want "civilised" clothes, food and other things. Running to a schedule or clock-punching is so irrational that it falls into disuse. Civilisations disappear. Half truths are mischievous: Marx's "surplus value", Henry George's "single tax", Wells's "super-man", "planned control", "orderly marketing", the "intelligence of the intelligentsia", and the "self-contained country" idea which has been an important factor in promoting this war.

SAXON (Auckland).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

Z.J.L.—Referred for consideration to Station Manager.