

# LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday Price Threepence

APRIL 17, 1942.

## William Rolleston

IT is one of the paradoxes of the present war that the longer it lasts the less we attempt to escape from it. Until adjustment came we used to feel that we could not endure reading and thinking about it all the time, and for six months or a year after it started recipes for escape were a fairly regular feature of most magazines and newspapers. Some recommended music, some light reading, some the cultivation of hobbies, some good works; and it is possible that the chief reason why these prescriptions have disappeared is the fact that most of us are doing good works of some kind to-day whether we chose them or were dragged into them.

But if in spite of all this we still wish to escape occasionally, an excellent method is to read the biography of a really engrossing personality. Not long ago, for example, Mr. Downie Stewart's study of William Rolleston was issued by Whitcombe and Tombs, and it would be difficult to imagine a better use for our minds during the hours when we are not thinking about the war, than turning them on this most remarkable man. And it is of course denigration of William Rolleston to call him merely remarkable. He was one of those men who stop just short of greatness. With a little more humour and a little less independence he would have been one of the outstanding figures in our first century; but he lacked humour in the way in which Gladstone lacked it, and he had the kind of independence that in politics is merely pathetic. He could never trim his sails, or say soothing things, or shut his eyes to folly and corruption whoever exhibited them. So he was a man without a party, a man in fact mistrusted by both parties, a radical among conservatives, a conservative among radicals, for no other reason than because he had two eyes, a full mind, and an almost savage integrity. It was a combination of qualities that doomed him in advance to sadness and disillusionment; and both overtook him.

All these things Mr. Stewart brings out very clearly, so that if he has not produced a vivid picture he has given us something more valuable: the man as he really was. And the man was of the breed that we forget at our peril. The world is in ruins because our morality has failed. If we want to preserve our own corner of it we shall have to be better men than those who are trying to wreck it; and that is just another way of saying that we shall have to be more like William Rolleston.

## 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.

### HOLD THEM IVAN!

Sir,—Some of your readers will be admirers of Henry Lawson, Australia's poet. Here are some lines I read the other day from Lawson that fit the present situation:—

*"Tis the first round of the struggle of the  
East against the West,  
Of the fearful war of races—for the White  
Man could not rest.  
Hold them, Ivan! Staggering bravely under-  
neath your gloomy sky;  
Hold them, Ivan! We shall want you pretty  
badly by-and-by.  
Fighting for the Indian Empire, when the  
British pay their debt;  
Never Britain watched for Blucher as she'll  
watch for Ivan yet!  
It means all to young Australia—it means life  
or death to us,  
For the vanguard of the White Man is the  
vanguard of the Russ!"*

AUSTRALIAN (Wellington).

### "SOME RECENT MUSIC"

Sir,—Though I speak with the tongue of the Philistine only, I must say I enjoy "Marsyas," and if that's any help to him, I should like him to know. What he writes is often double Dutch to me, but the idea is fine. It's healthy because I think it's more important in the broadcasting business to take

## The Nameless War

(By WHIM-WHAM)

[Mr. Roosevelt appealed for suggestions for a suitable name for the war. He said it was "thought that some terse term should be concocted which would be more descriptive of the war as one for the preservation of the democracies and the smaller peoples of the world; but how can you put all that into one adjective?"—Cable item.]

**WANTED, a single Word,**  
*Bitter enough to tell  
The Torment of a World at War,  
Noble enough to spell  
Love, Hate, Despair, and Hope,  
And make, through Mists of Pain,  
Some human Meaning plain.*

**WANTED, an Adjective**  
*Apt, challenging, and clear,  
Denoting What we fight, and Why,  
Our Courage and our Fear—  
No Jargon from a Speech,  
Or Cliché to conceal  
What Men and Women feel!*

**WANTED, the only Term**  
*Adequate to define  
A War that forces all Mankind  
Into the Battle Line,  
That gives no Man the Choice  
Of Where or When to fight,  
Of heavy Load or light.*

**WANTED, in fact, a Name**  
*For War on such a Scale  
That History may well be dumb  
And common Language fail!  
Let it be nameless, till,  
Peace earned and Service done,  
We've Time to think of one!*

a bit of good adverse criticism than to be forever scratching one another's backs. As I say, I don't know always whether the criticisms are sound or not, but they are interesting, and printing them will, I think, weigh with your more responsible readers. Also, there's a touch of humour in the stuff which makes it readable even for blokes like me who can't claim to do more than recognise a tune when they hear it.

One question I'd like to ask is why we never hear hear Peter Dawson (nowadays), singing anything more ambitious than "Old Father Thames" et hoc. He's capable of singing lieder and opera—and has recorded in these media, excellently, in my opinion, but we never hear these. Yet I have heard recordings by Dawson of passages from Haydn's *Creation*, Handel's *Samson Agonistes* ("Honour and Arms"), *Tannhauser*, etc. I don't object to "Waltzing Matilda" (which I think is a good ballad), and such light stuff as Stanford's songs, but Dawson isn't (or, wasn't, perhaps), such a hack as to be perpetually condemned to them. Of course, that's maybe just my poor taste. Harold Williams may be much better than Dawson ever was—but I have my doubts.

MAC (Auckland).

Sir,—"Marsyas" devoted two fairly long paragraphs to remarks about Eileen Ralph's performances of works by Busoni and Stravinsky, but he cleverly avoided giving any direct opinion of those compositions—which was most judicious of him. I, too, listened with hopeful interest to Miss Ralph's broadcast, though not for long. In London seven years ago, I had the good fortune to hear Egon Petri play Busoni's Piano Concerto, a stupendous work, stupendously performed, and I thought then that here at last was a modern composer who had something really vital and worthwhile to say. Since then, I have never missed any opportunity of making acquaintance with Busoni's output; but, I regret to say, my interest has waned almost to vanishing point, and the "Christmas Sonatina," played by Eileen Ralph, snapped the last link. I switched off my radio in despair long before the end, and never want to hear it again. The same, only more so, applies to Stravinsky. Of Eileen Ralph I have a very high opinion as an executant, and I think it a great pity she should waste her time and talent upon such miserable modern stuff. A recent broadcast by her of Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 110, showed what she can do with real music.

"Marsyas" also quoted E. J. Dent, Busoni's biographer, as follows: "Busoni's technical achievements must have far surpassed anything accomplished by Liszt and Rubinstein."

This is sheer nonsense. I myself heard Busoni at his prime. He was one of a group of magnificent pianists who appeared during the 1890's, the others being Moriz Rosenthal, Emil Sauer, Leopold Godowsky, Eugen d'Albert, Alexander Siloti, Frederick Lamond, Basil Sapellmikko, Teresa Carreno, Annette Essipoff, Sophie Menter, and, of course, Paderewski. Busoni's musical stature was not greater than theirs—in fact, he ranked below Rosenthal in virtuosity and d'Albert in intellectual breadth. And by general consent, including their own, none of those pianistic giants could be mentioned in the same breath as Liszt, the arch-pianist of all time.

Among present-day pianists, Horowitz is a greater performer than Busoni ever was, and even Horowitz is not a Liszt. It is fashionable nowadays to "debunk" the illustrious dead, but "Marsyas" would be well advised to let less competent scribes pursue this futile course.

L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

### ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"INTERESTED LISTENER" (Christchurch): We published a photograph of him on January 24, 1941. Because the size of the paper has had to be reduced, it is now difficult to find room for photographs of artists, except local ones. But keep hoping.

"SEARCHER" (Nelson): Schubert's Quartet in A Minor (Op. 29) was used as a musical background throughout the film *Swiss Family Robinson*.