

Tobruk And The Soothsayers

IF the loss of Tobruk puts the soothsayers out of business the pain will become almost tolerable. And by soothsayers we mean soothsayers—the diviners, fortune-tellers, astrologers, and complacency peddlers who have played such a large part in our war-reporting. Everybody knows who they are and how they work. Nobody doubts any longer what they have done to us. They are the men who cry victory when there is no victory—who call defeats withdrawals and retreats the occupation of new ground; the correspondents who tell us how difficult it will be for the enemy to get back into his own territory if he pushes too far into ours; the observers who see in a disaster the hidden hand of the master tactician; the propagandists who puff plodding brigadiers into Marlboroughs and Wellingtons; the fools who say in their hearts that the facts can be swept away by fiction. We have all met them, and listened to them, and laughed at them, and then surrendered to them, because it is easier to swallow encouraging lies than to accept humiliating truths. But we have not often met them in uniform. They do wear uniform occasionally, and then they become "military spokesmen" and "high military authorities." But as a rule they work in newspaper offices, or live in front of microphones, or hand out syrup from publicity offices, or expound strategy with their backs to the enemy and their eyes on the Marne and the Somme. The fighting men themselves are usually silent, make few promises, and indulge in very little swagger. Sometimes, though very rarely, they speak slightly of their adventures, but they never suppose, and seldom suggest, that battles can be won with wind. If they boast—it is an almost negligible exception—it is when they are putting off their harness and not when they are girding it on; when they have won the battle and not before they have started it. But we have not rewarded modesty and silence. We have rewarded "vain knowledge and filled our bellies with the east wind"—in Norway, in France, in the Far East, and more than once in the Middle East. If Tobruk has brought us to our senses at last what is at present just a burning humiliation may be the point from which our forward march begins.

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.

"49th PARALLEL"

Sir,—I am a regular reader of G.M.'s film criticisms and would like to correct him on a point in his review of the comedy (?) *Tanks a Million*. He writes that the brutal sergeant was played by Noah Beery, junr. If he takes the trouble to examine the cast list he will find that this part was really taken by a gentleman who goes by the name of Joe Sawyer and who has appeared in a few other unimportant films recently.

In the same issue of *The Listener*, G.M. answers a letter by "Londoner," and challenges her to deny "that she felt any compassion for that 'cornered rat' of a Nazi who wanted to join the Hutterites and was shot as a result." He misses the point completely here. It is only natural to feel compassion for an enemy who has seen the wrongness of his creed and therefore defies his commanding officer. G.M. will have to be more ingenious to answer "Londoner's" letter effectively.

COLLEGIAN (Wanganui).

[G.M. thanks the correspondent for his correction about *Tanks a Million*, and points out that even Homer sometimes nods. But it was not G.M. who suggested that it was unnatural to feel compassion: it was "Londoner" who said that "one has to quench that feeling"—presumably even for the Nazi who wanted to join the Hutterites.]

Sir,—I don't think G.M. is tender-hearted; he is a little middle-classish in his sentiments at times, but it's usually in a pleasant and very readable sort of way. But tender-hearted! Not with those well remembered complaints about bitches and things, surely. At times, too, he is a little too concerned for the likes and dislikes of his larger audience, and like Mrs. R.S. I fail to see why *The Little Foxes* should be graded even one off the top; there is far too much playing-down of stern film material. In Auckland, for instance, one of the most enjoyable productions of all time, one of those really great films, *All That Money Can Buy*, played for less than a week. Surely there was no excuse for this. I only hope G.M. gives it a lift when it comes his way. As for *49th Parallel*, I liked it too much to worry about anything ever; my favourite New Zealand journalist could say concerning it. Perhaps it was a waste of public money, but money has been wasted on many less worthwhile efforts than *49th Parallel*. And although I have not agreed with G.M. in his reviews of *Citizen Kane*, *The Long Voyage Home*, *Tobacco Road*, and a few others, and think H. M. Pulham, Esq. deserved top rating, he is still by far the brightest spot in New Zealand journalism for me, and I imagine for many other people. D.W.B. (Auckland).

CALICO AND THE MAORIS

Sir,—The article "Ancient India" in *The Listener* of April 17, reminded one

of a connection India has with New Zealand. The people we know to-day as "Twi Maori" (whatever their name may have been) held the coast regions of India for 500 years. Vasco records that they arrived at a place called Kara Kata on the west coast of India. With the usual capacity for mutilating Maori names which most Europeans possess, the place was dubbed "Calicut." At Calicut they made and exported a white cotton cloth which was then styled "calico" as a trade name. So when New Zealanders ask for a yard of calico they are unconsciously paying a tribute to our Maori peoples' ancestors who originally called "Calicut" Kara Kata.

FRED C. S. LAWSON (Te Kohanga).

BEETHOVEN'S 9th

Sir,—Your contributor "Marsyas" recently expressed the hope that we might hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony from one of the main National stations. It has since been played from 4YA. But I, for one, was unable to hear it by reason of the Dunedin atmospherics! I feel there are many listeners who suffered as I did. Could it not be played from one of the other YA stations?

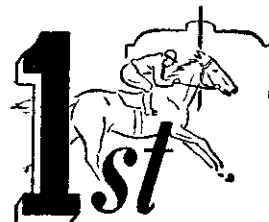
R. GILBERT (Nelson).

SUNDAY EVENING PROGRAMMES

Sir,—Last Sunday evening, at 8.15, I "tuned in" to 4YA in order that I might hear a performance of *Don Pasquale*. The performance proceeded until 8.35 when it was abruptly interrupted by the introduction of an address bearing upon military matters. The address, which was interesting and informative, but extremely out of accord with the emotional and intellectual content of the music, proceeded until 8.57. From that time until 9.0 the station broadcast a "fill up" in the way of a part of a military march played by a brass band. At 9.0 the tolling of a clock. From 9.1 until 9.18, a "newsreel" that amounted to little more than a paraphrase of a BBC bulletin that was broadcast from this station 2 3/4 hours earlier. From 9.18 until 9.29 a "war commentary" that amounted to little more than another paraphrase of the same BBC bulletin. From 9.30 to 9.34, station notices. At 9.35 the broadcasting of the performance of *Don Pasquale* was resumed; on the presumption, it would seem, that the mood of the listener would, at the instant, be returned to that in which he was wrapped an hour earlier.

I knew that the Service must try to please all listeners and that some listeners do not wish to hear great music. This circumstance provides no justification, however, for the interruption in question. It affords no justification for this interruption because obviously, all the items that together constituted the interruption might have been broadcast to listeners in Dunedin, from 4YO and, to listeners in the other main towns, from the subsidiary stations in those towns. LICENCE HOLDER (Christchurch).

[We are informed that the problem is one of coverage. If the auxiliary stations were used for the news, only those living in or near the cities would hear it.—Ed.]



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