

## BROKEN ENGLISH

Sir,—Among our radio script-writers a curious convention is maintained, by which all foreigners, even those who are comparatively literate, are compelled to speak broken English. The aim—as in the case of the naked cannibal who puts on the striped cricket belt he has borrowed from the missionary—may be simply to create a “colourful effect.” Or it may have the deeper, perhaps unconscious, motive of ministering to our pride of race by making other nationals appear to be very much more cretinous than in fact they are. In certain kinds of radio drama this practice is so much in keeping with the general character of the production, and helps towards such a notable consistency of effect, that one cannot possibly take exception to it: one simply turns to another station. There are occasions, however, when one is moved to expostulate.

The Russians, as no reader of the daily press needs to be told, present a combination of barbarism and degeneracy that is unique in history. They are capable of anything. I thought, however, that in a recent broadcast production of O. A. Gillespie's “The Amazing Harold Williams” the author (or possibly it was the producer) was rather over-doing things when he made several Russian characters (including Count Tolstoy, author of half a dozen novels that have been very well reviewed) speak English as if they had been brought up in the back streets of Port Said, or on the beach at Papeete. It might be argued that, although the convention may lead to a slight distortion of values when it makes a Frenchman talk to a Frenchman, or a Dane to a Dane, as if both were half-witted, in this production Russians were speaking to an English-speaking visitor, and so might have been using English and doing it imperfectly. But the narrator brought home to us with considerable force the fact that the subject of this documentary was a linguistic genius who was able to speak 57 languages. (Or am I thinking of Heinz? Fifty-something, at all events.) Since Harold Williams had made a special study of Russian, it is inconceivable that any Russian could have been put to the inconvenience of using semi-pidgin English in talking to him, of all people.

Speaking generally of the effects of this convention I would say that, so long as the French, Italian, Portuguese and Russian characters presented to us in radio drama are made so much more inarticulate in English than they are in their own tongues, listeners will be greatly encouraged in the notion that literacy, like moral probity and the capacity to enjoy the game of cricket, is a peculiarly English accomplishment. This view is, I think, already held with sufficient conviction amongst us not to need any emphasis in radio programmes; and mere courtesy should restrain us from reminding foreigners so often, and in so public a fashion, of their limitations.

A. R. D. FAIRBURN (Auckland).

## THE NATURE OF MIND

Sir,—I have to thank “Psychiatrist” for his clear definition, in your issue of March 19, of what he means when using the term “mind.” His statement that “brain” must not be confused with either “soul” or “mind” agrees with the latest findings of science to the effect that the brain is merely part of the mechanism through which the mind, by means of a very complicated electrical system, controls the body. This appears to suggest that the brain, of itself, has no power to institute either ideas or actions. What

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is needed now is an expert (or experts) in electricity, physiology and psychology to explain, in terms that can be understood by a man of average intelligence, how very closely our system of communication by means of electricity follows that of the human body. When this point is understood it will leave the way clear to concentrate on the difference (if any) between mind and soul. Opinion on this point appears to be divided into two camps, the first of which holds that the terms mind and soul are interchangeable, and that they have the same functions. “Psychiatrist” apparently holds views similar to this.

Another group holds the view that the soul is part of the spiritual side of man while mind controls the mechanism of the material body. Briefly, the idea of this group is that the mind thinks or feels, reasons and wills (in that order), hence the terms “principle of thinking,” “intellect,” etc., applied to it. It governs the body by means of a most efficient electrical system. Like the soul, it continues working while the body rests in sleep or is unconscious; but, unlike the soul, it probably ceases with the change called death. R.J.T. (Auckland).

(*Doubt and Certainty in Science*, the Reith Lectures for 1950, by Professor J. Z. Young, since published in book form, should give our correspondent his starting point.—Ed.)

## A GREEK WORD FOR IT

Sir,—Squeezed between an item on Koestler, and advertisements, in a recent *Listener* was the following challenging excerpt from a BBC talk by Bernard Keelan: “The Greeks had a special word for the man who took no interest in politics. They called him an ‘idiot’; and we who believe in democracy must agree that the word is not too harsh.”

The implications of this excerpt are somewhat misleading. In these days of the world's wariness of an ideological version of an earlier century's Russian “bear,” “politics” is a word the mind often hastily skirts in favour of another less weighted. Some “politics” are “safe”; others not. In any case, the word and its derivatives have endured a sad loss of prestige. Many prefer to use the ungainly “statesmanship” about the activities of our admired leaders, and “international relations” is now a more favoured term where world “politics” are concerned. To the Greeks the word had a purer denotation surely. Politics was then an “art” to which attached a high prestige, to the Greeks almost a divine art—a living, evolving process whose end tools were to be polished and refined until the near-perfect was attained. Each man had a burning, personal interest in a government which took many of its decisions direct from the people in a public square meeting.

The early Greek, then, who took little interest in “politics” was certainly more of an idiot than his counterpart today, who may even be exhibiting prudence in his real or simulated disinterest. For, from current reading about America, one gathers that a college professor must even take care not to have too comprehensive a collection of Tchaikovsky concertos, lest he have his political leanings assessed for him, gestapo-fashion; and this week's top radio or television commentator must not express too openly his approval of the latest abstract sculpture lest he, too, be assessed—and speedily become “last week's” commentator. Even that standing institution, the great American Clubwoman, has become a little frustrated. It is only the “idiot”

who has not heard of “McCarthy.” Thus it would seem that although we imagine that we have adopted the Greeks' tool or form of government—democracy—we have done little to improve on its mechanics and mould it effectively to our own uses. The party-system has not even allowed it to retain the flavour of idealism. Rather, we are well on the road to sullying a word other than “politics.”

Bernard Keelan out of context may have been misleading, but the Greek “idiot,” out of context, was certainly more so. P. WILTSHIRE (Wellington).

## THE YOUTHFUL CITY

Sir,—Usually historical programmes have the habit of maintaining the dust which has clung to the manuscripts and documents used by those who compile them. But a welcome exception to this is *Dunedin Diary, 1864*, the first programme of which I heard from 4YA on Saturday, March 27, at 8.0 p.m. In this programme, which will be a weekly feature, the dominant impression is that of real life in a youthful city, rather than retrospective probing into the records of past history. Rodney Grater, who prepared the programme, deserves much credit for the lively and interesting way it is presented, and for the careful selection of material which still has interest to the listener of 1954. Brian Bell, too, is to be complimented on his fine reading of the script. This collaboration by two young men who are still students at Otago University, each making full use of his own special ability, promises to produce an interesting series of talks: a youthful and lively introduction to the life of a young city. J.K.N. (Dunedin).

## TRAGIC DESTINY

Sir,—Replying to “C.R.” (March 26 issue), I was for many years as a young man an earnest professing Christian. I even did mission work in slums and preached sermons said to be eloquent. I drifted mainly because I found that my prayers—even the most unselfish—were not answered and the promises not fulfilled. I had a spell in the wilderness. Then I thought perhaps the fault was mine; and tried again. During the latter part of this second period, seventeen years of close association with the churches throughout New Zealand did much to put me where I am today. For me, Christianity does not work. “C.R.'s” heavy artillery barrage is so much wasted ammunition. If God made me, I am as God made me.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).

## “FROM HERE TO ETERNITY”

Sir,—Critics are born to disagree. May I outline a few differences of opinion occasioned by reading the *Listener* review of the film *From Here to Eternity*? Prejudices apart, Frank Sinatra as Private Maggio nearly steals the show. A very live piece of “natural” acting which no directing could destroy. No one has died better in pictures for years. Deborah Kerr, now the conventional glamour-faced Hollywood doll, is far less adequate. Neither in the kitchen scene nor in the beach scene does she achieve that tension that the script demanded the acting should supply. Lancaster? On the contrary, quite easy to understand if the filmgoer has been in the army. An adequate portrayal of a type every soldier knows.

The story? Sadism (it appeals to the masses) is overdone. A “Rock College”

sergeant getting away (apparently for years) with brutal personal assault; an ambitious company commander absenting himself from duties while his top sergeant does everything in his name; a “lone wolf” subjected to unlimited persecution, and refusing to appeal over his superiors' heads because it would afford them too much satisfaction (satisfaction to an ambitious company commander?)—all these in one drama strain too heavily one's credulity.

Why, in the end, is justice done and villainy punished? Because previous over-emphasis demands compensation. Result—an army, I would guess, as unlike the American army as Hollywood is unlike America. Fair, yes. But no finer than fair.

A. B. GORDON (Wellington).

## THE RUMINANT HARE

Sir,—It is a pity that science must so often be distorted to fit the innocent folk-lore of scripture. The hare is not a ruminant. It has no first stomach or “rumen” (Latin for “throat”). All herbivorous mammals have the large blind gut, or caecum, which seems to take the overflow of partly digested food from the stomach when pastures are lush. Under certain circumstances, such as in a scientist's torture-hutch, the hare, or any other herbivore, consumes both the soft and hard pellets.

It would upset Mr. D. S. Milne's theories if he could see the springbok of South Africa—a true ruminant—doing the same thing. Witnessing this in both the Pretoria and Johannesburg zoological parks, I sought information from a zoo official. He told me that when the great springbok herds swarmed across the veldt like locusts, the vanguard consumed everything, while the rest survived on what they could pick up.

The fact is that the true vegetarian has not yet evolved; the herbivore's gut is still not long enough to digest fully the food he consumes.

Pseudo-ruminant? One might as well call the rabbit a pseudo-fish because of his marble-slab destiny at one-and-four a pound! VARIAN J. WILSON (Christchurch).

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

J.M.B. (Timaru).—The correspondence has been closed.

R.B. (Point Howard).—Sorry; too long.

P.S.A. (Auckland).—The correspondence has been closed.

Dick Southon (Auckland).—Too long.

Fan (Gisborne).—The date was given as 1903 in Maurice Hurst's “Music and the Stage in New Zealand.”

Rae (Dunedin).—Thanks for directing attention to it.

B.C.H. (Nelson).—By all means, let's. The effort is made, and continues, and will continue. But “always . . . at least three?”

K. McGregor (Le Bons Bay).—(1) Sorry. One of a regular series of studio performances had been inadvertently omitted from the printed programme, the recordings being substituted. The usual announcements of the correction were made, as you suggest. (2) Thanks; inquiring; no other complaint received.

Fair's Fair (Wellsford).—(1) Looking for talent everywhere and all the time; using it when found. (2) Yes; trying; long-term commitments create the difficulty.

Vox Populi (Hawera).—Are you quite sure your information is complete and correct? *Mosgiel Listener*.—Not practicable; but thanks.

N. B. Howell (New Plymouth).—(1) Each YC station transmits with the same power as its YA partner. YC stations are not subsidiaries; programmes are not “relegated” to them, but assigned to them because of their suitability in type and quality. (2) Such a relay as the one you mention is carried by the YC stations for two reasons. First, it is thoroughly suitable in type and quality; and second, it can be carried without being interrupted by service programmes (weather, news, etc.), or displacing these.