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Conquerors Close Up

IT is not quite certain yet who first remarked that no man is a hero to his valet. But it was a woman, and she was not English. Nor was it an English man who first asked whose fault it was that the servant could not see his master's size. It was a Scot. The English are slow to worship, slower even than the Scots, but when they start they are difficult to stop. Take the case of Mr. Churchill. He was sixty-five before he could persuade his own people to trust him, but if he retains office, and his health, till the war is won it will be dangerous to criticise him a hundred years hence. Do we not still refuse, more than two hundred years after his death, to look frankly at Marlborough? We don't like spots on the portraits of our heroes—even the little spots of vanity and ostentation—and our debunkers seldom become best-sellers. After all what is a hero? To begin with he is someone who does something we are too timid or dull or squeamish to do ourselves, but which, when it is done, makes us all happy. But to capture us completely he must be romantic and generous and humane and even sentimental, as Nelson was, and die saving us. So Nelson is almost the only hero we can bear to look at with both eyes; the only one we have always seen more or less as he was—not "the strong silent man of fiction and fools," as A. L. Rowse put it recently in a review of an anthology of Nelson letters compiled by Clemence Dane, but a vain, sensitive, self-conscious, talkative man, who got sick in a rough sea, lost his head completely over Lady Hamilton, and wept like a child over the deaths of his friends. He had to be a conqueror too; but it was the fact that he was a conqueror and at the same time "all soul and sensibility" (as he described himself to Emma) that brought England to her knees in worship and keeps her there.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

NEW HORIZON

Sir,—As a constant reader and great admirer of your journal, I am amazed, startled, and almost moved to profanity on sighting the cover picture of the above title in the issue of February 19. Apart from the fact that, I suppose in these days of conflict, it is quite in order for a member of the WAAFS to confer with the master and officers of a transport upon the landfall made, I think it is a bit thick that the engines should be rung off and the telegraph standing at "finished with engines." Hope you will take this letter in the right spirit, and will not offend the susceptibilities of the seafaring fraternity again.

SKIPPER PEGLEG (Takapuna).

(We expected the Skipper, and we welcome him to our columns; but it was made quite clear in our footnote that the W.A.A.F. was merely a visitor to the bridge—looking round, and being looked at, when the journey was over.—Ed.).

FARM LIFE

Sir,—Your article "Microbes or Human Life" set me wondering if Dr. Blair has given thought to community farming as a solution to the farmer's life problem. Would this not give the man on the land the amenities the town dweller enjoys? Country roads would improve, small towns would spring up with schools, theatres, libraries, etc., to say nothing of the impetus to better farming. It is hard to make the present farmer realise that his lot in life is infinitely more real and natural than the life of the city dweller, because when the farmer comes to town, he sees the street full of people, presumably on pleasure bent, in reality scuttering around to find the cheapest market in which to buy their goods. Consider the monotony of a tram or bus driver's life, a factory worker or a shop assistant closed in from sun and air five days a week, the dweller in flats and room with liberty of movement restricted, and then contrast the independent life the average farmer lives among natural surroundings.

Small farm communities would do away with that isolation that surrounds the big farmer and prevents him from getting the company, the pleasure and the knowledge needed for mental stimulus.

CITY DWELLER (Christchurch).

"MRS. MINIVER"

Sir,—May I add one defiant last cheer for Mrs. Miniver before the subject is closed. In particular, I would like to challenge a statement in the letter from Sgm. Bruce Mason, who says that Mrs. Miniver is "a routine film," and that "all the old stagers are there." Anyone who has not been brought up in an English village probably does find it hard to believe that characters such as Lady Beldon, her butler, the station-master, and others really do exist. But they do. For generations class distinction has been instilled into the British people, and the result is the development of the types from which Mrs. Miniver undoubtedly received its inspiration.

Another point which seems to have been overlooked is the fact that Mrs. Miniver is a film about Britain, but principally for America. In my opinion, M-G-M deliberately set about presenting the picture in the form best calculated to please American palates.

In this M-G-M may be considered worthy promoters of propaganda for Britain. I doubt whether a film on similar lines produced in Britain would have had the same success. And again, had the producer taken as his inspiration the bombing of London's East End, he would in all likelihood have been accused of presenting a "horror" picture.—JOAN DRURY (Hataitai).

(We have no more space for letters on this subject.—Ed.).

THE VOICE OF AN ACE

Sir,—How on earth does H. Alexander, of Auckland (Listener, 26/2/43), know that "a small minority of the listeners informed the performers (Easy Aces), that their freakish programme was admired all over New Zealand"? Also that, to quote him, "75 per cent of the listeners tuned to another station immediately these fearful tones rent the air"? Personally, I admire these performers, admitting, at the same time, that the voice of Jane Ace is not all that could be desired. The sessions are written by a master-hand, being clean and clever as the old-time vaudeville manager used to announce it. Some of the types are purely American, but I find them none the less acceptable. On the other hand, how can H. Alexander waste time listening to "Chuckles with Jerry"?

In closing, let me congratulate 2YA for a splendid local talent session "Home-town Variety."

M. MCKAY (Wellington South).

POINTS FROM LETTERS

"Student" (Point Chevalier) finds "Easy Aces" the only serial worth "taking the trouble to hear." He knows "many student friends, besides professors and a headmaster who even quote from the play."

Lief (Lyttelton) points out that "Easy Aces" has been running for several years, and argues that a serial can run so long only if the majority of listeners like it.

L.M. (Auckland) found "the recent picture of a bonnie W.A.A.F. a vast improvement" on the "grotesque productions which till recently appeared on the front page of The Listener."

"Fair Play" (Wellington) expresses appreciation of "the many fine articles featured in our interesting journal," but wants to know why Tex Morton, "our own yodeller," is nowadays so seldom heard on New Zealand stations.

"Turn It Off" (Remuera) endorses "H. Alexander's remark about 'Easy Aces.'" He has, he says, never heard, and hopes he never will hear again, "such hideous shriekish voices."

"Ephesians 4" (Palmerston North), sends the following comment by W. Robinson, M.A., of the College of the Churches of Christ, Birmingham, about the use of the prefix "Reverend" before the names of Church of Christ pastors: "We have more ministers than most churches, for we have always taught that office in the church has nothing to do with how a man earns his living. It is not a professional matter. A man who is ordained as presbyter is just as much a minister in our understanding of the matter as any parish minister, although he may earn his living as butcher, baker, or what not."

"Spare Us Pain" (Lower Hutt), complains that immediately before the War News, when "turning the knob is no remedy," he has to listen to "sentimental slush, with perhaps a little band music."

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

F.E.P. (Kaiaia). All at present in uniform. Photographs have appeared.

Sam Small (Wellington). We cannot charge a concert-party with indelicacy if the evidence is what you "learnt later from a friend."

A.R.A. (Howick). Embarrassing to start a prayer competition.

J.W.H. (Wellington). Your guess as likely to be right as ours.

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—HISSING
—CRACKLING

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