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## Austerity on the Air

WE are often told, but never believe, that there is no sentiment in business. Now we are told, and have no difficulty in believing, that there is too much business in sentiment. The BBC ban on what the robust *Yorkshire Post* calls "drivel and snivel" is a protest against the traffic in sobs and sighs. Suggestiveness comes under the ban, too, but suggestiveness has never got very far with the BBC at any time, and is in any case a wholesome thing by comparison with the emotional abuses of the sob-sisters and drooling neuters. But the trouble is, as the BBC has already admitted, that taste is largely interpretation. It is true, up to a point, that the public will want what it gets—and at present the BBC is in a position to say what that will be; but if the BBC offers brown bread in normal times and the Continental stations offer cream cakes it is quite clear what will happen. Sir John Reith went as far as anyone is ever likely to go in telling the British public what was good for it. He gave it plain living on week days and high thinking on Sundays. But after a few years of struggle he found it expedient to retire. To-day's controllers may order austerity again, but when competition returns reaction will come with it. Besides, who can say officially where sentiment ends and sentimentality begins, and how far sentimentality may then go before it becomes slush? Who will say when the tenor ceases to be robust and the stolen tune begins to deprave? Every one knows answers that satisfy him as an individual, but who has the answers that ten million listeners will find convincing? It seems chicken-hearted to hesitate when uplift calls, but it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that although the BBC is gesturing magnificently, it is not waging war.

## LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

### "THEY STOOD"

Sir,—I received this cutting from London last week. It is such an eloquent and touching reference to our New Zealand men that I thought, if you have not already seen it, you would be interested.

LINA V. BRUCE (Russell).

(We thank our correspondent on behalf of the thousands of parents, other relatives and friends who will be grateful for this tribute, which is from the London Daily Express:

Neither we nor the Germans had the necessary armour on the spot. The battle eased down to a temporary deadlock. Then, from all sides, Rommel called up reserves, and started to counter-attack. It did not matter that there were many of his own men (our prisoners), under his own fire. Some of them pressed to the ground and escaped later. There was a group of New Zealanders out in front with anti-tank guns and machine-guns. They stood. They still stand, for all of them to-night are dead.

They died firing, and it is a hateful thing to record that these men, by common consent, the finest fighting men in the Middle East, are dead. They did not budge an inch. When the gunlayer died, the man who shoved the shell into place took his job, and so on.

There are plenty more of these men—I was with them last night—but after two years of knowing some of those gunners in the Middle East, I find it an intense grief to say that they are dead.]

### PERFECT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Sir,—Your correspondent "Hearing" asks "whether the difference of 7 cycles per second between G sharp and A flat can be detected by the human ear?" Let him ask a violinist to play the interval C to A flat, and another to follow immediately with C to G sharp; the difference will be apparent to any moderately trained ear.

Aural perception, in its finer sense, is largely a matter of imagination. A pianist modulating between the keys A flat and A sharp would, in striking the leading note of the new key give it an apparently sharper sound than the tonic of the old key, thus appearing to increase the frequency by the desired 7 cycles! In point of fact, the only perfect (orthodox) musical instrument is the slide trombone, which can be played in absolute tune throughout the length of its compass. This cannot be said of stringed instruments, as the open note of the lowest string obviously cannot be flattened by shifting the position of the

### Our Cover

OUR cover this week is a composite drawing by Leonard Potter illustrating two series of programmes in the BBC's overseas services—"Civilians' War" and "My Working Day."

The draughtsman, the armaments worker, the craftsman, the shipwright, the weaver of cloth, the farm labourer, are all component parts of the fighting man, since their work is essential to keep him supplied with munitions, with food, with uniform and equipment.

Frequently the British war worker is a civilian by day and a soldier at night—in the Home Guard.

finger, whereas the fortunate trombonist who could produce his fundamental note at will could control its pitch with ease.

"BANDMASTER" (Auckland).

### WAR FILMS

Sir,—As G.M. wants opinions on Miss Lejeune's article, permit me a few words on the subject of war films. I absolutely agree with Miss Lejeune that we do not want the kind of war film that Hollywood's producers give us. The war never has and never will look as shown in 90 per cent of the so-called war pictures. Everybody knows nowadays that the times of a happy war have gone, if they ever have been. So why don't the producers draw their conclusions? I doubt very much if any of the actors serving with the Forces would be willing to portray one of the "gallant soldiers" as they are shown now. If there must be war films, let them be on the lines of *Sergeant York*, or the stories of ordinary people carrying on.

Finally, you might be interested in these few lines from a letter received recently from a friend in Australia: "Not often, if ever, did I read such detailed film reviews, which really go deeper into the problems both of the picture and what it lacks. New Zealand, with its various social institutions, its good radio programmes and good *Listener*, appeals to me very much. If we had a few G.M.'s here, we might get the same high standard, too."—H.P.J. (Milton).

### GOD IN NATURE

Sir,—Mr. Cooney says that he does not find anything revealing or inspiring in the cruelties of Nature. Neither do I. But I do find something revealing and inspiring in the ethereal loveliness of a lily, and in the splendid mystery of its growth. It seems relevant to say that man, although endowed, unlike nature, with conscience and powers of reflection, often thoughtlessly inflicts racking tortures in the name of sport. Mr. Cooney speaks of a humanity tortured by disease and pain. But man must also face this charge. This is a good world to live in—that is, if man is content with moderation in all things. But no, his passion is for excesses of all kinds—excesses that are a perennial source of a vast volume of human suffering and degradation. It is time, I think, that man blamed himself a great deal more, and God and Nature a great deal less, for the hell that has been made of this fair world.

J. E. HAMILL (Rotorua).

Sir,—I am sure that Lionel Cooney, who feels so strongly about the cruelty of beast to beast, of man to beast, and of man to man, will have nothing but approval for that impetus that for thousands of years has been slowly and surely weaning mankind from the tooth-and-claw methods of Nature; and that he would agree wholeheartedly with the writer who says: "Wherever a man refuses to do evil that good may come, wherever a man is merciful and pitiful even unto his hurt, there and there only is the great and true God who is below all, and above all, and in us all."

Pa. 27, 13 (Dunedin).

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