

LISTENER

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The Duke of Kent

BEFORE this issue reaches the public the death of the Duke of Kent will have ceased to be news. Every paper in the English-speaking world will have printed articles about it, every orator in the Empire expressed the Empire's reaction to it. We shall not add, or attempt to add, to the flow of emotion at this late date. But there are things still to be said. To belong to the Royal Family is, in Britain, to be something that tens of thousands of people can't see with clear eyes. But the Duke belonged to the Royal Family three times over—he was the son of one king and the brother of two others—and yet people saw him as he was. That in itself was extraordinary. It meant that he was entirely without pretence and entirely without guile. The most striking example of this was the response of the people of America when he visited their President last year. For we must not forget that a king's son in the United States, though he remains an object of interest, arouses enthusiasm only if he is what Americans call a fellow; and he can be a fellow only if he is too simple and too sincere for possible misunderstanding. The Duke was not misunderstood either as a fellow or as a prince, and we lack imagination if we think that a small achievement. It was a remarkable achievement, and it is the fact for which he will be longest remembered. For we must not dishonour him by base flatteries. Some of the things said about him for a day or two following his death should not have been said in any circumstances. They were just not true, and what is not true is offensive. A king's son has the same right as a cook's son to protection from misrepresentation; and since this particular prince remained at forty the friendly and natural schoolboy whom Fate twenty years earlier called out of school to an exalted and dangerous life, it is not merely fatuous to pile laurels on him that he never sought or won: it is indecent and impudent.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

"THIS FELLOW GANDHI"

Sir—Congratulations on your article, "This Fellow Gandhi." You have done a real service by pointing out that, whether we choose to regard him as a menace or not, the Mahatma is a figure of world importance whom we shall fail to take seriously at our peril. But your article was largely a matter of opinion, and since it is difficult for most of us to secure the Autobiography you mention, could you add to the service which

Correspondents Please Note

Letters sent to "The Listener" for publication should not exceed 200 words, 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.

you have already done by giving us a more factual and detailed account of Gandhi's life in a subsequent issue?
CURIOUS (Wellington).

"NEW ZILLAND."

Sir,—I hear soi-disant purists label as "awful", "frightful", or "appalling" the oft-heard shortening of the "ea" in "New Zealand". Like these people I know nothing of the canons of orthoepy, but I do know that they can never be absolute: gradually but inexorably pronunciation changes. Apparently, however, these changes follow, in general, certain fundamental laws which operate throughout all the Indo-Aryan languages. Skeat, in his *Primer of English Etymology*, gives the following rules.

(1) When the length of a word is augmented, an original vowel is apt to be shortened by the accentual stress falling on it.

(2) In disyllabic compounds accented on the former syllable, a long vowel in the latter syllable is frequently shortened by the lack of stress upon it.

The operation of the second rule is surely well shown in the word "Zealand" itself, for nobody could pretend that the "a" is sounded as in "land". Why then is the tendency to shorten the first vowel so heinous a sin? The vowels in "heal" and "zeal", to take two similar cases, become short in "healthy" and "zealot" following the tendency laid down in Rule 1. I suspect that the objection to the shortening of the "ea" in "Zealand" is based on priggish reverence for the pronunciation of the BBC; but no real New Zealander, as Baker has recently pointed out in his *New Zealand Slang*, "speaks with the educated Southern English accent". We pronounce the first syllable of "Australia" as that of "ostrich", not like "awesome" as the BBC does. Why then the objection to allowing the operation of an established law of sound change in the case of the name of our own country?

NIALL ALEXANDER (Christchurch).

A DISAPPOINTMENT

Sir,—Your par in the "Things to Come" section on the "Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street" recital led me to expect something good in the jazz idiom. That expectation was misplaced.

In the first place the show was borrowed from the National Broadcasting

Company's weekly programme of the same name that has been running in America for at least two years. From the jazz point of view this never was much of a programme anyhow. The local NBC studio dance band, led by "Paul Laval" and "Henry Levine" (two very ordinary local musicians) masqueraded under the name of a Dixieland Group, and sounded about as much like one as a hen trying to imitate a dive bomber. In the second place the only local talent used in the New Zealand version was the compère, Doc. Ricardo McMutt. At least I think he was local. I cannot visualise the NBC of America using such a high old piece of gorgonzola. In short, the show was corny. There were only two good things about it. The idea, which was misused, and Dinah Shore, an impeccable singer who could never put a foot wrong no matter what the accompaniment was like. But a better compère, with a better script, and better chosen records, could make this show a highlight of the week's listening.

SATCH (Orangapai).

"NOT CRICKET"

Sir,—It was decidedly "Not Cricket" for the Lady Member for Mid-Canterbury to "put one across" the late Mr. Seddon in an interview with your reporter. The record of the late Richard John Seddon will compare favourably with that of any of the predecessors, and I think the lady was unkind to make such a comparison, particularly as the gentleman who escaped the earthquake was her own grandfather.

PLAY THE GAME (Papakura).

GOD IN NATURE

Sir,—Mr. Cooney says, romantically, that Nature is an unfortunate mixture of good and evil. Still, nothing can be done about it. Nature is wonderfully revealing and inspiring to those who approach her in a spirit of reverent inquiry. But of course she is as unresponsive to senseless criticism as a sphinx. Man is completely baffled by countless mysteries in life—mysteries that ought to teach him how very little, relatively speaking, he knows, or ever can know. Far wiser for him to trust his heart more and his head less. Admittedly, the impulses of the heart must be under the sway of reason, but not in complete subjection to anything so inherently erratic. Those who have been stricken with grief in this war will feel intuitively that it is the heart and not the head that speaks to their loved ones across the great Void. They will also feel that the desolating view about a "hypothetical God" is entirely wrong; that their loved ones have not died in vain, and that they will meet them again when they too shall have crossed the bar.

J. E. HAMILL (Rotorua).

Sir,—Your correspondent Lionel Cooney gate-crashes into the subject "God in Nature" with "a hypothetical God." This puts him off-side absolutely, for your previous correspondents spoke of God.

ROB (Ahipara).

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