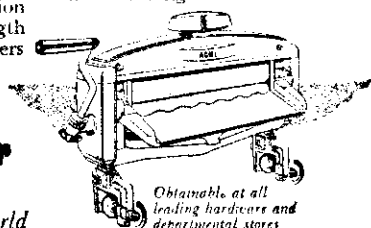




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## LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

### JOSEPH MASTERS

Sir.—The centenary of the Small Farms scheme in the Wairarapa, something unique in the settlement of land in New Zealand, has brought forth a new crop of historians. A few of these, although conceding Joseph Masters the credit of founding the scheme, have endeavoured to create the impression that Masters was illiterate of poor address, dependent on others for his contacts with authority, intolerant, quarrelsome, and in general a rather unpleasant and unpopular person. Yet such a man, early in 1853, with the blessing of Sir George Grey, on one brief visit to the Wairarapa, induced the Maoris to sell their land to the Government.

This was something that not even Sir George Grey, Mr. Donald McLean, the New Zealand Company or any of their agents had succeeded in doing in six years since 1847 in spite of persistent efforts. Masters was unanimously acclaimed by the members of the Small Farms Association as the founder of the scheme and they named Masterton after him. He was elected a member of the first Board of Wardens for Masterton in

1864. In 1870 he was appointed a member of the Trust for the combined interests of the Association in Masterton and Greytown.

He was three times elected a member of the Wellington Provincial Parliament, representing Wairarapa West until 1873, the year before his death. He was the founder and first Master of the Masonic Lodge in Masterton, and several times Master of the New Zealand Lodge of Freemasons.

These few points indicate a greater measure of respect and confidence in Masters by the people of his time and place than these few recent historians would have us believe.

B. IORNS, Secretary, Masterton Historical Society.

### "THE SEEKERS"

Sir.—Now that some of us have seen *The Seekers* it may be assumed that *The Listener* will again accept criticism of the film. One would avoid coining a phrase but the eternal curate's egg comes to mind, and suggests the comment that though parts are quite good

(continued on next page)

## CHEKHOV ANNIVERSARY

THE great Russian short story writer and dramatist, Anton Chekhov, died on July 15, 1904. To mark the 50th anniversary of his death a short talk by Professor H. Winston Rhodes, Professor of English at Canterbury University College, was broadcast in *Book Shop* on July 14. Below we print the text of this talk:

ANTON CHEKHOV, the fiftieth anniversary of whose death falls in this month of July, was the author of a handful of plays which have made stage history and of scores of short stories which have placed him with Gogol, de Maupassant, and Poe, as one of the acknowledged masters of this literary form. It was not an accident that Katherine Mansfield was so attracted to his characteristic manner and craftsmanship.

Life was not made easy for Chekhov. He once referred to Tolstoy and Turgenyev who "receive from nature as a gift what we lower-class writers buy at the cost of our youth," and recalled that in childhood he had no childhood. As a medical student in Moscow he became the main support of his parents and their five other children. This was the time when he served his apprenticeship, for necessity drove him to write sketches for the comic papers under the name of Antosha Chekhonte. Soon after he graduated the first symptoms of the tuberculosis which shortened his life appeared; but, undeterred, he continued to write and to pay what he called his debt to medicine. Wherever he lived the peasants flocked to him, and he attended to their medical needs as well as attempting to make life less harsh for them. In 1890, against all advice, he set off on an arduous journey across Siberia in order to conduct a one-man investigation into the conditions under which the people were rotting in the penal island of Sakhalin.

Yet Chekhov, with his great energy, his zest for living, his humour and immense sociability, his compassion and integrity, is often described as wistful, disillusioned, and overpowered with a sense of futility. Nothing could be fur-



ANTON CHEKHOV

ther from the truth. Chekhov's stories are like life and filled with all the variety of life. Taken together, and there are over two hundred of them translated into English, they provide a vivid picture of the Russian world which he loved, laughed at, and wept for; but it is a picture composed of fragments which have been well described as biographies of mood. As he said of his plays, so it can be said of his stories, "People eat their dinner, just eat their dinner, and all the time their happiness is being established or their lives are being broken up." He avoided the sensational in subject and the flamboyant in manner. He did not want to stir up people's imaginations just to pass the time of day, but to bring them closer to life and its problems.

And so, fifty years after he died in Yalta at the age of forty-four, many of us remember with affection and admiration Anton Chekhov, the man, the short story writer, and the dramatist.

(A BBC "World Theatre" production of Chekhov's play, *Uncle Vanya*, will be heard from 3YC at 7.30 p.m. on Friday, July 30.)

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 23, 1954.