LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

DYLAN THOMAS

Sir,—Your correspondent Kenneth McKenney is unduly petulant about "Tribute to Dylan Thomas." He deplores the "dry and almost schoolroom attitude" of the speakers, excepting Denis Glover. As one of those speakers I should like, in a thoroughly schoolroom manner, to examine the implications of his letter.

Why can't dead writers be left to the readers? All right, then, let us have no middlemen. Who will define and clarify for each generation the "formal engagement to gratify known habits of association" which Wordsworth considers a poet makes with his audience? Critical assessments are made much more for those un- or semi-converted to an understanding of modern idiom than for the fans such as Mr. McKenney. As every dramatist knows, public response to a play is determined as much by reviews as by the play itself. Is the answer no criticism? Rather, surely, responsible criticism.

"Denis Glover did give us an honest and credible description of the man. . ." Yes, because he had had the good fortune to meet Thomas. His tribute, like Allen Curnow's, was in part a personal one. But M. K. Joseph and myself could pay tribute only to the significance and stature of Thomas's work.

"Thomas was a man ripe with all the rich thoughts of a fertile lifetime. A man with an enormous lust for life—who drank too much gin. . ." I envy Mr. McKenney his certain knowledge of Thomas's character and habits. However, as one who also mourned for the death of Thomas, I sympathise with his irascible championship of the man. Yet there is a point his warm glow of zeal has made him miss. Every schoolboy and schoolgirl has "rich thoughts." They do not express them in adequate language. We honour Thomas the man because of Thomas the poet; otherwise that rum, racy little book, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, would seem to us much superior to *Deaths and Entrances*. The enigma of genius does not reside in an artist's personality but in his power to confront us through his medium with a mythical personality selected and fabricated from the former one—bricks out of straw, gold out of rubble.

"Might we not just leave him that way—as a great and natural poet. . .?" There is nothing more unnatural than a great poet. "Let us be honest with ourselves."

JAMES K. BAXTER (Wellington).

IN A GLASS, DARKLY

Sir,—The writer of "In a Glass, Darkly" (Radio Review, February 19), wisely states that there is no doubt that second sight exists, but expresses impatience at its mode of interpretation in modern language. In a very small way I have to give expression to great thoughts that are sometimes received in awed moments. It seems impossible to give adequate words to these presentiments. It is similar to being aware of the beauty of a picture and being quite unable to reproduce it by words or pen. When words are vouchsafed they are usually in beautiful language and require a certain amount of quiet contemplation to fathom the meaning and its application to modern times. It is like the pearl in the oyster—mostly unseen and so difficult to gather.

KOPI (Wellington).

PRONUNCIATION OF FOREIGN NAMES

Sir,—Your correspondent Elwynne Thomas quotes the book *Loom of Language* as an argument against Esperanto, and then mentions Interglossa; and wonders why "Nothing more was heard of it." I can tell her. For the same reason that nothing more was heard of over 120 other proposed international languages—it just didn't measure up to international standards in practice.

Esperanto is not perfect? So what? Neither am I. When we have a perfect man or perfect woman, we shall probably have a perfect international language—but in the meantime, why not adopt the language that has already been accepted by representative groups of people in every country of the world? We cannot wait for ever for perfection and, in fact, what is considered perfection in one country is totally unacceptable to another. In the meantime, Esperanto is fulfilling a vital and urgent need and, if it is adopted officially as the international auxiliary language, then perhaps we might find that we don't need perfection after all.

For your correspondent's benefit, I mention that an excellent Esperantist is to be found in her own suburb, Eastbourne, who could give her far more information about Esperanto than is to be found in a book written several years ago. After all, although the author is entitled to his opinion, he might just be wrong.

NELSON HILL (Wellington).

BATTLE OF ATLANTIC

Sir,—In a *ZB Book Review*, Sir Keith Park stated that, in the Battle of the Atlantic, German U-boats were defeated by aircraft of Coastal Command, supported by the Navy. No doubt Sir Keith was injecting a little quiet humour into his able review of *New Zealanders with the R.A.F.* "Supported" is a rather ambiguous word with various meanings, one of which is "tolerated."

A.S. (Huntly).

TRAGIC DESTINY

Sir,—Under the title "Tragic Destiny" (*Listener*, February 19), Mr. J. Malton Murray presents his rationalistic view of human mortality and the question of immortality. There is another approach, equally rationalistic, but leading to a very different conclusion, which I would like to reveal. It is generally accepted that religion has been, and still is, one of the great nutrients of the poetic sense. Everyone knows how the arts—poetry, music, sculpture and painting—flourished during the religious age. It is therefore rational to consider the function of the poetic sense. Obviously the major function of that sense is to interpose the poetic vision between the mind and the harsh realities of life. In this position poetry acts as the great mental lubricant, preserving human sanity. When the prophet proclaims, "This mortality shall put on immortality, this corruption incorruption," the mind moves easily away from the aspect of the corrupting flesh, and such movement is necessary to mental health.

No rationalist will disapprove of the ancient custom of burning or burying the dead; and the belief in immortality is a way, and a very important and effective way, of burying, not only the dead, but death itself.

A. C. NICHOLSON (Wellington).

CHINA TO ENGLAND

Sir,—The Saturday afternoon programme, "Guns Along the Yellow River," was good; but as an old salt I would like to know by what feat of navigation Captain Taylor got the Flying Cloud, a sailing ship, into the Mediterranean on the homeward run from China to England.

HARD TACK (Waikanae).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

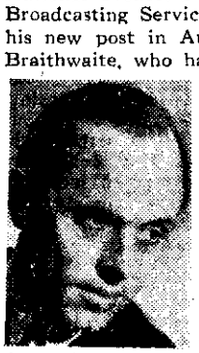
Southlander (Pine Bush).—Thank you. His work will be appearing regularly.

Alfred F. Grace (Auckland).—Time signals are broadcast from YA and YZ stations as follows: 5.0 a.m., 6.0 a.m., 7.0 a.m., 9.0 a.m., 10.58-11.0 a.m. series, 12.30 p.m., 4.0 p.m., 6.30 p.m., 7.0 p.m. 9.0 p.m. (except Sundays), 10.0 p.m., 11.0 p.m. (YA and 4YZ only).

Ecclesio-Musical (Christchurch).—(1) The programme was cut to nine minutes on January 31, as you say; it was also cut on January 24, to 13 minutes. These two occasions, the only ones that can be recalled, are regretted; but they did not sustain your complaint that such occasions are "commonplace." It is hoped, with some confidence, to avoid provoking it in future. (2) Thank you for the more agreeable conclusion.

New Conductor for National Orchestra

JAMES ROBERTSON, M.A. (Cantab.), A.R.C.M., since 1946 Director and Conductor of the Sadler's Wells Opera, has been appointed Conductor of the National Orchestra of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service. He will take over his new post in August from Warwick Braithwaite, who has been interim conductor since Michael Bowles's term expired in 1953.



Making this announcement the other day, the Hon. R. M. Algie, Minister in Charge of Broadcasting, said he had realised, not without anxiety, that, when the conductorship of the National Orchestra changed, its repute and progress were at stake. "I am confident that both are secured by Mr. Robertson's acceptance of the appointment I have offered him," said Mr. Algie.

"Applications for the position closed on November 30, 1953," the Minister continued. "Nearly 70 were received, from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada, Great Britain and Europe. Not only the number but the quality of the applications was gratifyingly high—a fact in which it is not fanciful to measure the credit which the National Orchestra has won. Most of the applications were lodged in London, where they were reviewed by Mr. C. B. McNair, Overseas Music Organiser for the BBC, Mr. Eric Warr, Assistant Head of Music Programmes, and Sir James Shelley, formerly Director of Broadcasting in New Zealand, with whom Dr. R. M. Campbell was associated at New Zealand House. This committee selected seven candidates for interview and its convinced and convincing recommendation was unanimously given to Mr. Robertson. Mr. William James, the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Director of Music, most helpfully reviewed applications lodged in Australia. All papers and all reports were then carefully considered by the Committee of Advice I had appointed here—the New Zealand applications with special care—and this committee unanimously made the London recommendation of Mr. Robertson's appointment its own, which I unhesitatingly accepted."

James Robertson was born in 1912 at Liverpool, and was educated at Winchester and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he played a great deal of chamber music, founded a college orchestra, and obtained first-class honours in classics and modern languages. Uncertain what profession to follow, he went as an exchange student to Leipzig, and studied conducting under Herman Abendreth. In the first few months he progressed so slowly that he decided to go into business. Having arranged to join the Rio Tinto Copper Company he returned to Leipzig to play out time and progressed so quickly that Abendreth tried hard to persuade him that his future lay in music. It was therefore, he says, in a somewhat unsettled frame of mind that he entered the world of copper, and after six weeks he beat a hasty retreat. On the advice of Sir George Dyson, who taught him at Winchester and who has since been his musical mentor, he enrolled at the Royal College of Music and there studied conducting with Constant Lambert, composition with C. H. Kitson and Gordon Jacob, and piano with Herbert Fryer. He took his A.R.C.M. as a solo pianist.

His first appointment (apart from copper) was to the musical staff of the Glyndebourne Opera, where he derived from Fritz Busch much helpful encouragement and a passion for Mozart. This engagement, says Mr. Robertson, "lasted for three paradisal summers," in between which he worked first as a freelance accompanist and then as conductor and chorus master with the Carl Rosa (Touring) Opera Company. In 1939, blissfully unconscious of the approach of war, he left for Winnipeg to conduct an orchestra for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a large choral society, and a male voice choir. He was happy in Canada and might well have stayed put were it not for the war.

In 1940 he returned to England and joined Air Ministry Intelligence as a civil servant, later receiving a commission. He served in Egypt, Malta, Palestine, Libya, French North Africa and Italy. Towards the end of his time abroad he found himself conducting symphony concerts with the Rome Radio, Naples and Bari Orchestras.

He was appointed Director of Opera at Sadler's Wells soon after demobilisation, and has since conducted some 100 opera performances a year. He has done a fair amount of other choral and orchestral conducting, broadcasting, recording, adjudicating and lecturing. At present he is in the middle of a large series of children's concerts for the Liverpool Corporation. He is married and has a son aged three.