

Three Hundred Years Ago

THE happiest women, George Eliot said, have no history; and some cynic has said the same about nations. It is certainly the case that most nations, like most people, have more history than is good for them, and more than most of them want. But New Zealand has none at all. It is almost ludicrous to think that this week three hundred years ago there was no such place as New Zealand on any map or in any civilised mind, and that it floated into knowledge then quite by accident. But it looked so bleak and so forbidding, and of so little value or interest to anybody, that Tasman, though he was on the look-out for worthwhile worlds, sailed away and almost forgot it. Yet here we are in 1942 roaring like sucking doves, and a little louder, and preening ourselves this very week because we alone in all the world have a Social Security scheme in operation that Britain counts worthy of imitation. It is a reasonable excuse for some huffing and puffing and it would be sanctimoniously mock-modest not to use it. But the real lesson of the Tasman celebrations is that we have so little to forget. We have done so well so far largely because we have had nothing to undo. After all, it was not merely Tasman who forgot New Zealand. The whole world did, and even when Cook held it up again 127 years later hardly anybody would look at it. No, we have no history—a hundred pages of white settlement, an authentic entry or two by whites during the preceding three hundred pages, and before that legends only. We cannot even say with certainty when the first brown men came, or who or what they were: we know merely that they were here ahead of Tasman, and have some evidence that they were five hundred years ahead of him, and perhaps a little more. Kupe we have somehow persuaded ourselves entered Wellington Harbour a thousand years ago, and we almost believe that Te Aru-tanga-nuku was a hundred years ahead of him, and Hui-te-Rangiora two hundred years. But we don't know for certain; and we think we know that whoever lived in New Zealand in those remote times, if anybody did, disappeared and left nothing behind. We are chickens just emerged from our shell, and if we have shown some precocity in learning to crow, it is our beautiful new world that has stimulated us.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

OUR MUSIC CRITIC.

Sir,—Musicians are notoriously a jealous, irritable, cantankerous, narrow-minded, thick-skinned, humourless, savage, and vengeful race. (I can at the moment think of only a few exceptions, like Handel and Bach and Schubert and Parry and Stanford and Cesar Franck and Schumann and perhaps half a dozen or a dozen or two more). It was therefore inevitable that "Marsyas" should in due course stop a few bricks—even if he gets off without being flayed alive, like his namesake the wood-wind performer who so irritated Apollo. But I really think he has stopped so many bricks that it is time someone helped him throw a few back. I therefore step to his side and heave this one.

"Marsyas" has of course made the sad mistake of thinking and speaking freshly and candidly about music and musical performers, in a country which has no tradition of criticism in the arts; and where therefore any remark that has not been reverently or positively made a hundred times before is met with the yells of pain and astonishment which a politician emits at some hint that a shadow has passed over his reputation for probity. There are times, too, when "Marsyas" has been witty. This is bad, very bad. Persons who talk about music should not be witty. He has said things about Beethoven. This also is bad. Some day the devilish fellow may cast an aspersion on the sacred name of Bach. Has he not already delivered himself of dicta on the flesh and blood performers who so pitilessly assault our New Zealand ether? Base, lewd, profane, irreverent, vulgar, and pretentious ink-slinger!

I suggest, Sir, that some of your anti-"Marsyas" correspondents should pull themselves together and take a short course of Ernest Newman and W. J. Turner and Cecil Gray and G. B. Shaw and M. D. Calvercoressi—for a start. That might give them a hint that writing on music is not necessarily the portentous repetition of platitudes, or the sloppy spreading of adulation, to which we are so generally accustomed in our country. Of course I don't think "Marsyas" is always right—I think he's wrong about the Ninth Symphony for instance. But maybe it is I who am wrong. At least, though he sometimes—like all other writers in music—talks what seems to me, in my infinitude of wisdom, nonsense, he doesn't—unlike some of his own critics—talk solemn nonsense.

J. C. BEAGLEHOLE (Wellington).

GOD IN NATURE

Sir,—J. E. Hamill (Rotorua), lacks understanding. There is no loveliness in a lily, the beauty being in the mind, and there is no mystery; the obscurity is also in the mind. Beauty is a question of education and heredity, and the growth of a lily is simply a combination of circumstances. If the lily did not grow under these circumstances, that might be a mystery.

Likewise the idea of God is in the mind also. In nature "things" consistently behave along certain lines, so instead of this uniformity pointing to a God in nature, if "things" varied their

behaviour under identical circumstances, that might be an argument for an over-ruling intelligence in nature.

"OLIVER" (Te Awamutu).

Sir,—Your correspondents on "God in Nature" are interesting, but are plainly bogged by the mysterious mixture of heavenliness and hellishness in nature; and it is the hellishness which is the difficulty. But it is just this which makes faith necessary; and the true romance of man lies in his being a creature capable of great ventures of faith. Any fool can believe in God when things are "just heavenly." It takes a full-sized man to go on believing in God when all the devils out of hell are let loose at him, and when he sees more hellishness than heavenliness in life. But I (poor creature though I am), cherish the ambition of becoming a real man some day, and so I am grateful for that spirit in me which makes me barge through all the hellishness-of-things, that spirit which makes me determined to win through to seeing and having all things heavenly, in this world and beyond it, too. I believe God's purpose for man in nature is just this.

C.C.C. (Cambridge).

WOMEN MINISTERS OF RELIGION

Sir,—"Kowai" says that the second chapter of the first Epistle to Timothy is the answer to the question—why there are few women ministers in the church. Like men through the ages "Kowai" follows Paul instead of Christ. Paul was never a ladies' man, and always seemed to have a few stones to throw. Christ gave women honoured positions. It was to women that He appeared first after the resurrection and entrusted them with the grandest message the world has ever heard: "Go tell My brethren I have arisen." Never was that message more urgent for women to deliver than it is to-day.

—MARY OATES (Morrinsville).

1YA PROGRAMMES

Sir,—As an Auckland listener, I should like to protest against the poor quality recordings which 1YA has been broadcasting of late in its light musical programmes. I refer particularly to the "Music While You Work" and Saturday afternoon session. Surely a programme can be made "bright" without including the poorer types of brassy dance bands and wailing over-sentimental vocalists. These poor programmes spoil an otherwise excellent station, and it is to be hoped that 1YA will return to its former policy of quality whether it be "vaudeville" or "chamber music."—QUALITY (Auckland).

ARE PARENTS IMPROVING?

Sir,—I enjoyed very much the article in *The Listener*, "Are Parents Improving?" I believe the main objective is to teach a child to think for himself, and to learn to appreciate suggestions and guidance from his parents in whom he will have much confidence if the parent will always aim to tell the truth. I do not think there will be any trouble when the child gets out "into a world sprinkled with 'don't' notices," as he will have learned to think and to reason for himself.—MORE PSYCHOLOGY (Mount Albert)