

FEBRUARY 26, 1943

## Russian Victories

**O**VERSHADOWING all other war news for the last three weeks has been the sensational toll of victories reported from Russia—three of them (Kharkov, Rostov, and Stalin-grad) on a big enough scale to end a normal war, three more (Kursk, Lozovaya, and Voroshilovgrad), in the Battle of the Marne class, and one (the rapid clearing of the Caucasus) comparable territorily with the sweep of our own Eighth Army through Libya. We must still keep our heads, and give free play to our doubts and suspicions, but it is almost possible to agree with those who are saying at every street corner that this is the beginning of the end of Hitler. It certainly requires a little more daring at present to believe in a big-scale counter-offensive by Germany than to believe that Stalin has always had a plan, and that we are now seeing it unfold. All plans miscarry to some extent, and have to be modified, but if Russia's general strategy had been nullified by the German blows the present offensive would have been impossible. For we are not looking at one army or group of armies and at a single field of operations. There are fifteen hundred miles of battlefield between the Leningrad area and the Caucasus, and there has been co-ordinated pressure all along that line for three weeks, with victories at each end. That is not accident or luck, but organisation on a scale that no one a few months ago thought possible in Russia. And if we must still withhold judgment about the stature of this or that Russian general, there can be no doubt about the General Staff's collective skill, or about the courage and tenacity of the Russian soldier. Defeat has been warded off by national discipline and national faith, by confidence in the leaders and by hatred of the attackers, but most of all by the fact that for the first time in centuries Russian soldiers have been fighting with weapons as formidable as those arrayed against them—and have poured out their blood like water.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## WHEN TWO AND TWO WILL MAKE FOUR.

Sir,—I quote from your leading article (29/1/43): "What worries Dr. Blair is how to make the life of those producers as full and as interesting as most people find life in the city."

There is just one answer. Give us roads—telephones—and electricity—and the stupid country bumpkins will do the rest. Then Dr. Blair's worries and those of the worthy producers will be at an end. So easy, isn't it?

MUD TRACK (Queenstown).

## BIG BELLS.

Sir,—In Major F. H. Lampen's recent talk about bells he said that the new Cathedral in Liverpool is to have the heaviest peal of ringing bells in the world. "The peal will number 13 bells

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and weighs 14½ tons, the tenor of the peal weighing 4 tons." That is interesting, for the heaviest ringing peal of bells in the world at present hangs in the massive tower of Exeter Cathedral. The tenor of this peal of twelve bells weighs 3 tons 12 cwt. For comparison the proposed 4 ton tenor bell for Liverpool Cathedral will be more than 30 times the size of the Ship's Bell on the Queen Mary, which in turn is ten times the size of ordinary ships' bells. It is in fact the largest bell afloat and weighs over 300 pounds. —R. HEAL (Ahipara).

## "MRS. MINIVER."

Sir,—It is objected that *Mrs. Miniver* is not typical of England. What is meant by "typical"? If you want something typical of all England you will have to produce a crowded serial, which won't be one quarter as effective as this entertainment of two hours and a bit. Art is selective, and the artist is restricted by his medium. It is true that *Mrs. Miniver* doesn't portray the cotton operative, the Cockney shopkeeper, the Durham miner, the Grimsby trawler hand, or the Cotswold farm labourer, but it does show us a section of English society, and it is reasonable to regard this section as fairly representative. True, the "gentry" predominate, but there are others. The station-master and the grocer are just as typical of England as the Minivers themselves. Objection is also raised to the Miniver's way of life. But that is an essential part of the story. It was the purpose of the authors to show the impact of war on a carefree society, so why blame them for showing us the Minivers in their comfortable surroundings? Their "sumptuous" home and their service were not out of the way in pre-war England. According to those standards the Minivers wouldn't have been considered wealthy at all; they were simply fairly well-to-do middle class. There were large numbers of such folk in England, and like the other class they have turned

up trumps in the test of war. The makers of a screen picture have a perfect right to choose them as a frame for a story. I am least happy about the Lady of the Manor; to me she is rather a stage type than real life. But I was talking about her the other day to a woman who knows English life pretty well, and she said she had met a number of such ruling women. We shouldn't judge *Mrs. Miniver* by an England as it ought to be, but by England as it is, or was in 1939.

NEW ZEALANDER (Wellington)

Sir,—I'd like to tell you how much I appreciate your weekly film reviews. They are the first of their kind in New Zealand. Still greater is my appreciation of the controversies which you insert from time to time in your film section. Such controversies can educate the picturegoer to view pictures with a certain amount of criticism and to see their shortcomings and merits. This should eventually have a beneficial influence even on the motion picture industry.

I expect you've read the review about *Mrs. Miniver* in *Punch*. If not, you'll find these remarks of a London reviewer interesting.

F. BONDY, Ph.D. (Wellington).

(We thank our correspondent, and reproduce here the main part of *Punch's* review: "Miss Jan Struther's *Minivers* are, or ought to be, a typical English upper-middle class family, united and affectionate, easy-going in easy times, resourceful and enduring in hard. It was a good idea to make a film out of their experiences in their village home near London during the months from Dunkirk to the Battle of Britain, and the idea has been carried out with great tact and skill . . . The film is excellently played throughout. The chief parts could hardly be bettered.")

## EASY ACES

Sir,—Listening recently to "Chuckles with Jerry" while reading *The Listener*, I came across the article of January 29 headed "The Easy Aces Also Wish to Visit Us." Just at this moment my ear was assailed by the most hideous voices I have heard for a considerable time. The programme informed me it was "The Easy Aces," and I was struck with amazement that a small minority of the listeners should have informed the performers that their freakish programme was admired all over New Zealand. Why not have informed them that 75 per cent of the listeners tuned to another station immediately their fearful tones rent the air?

H. ALEXANDER (Auckland).

## POINTS FROM LETTERS

"Boost 'Em" (Brooklyn) hopes that New Zealand will take the Post Laureate's advice and "give young writers a chance." He admits that *The Listener* has "on many occasions published short stories by New Zealanders," but wants more with the "scripts of some of the plays that are put on the air."

"Ex-Taranakian" (Parnell) supports "Taranaki Listener's" request for more records of Sidney McEwan's singing.

"In Tears" (South Dunedin) would like "bah-hind" as well as "New Zillund" to disappear from the air.

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

M.S. (Lyttelton): Too late.

"Renard" (Inglewood): Referred to Health Department and Red Cross authorities.