

JANUARY 15, 1943

History As It Happens

THE first of the popular histories of the Second New Zealand Division* is now available to everyone who has two shillings. It is an interesting survey to read, a very interesting production to look at and it will soon find its way into our homes. For they are of course rare homes now that have no representative in uniform, and to have a husband, son, or brother in a New Zealand army is a reason for having the printed story of that army's activities where every member of the family can follow it. These surveys will be bought, and will be read, as they appear, and it is as well to admit frankly now that the majority of people will never read anything else. History's last word is for scholars: it is the first word that the man in the street hears, and that is why it is so important that popular histories should be true as far as they go. More than that we cannot expect them to be, since some of the facts are not yet known, and some, though known, cannot yet be told. We shall in fact be lucky if the official story of the present war is ready ten years after hostilities cease. A more cautious estimate would be twenty years; and if in the meantime research is to be silent many of us will not hear it when it speaks. We are entitled to hear what it can tell us now, and the fact that these surveys are being produced in the office of the Army's Official Archivist is a guarantee of their tentative accuracy. Narratives may of course be accurate and dull — as many military despatches are. This survey is accurate without being dull, and is lit up by an admirable series of illustrations — maps, photographs, and drawings — well reproduced and arranged with great skill. Whoever is responsible—Army Board is a blanket signature—has initiated something for which two generations at least will be grateful.

*Prelude to Battle. First of a series of Surveys describing the work of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Printed by Whitcombe & Tombs for the Army Board, Wellington.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

MORE HUMOUR PLEASE.

Sir,—With "Mother of Twelve" I regret the lack of fun in the daily programmes. I wish the programme organisers and radio entertainers could see my young son listening to something funny. He rolls helpless with sob-splitting laughter, tears stream from his eyes, and all the while he gasps "This is too much! This is too much!" It is a loss to his family that such laughter has so few occasions for bursting forth.

Instead at the time when he might listen in, a diet is served up which would make him bolt for the nearest door, and this in spite of the fact that some of the serials are specially written for young people. Once when I explained that characters in radio serials were made more wicked than people really were for the sake of excitement, he said that he preferred people sillier than they are than wicked than they are, and I am sure he is not alone in his preference. —JOCULARITY (Dunedin).

HITLERISM AND THE GERMAN PEOPLE.

Sir,—Your correspondents Audax II. and N.E.W. (for short) both emphasise that Stalin has been careful to distinguish between Hitlerism and the German people, but if I were a German I would not rely too much on that. Stalin is above all a superlative tactician, his sole and very proper aim the good of his own people. To see something of his methods one need only recall how in 1939 he broke his pact with France, entered into a pact with Hitler, ruthlessly invaded Poland and the Baltic republics, and above all how he deliberately botched his campaign against Finland just to hide his real strength from his new ally. Naturally such a man is not going to present any propagandist ammunition to the enemy, but neither is he the man to allow a new German menace to overshadow the next generation. Given victory, and with or without our approval, it is utterly certain that there will be no half-measures this time; and the genteel protests of those I have called our ladylike humanitarians will not persuade us to declare war on Russia in defence of Germany.

XXX (Christchurch).

Sir,—Stalin is quoted by one of your correspondents as differentiating between Hitler and the German people. First, one would like to know just what is in Stalin's mind. Second, what Stalin thinks and what he will be able to do may be one thing, and what the Russian people think and insist on doing, another. In a recent BBC discussion on "What Shall We Do With The Germans?", the participants in which included Harold Laski and Jan Masaryk, this point was raised. Masaryk was asked: "Didn't Stalin say the other day that the German private, that is to say the ordinary man in Germany, takes what might be called almost an Anglo-Saxon view of the way to treat the problems of peace?" Masaryk's reply was: "Possibly a private who is very far from Russia, but I wouldn't like to be a German private on Russian territory three or four days after the war. If they catch him, they'll kill him." "I agree," said the Englishman who asked the question. A very important point is made by

Alexander Werth, Moscow correspondent of the "Sunday Times" in a recent broadcast from the BBC. Terrible as have been the sufferings of people in England, their country has not been invaded. They haven't felt the filthy hand of the Hun on their homes, their cherished monuments, their wives and families. Their land has not been befouled. This consideration was put up to Mr. Werth in Russia, and it is evident that there is a fear among the Russians that the English may be too forgiving. Mr. Werth describes Germans in occupied Russia as behaving like grotesque apes. "It is small wonder that at the Moscow circus the other night a conventional German couple appear in the ring, pushing a pram with an enormous chimpanzee inside. That's the baby Germany has brought up in the last few years." If you think this is crude and cruel, reflect what Russia has suffered. The slime of the beast is over their beloved country. Imagine what a legacy of hate this is going to leave. It will last for generations. —NEVER AGAIN (Wellington).

Sir,—Your correspondent "XXX" in allying Stalin, perhaps unintentionally, but none the less surely, with Vansittart is, I am afraid, under a misapprehension. Russian propaganda has always been directed towards revolt by the German people against the Nazis, an eventuality which the noble Lord and his followers have regarded with frequently expressed horror. The people responsible for, and who committed, atrocities should certainly be punished. But there are not 90 million of them.

And touching on E. A. W. Smith's attack on J. B. Priestley, perhaps protests did come from as far afield as Canada (vide *National Review*, April, 1941), but he nevertheless received considerable support from other quarters (vide *Picture Post* of the same period).

VVV (Christchurch).

THE CALLIOPE.

Sir,—Your correspondent "Ruhamah" attributes to God the escape of the Calliope from Apia in 1899. When one considers the number of ships that did not get away, the average leaves a lot of room for improvement.

H. C. McDONALD (Ashburton).

INFLATION.

Sir,—Forty years ago every farmer in the South Island cut his tobacco, and every farmer's boy skinned his rabbits, with a single-bladed, wooden-handled pocket-knife that cost one shilling. Yesterday I bought one of the same knives — same brand, same style, same maker, same rough strong job—for 6/9. Forty years ago a shilling represented an hour's work by a highly skilled man, two hours by a labourer, or twelve rabbit skins fatted, stretched, dried, and bundled by a boy. I should not like to say how much labour it will buy to-day or what portion of a rabbitskin, but I have discovered that it represents about one-seventh — the spring, perhaps, or the wood — of a crude pocket-knife in the retail shops of Wellington. Perhaps I should not say "shops", since I wandered all over the city before I found one shop that had just one knife; and I unfortunately, had more than one shilling.

BUY MORE BONDS (Wellington).