

ISLANDS OF EELS

Sir,—Mrs. Helen Wilson is quite right about the eels. I have seen almost the same thing. Some time between 1918 and 1920 I was fishing for trout below the waterfalls in the Mapara Stream. It was summer, perhaps about March, and very hot and dry. The bush locusts covered the trees in millions and as usual their din was deafening until you got used to it. Everything became very quiet and still as big black clouds suddenly rolled across the sky. The lightning flashed and the thunder rolled overhead; and then came the rain. It pelted down in great drops. The pool below the falls was covered with a fine spray. Anyone knows what water looks like with big drops of rain pelting on it. Suddenly the eels rose to the surface all over the pool and some were huge—one was at least between 20 and 30 lb., and five to six feet long. They did not lie in circles but were like a crescent moon, with the middle parts of their bellies out of the water. I tried to hook the big one by throwing a spoon and dragging it across him, but had no luck.

The teeming rain suddenly stopped and the eels sank out of sight. They did not swim. The sun shone once more and the locusts resumed their din. I was pleased to read the article by Mrs. Helen Wilson, as I have told plenty of people this experience, and by their looks and smiles I knew I was not believed. A. PITTAMS (Waimiha).

FLUORIDATION

Sir,—I know of a child who is so indulged that she refuses to go to bed until everyone else goes; so mother and father, and granny, too, have to don pyjamas and lie in their beds until she is safely "off," and then they sneak out again. This is not more absurd than compelling the whole population to drink fluoride rather than curb the children's consumption of sweet-stuff; as lop-sided a scheme, indeed, as only specialists could devise. We are spending more than half as much on ice-cream as on bread—plus sugar and sweets as well. But why worry, when we can buy such excellent dentures! Decaying teeth are not a hopeless tragedy nowadays.

The margin between safe and harmful dosages of fluorine is a narrow one; and varying water consumption by individuals, owing to climate and methods of cooking, make it impossible to ensure the correct intake of fluoride through the water supply. A better way is to give children one fluoride tablet per day in a drink, just the exact amount wanted. Surely R. B. D. Stocker does New Zealand mothers less than justice if he thinks they "cannot be bothered" to administer the tablets. Mass medication violates a basic personal right, and it will be a bad day for freedom when our people become so brow-beaten by Authority that they give up fighting. ADIT (Havelock North).

Sir,—Your remarks in a footnote to a letter by "A.W." upon fluoridation call for some comment. You state that before taking the subject any further into fantasy the scientific findings of two genuine authorities should be recapitulated. The genuine authorities named by you, Dr. F. A. Arnold and Dr. Gilbert T. Parfitt, were for fluoridation, and the implied not genuine Dr. Charles M. Brusch and Dr. Leo Spira were quoted by "A.W." as being against fluoridation. I wonder how many people in New Zealand had knowledge of any of these men before the controversy on fluoridation. I suggest very few, therefore the evidence of both schools of

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thought must be presented in an unbiased manner. By the tenor of your reply to "A.W." you have apparently decided that the opinions of those experts for the scheme are genuine, and those experts against are of no consequence.

You do not believe it possible to bring Communism into this subject. Perhaps not, but we must be careful when trying to benefit others that we do not infringe upon the liberty of the subject, thereby unconsciously proposing that which we most vigorously wish to oppose. As water supplies are a public utility the introduction of fluorine immediately cancels out the right of the individual to choose or refuse which is a basic principle of democracy. It therefore follows that this scheme is not in harmony with our accepted concept of the British way of life.

E.C. (Auckland).

TALKS ON RUSSIA

Sir,—In an atmosphere thick with heavily-biased and emotionally charged propaganda, Mr. Norris Collins's seven talks on Russia were like a breath of clear, cool, fresh air. He displayed an objectivity, a keenness of observation, and appreciation of differing values and a lack of naivety that was extremely stimulating and convincing—qualities not always found in visitors to controversial places. Whilst we have talks like this and a Broadcasting Service that is willing (and able) to give us them there is hope. G.R. (Wellington).

Sir,—The Broadcasting Service did its very best to tell its listeners that Mr. N. Collins—who gave several talks on his impressions of Russia—is a devout and active member of the Church of England. Apart from his timid treatment of religion in Russia I was staggered by a statement in his last talk. In this he said that the Western world needs a more positive philosophy in its relation to Communism. I have always regarded Christianity as a positive philosophy, as countless others do, and have always found it practical and inspiring. It would be interesting to know what Mr. Collins had in mind. He probably believes that religion is something private, and must under no circumstances be allowed to intrude in public affairs, as in Russia. ABC (Wellington).

LISPING IN NUMBERS

Sir,—Allow me to take up a few points in the editorial of July 16, in which the little review *Numbers* was flattered with so much attention. The main charge brought against *Numbers* seemed to be that it "strikes out blindly," with "undefined purposes." What substitutes, it was asked, do the iconoclasts offer? Merely by looking a little past the review's editorial, the proposed "substitutes" should have been evident: the poems and stories in it. The policy of *Numbers* could be seen in what it printed. If its contents are ignored and the policy is considered in the abstract, how easy to call it a "cloudy generalisation."

With similar unfairness the grammar of one sentence (about work by both new and well-known writers) and the meaning of another (about contributors who did not help to plan the review) were misinterpreted and quoted out of context. (But compare the mixed metaphor that ended *The Listener's* editorial.)

Only once was the editorial of *Numbers* quoted fairly, with the comment

"juvenile nonsense" added without any reason given. This is not criticism. The passage quoted needs inclination rather than explanation. The values it implies, at least, are not as narrow as the Matthew Arnoldish "writing perceptively of life around one" suggested instead.

Two final points. If a "coterie" in the thirties had not indulged in the "luxury" of "playing at publication," our "established" writers would still be unknown. Isn't the situation a little like that in Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, where Solness fears "the younger generation at his door"? And wasn't Hilda in that play right in saying such fears were unworthy of him?

The type of criticism of *The Listener* about *Numbers* is precisely what must be replaced by "hard thinking and good writing." Admittedly, it comes from a "clear voice," it is a fine, resonant yelp of disapproval. But it is time that criticism here should stop being either a favourable or unfavourable yelp, or else an academic exercise, and instead should use reasoning as precise as the nature of this subject admits.

PETER DRONKE (Wellington).

(It is a familiar and rather weak defence to argue that quotations are unfair "out of context." The fuller the quotations can be, the better; but it is space, and not wicked design, which limits them. We cheerfully admit that the comment "juvenile nonsense" is less than criticism. Yet if, as our correspondent says, "the passage quoted needs inclination rather than explanation," we are obviously at levels of thought where only a yelp can be intelligible.—Ed.)

"THE FACTS OF LIFE"

Sir,—In his preface to *The Facts of Life* (reviewed in your issue of June 18), C. D. Darlington expresses the hope that his readers may find some parts of the book entertaining. Some parts of it certainly are, though these are probably not the ones he had in mind.

The scientific part of the book is interesting enough, though Darlington, like most geneticists, cannot see the organism for the genes. But the author is mainly preoccupied with questions of ethics and politics. He wants us to jettison a moral code that is two thousand years old, and therefore hopelessly out of date, and allow humanity to be scientifically controlled in accordance with the maxims of humanitarian biologists. He is not very explicit on the point, but he obviously wants people like himself to be appointed as student-masters to the human race.

If the biologists ever did control our destinies in the manner advocated by Darlington, the outlook would indeed be grim. It suffices to recall the roaring time they had in Belsen and Buchenwald, and Darlington's own description of the happiness of individual human beings as "an ephemeral detail."

In the chapters in which Darlington attempts to deal a death blow to such relics of folklore and medieval ignorance as belief in free-will and immortality, his philosophical equipment is so negligible that one could liken him to

CARE OF RECEIVING SETS

READERS with special problems in the care and maintenance of radio receiving sets are invited to send inquiries to the Editor of "The Listener." Names and addresses are required. Wherever possible, replies will be given either in "The Listener" or by letter.

a big game hunter on safari with a pea-shooter or a man setting out to mill timber with a knife and fork.

G.H.D. (Palmerston North).

WILLIAM SATCHELL'S WRITINGS

Sir,—In his very interesting article "Behind the Greenstone Door" (*Listener* July 25), P.J.W. states "it is possible to suspect from similarities in locale and particularly from parallels in the handling of the material and in the style of writing that such further *Graphic* pieces as 'Polly, a Bush Sketch,' by J. Eman Smith, and 'How the Colonel Went Home,' by Collet Dobson, may also have been written by Satchell."

It seems hardly possible that Satchell would choose J. Eman Smith as a nonde-plume at a time when "Jimmy" Eman Smith was widely known throughout New Zealand as a contemporary provincial Rugby representative. I knew J. Eman Smith as a very charming and cultivated man prior to his retirement in 1909 from the office of Commissioner of Old Age Pensions for New Zealand. N. McD. WEIR (Cambridge).

AN EXPERIENCE OF SOUNDS

Sir,—I must say that I am enjoying very much the talks about music by Arthur Jacobs. At last we have a recognised critic who frankly states that a note is a sound and music an experience of sounds, not of emotions, its ability to paint a scene being limited to the conveying of the sounds and rhythm of the scene, such as a train pulling out of a station, taxicabs in Paris, the flight of a bumble-bee (not overloaded with honey, either), and so on. All of which partly explains why Spike Jones is not only a notorious, but also one of the most honest and creative, musicians of our time.

I see now a great opportunity for a New Zealand composer to make some real dough. I have often been intrigued by the crowds at our A. and P. shows who flock around a working exhibit of a milking machine. I feel sure that, with Springtime almost on us again, there would be a wonderful sale for a recording, played by any musical group, of a composition based on the rhythmic suck and sigh of a milking machine.

H. GILLIES (Otahuhu).

"JEANNIE"

Sir,—On Sunday, July 4, at 3.0 p.m., I had the great pleasure of listening with some friends to 2YA. It was *Jeannie*, "a comedy by Aimee Stuart about a Scots girl who spends her inheritance in one glorious week in Vienna." We all enjoyed it so much that I thought I would write you to say so, and that I hope it will be broadcast again. P. AGAR (Christchurch).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Live Listener (Paeroa): (1) See page 19. (2) In general, the intention is to keep the YC programme choice wider than it would be if two hours were devoted to a concert relay; but there is no absolute rule about it. (3) In particular, the repertoire of a touring artist is more advantageously used in half-programme links than in full programmes. *Moyna H. Coskery* (Dunedin): The criticism is well aimed, and a change for the better will be pursued. But not the longer programme.

Listener (Auckland): Not the man in the street, but the man in a film whose low standard was clearly indicated.

F.A.S. (Christchurch): Too soon for another discussion of that subject.

J.P.W. (Christchurch): Thank you. A correction has already been printed.

W.J.W. (Christchurch): Suggestion noted.

A.D. (Blenheim): The play is not yet available, but will be broadcast later. Many thanks for words of appreciation.