

INTELLIGENT PEOPLE

Sir,—Reading James Bertram's admirable review of a book on prisoners of war, I was struck, like your correspondent "A Perturbed Student," by his reference to the superior intelligence of the French. I think I know what Mr. Bertram means. It is that the Frenchman is intellectually more active and curious, and more critical. That the Frenchman is more so in respect to the arts, is generally accepted. This was illustrated by what an Englishman said to me who had served in France through the First War. He knew the language and, I think, taught it in an English school. He told me he never returned to England for any of his leave, but spent it all in France, because he liked the life there. "Compare talk in an English mess with talk in a French mess," he commented. Also, it is widely agreed that in certain ways of life, such as eating and drinking, the Frenchman is more intelligent than the Englishman, or the New Zealander.

But are there limits to being "intelligent"? I have been asking myself for some years if Frenchmen are really as intelligent as they are believed to be. The art and science of war call for intelligence, but consider the record of the French (inheritors of the Napoleonic tradition) in three great wars. They were invaded and beaten in 1870. In 1914, after more than 40 years to prepare for another possible attack, they gravely miscalculated the weight and direction of the German thrust. The British high command appraised the situation more accurately. In 1940 they were overwhelmed, partly because they judged as impossible what proved to be possible. Or take politics. Is it intelligent to have so many parties and change the government every few months? It has been suggested by a highly competent authority that the trouble with French politics is that the French bring to them the high critical faculty they apply to the arts. Is this intelligent? Is it not better to realise that, as Gladstone said, in politics one must be content with second best?

I am not a philosopher or a metaphysician, and I put forward these ideas in no dogmatic spirit. I don't know what distinction philosophers make between intelligence and wisdom, but I suggest there is a difference. Wisdom consists, I should say, of intelligence plus emotion, plus intuition—plus something beyond pure reason. The English are proverbially a stupid people. But are they really? Among the great nations their political system is the best, largely because it has a considerable element of the illogical or irrational. Perhaps it was wisdom rather than intelligence that caused them to conduct themselves so well in prison camps. I should put it in one word—"character."

IRISH-NEW ZEALANDER
(Wellington).

TALKS ON RUSSIA

Sir,—Mr. Bell is so bursting with enthusiasm for Jeffersonian ideals and so ready with charges of "bigotry" and "blind prejudice" that I haven't much hope of getting him to see daylight, but to clear things up for some of your other readers, it may not be a bad idea if I show that Mr. Bell's charge of bigotry is groundless. He writes: "I called G.H.D. a bigot for advocating the suppression of talks not in keeping with his own opinions." If Mr. Bell has another look at my original letter and allows time for the meaning to sink in, he will find that I advocated nothing of the kind. What I did was to criticise the NZBS for inviting a speaker to give

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seven talks which were obviously worthless as a contribution to the democratic discussion of the Soviet way of life since they amounted to little more than Communist propaganda. It was not a question of suppressing the talks, as though Mr. Collins, having made the talks, could demand that the NZBS broadcast them. My point was that the NZBS should never have brought the talks into existence. There is enough of a threat to our democratic way of life already, without having the NZBS used as a medium for disseminating anti-democratic propaganda. And if Mr. Bell does not agree that Communist propaganda is anti-democratic, I fear his enthusiasm for Jeffersonian ideals is all heat and no light.

Mr. Bell evidently expects an affirmative answer to his first question. But the answer is No. Democracy does not survive only by the exercise of the rights and liberties inherent in it. For proof I refer him to the history of the Peloponnesian War. The answer to his second question is a qualified Yes. Free discussion of politics is an integral part of the democratic process, but the preservation of the democratic process requires that the right of free discussion be subject to certain limitations. Democracy is not the beautifully simple ideal that Mr. Bell and lots of others seem to imagine. G.H.D. (Palmerston North).

Sir,—I cannot understand why "A Foreigner" should criticise my talk on religion in Russia when what I said and implied was so very close to what he says himself.

I feel that to reply to G.H.D. will only waste your space. His idea of understanding Russia is for all of us to believe everything he believes and that everything else is "Russian propaganda." He has part of the truth but his intolerance closes his mind to a little more of the whole truth.

NORRIS COLLINS (Christchurch).

THE TEMPLE OF MITHRAS

Sir,—In your editorial, "In the Temple of Mithras," you write "... Mithraism did not entirely disappear. It was replaced by a higher religion; but some of its elements were absorbed, and although in the early centuries of Christianity they sometimes led to heresy, they also helped to strengthen the orthodox faith." This is an outstanding understatement, because Christianity absorbed the majority of the "elements" of the religion of Mithras.

When you speak of a "higher religion" you refer to Christianity, but that statement would require a lot of proving. Certainly Christianity became popular, but very little thought is required to see that this popularity could only be attained by using popular methods. It adopted many of the most popular "elements" of many so-called Pagan religions, but particularly those belonging to the cult of Mithra. Christianity, in fact, became popular by assimilating ordinary human nature in the mass.

To know what Christianity absorbed from Mithraism, we must know what Mithra stands for. Mithra was the Sun and the Friend, Mediator, Saviour, Redeemer, Preserver, the Logos, and one of the early "Pagan" Christs. Mithra was born of the Virgin Goddess, and Mithraic monuments show him as a newborn babe, adored by shepherds, who are offering first fruits. He was known as the Rock Born, from whom our Saint Peter comes to us, and he was the keeper of the keys of heaven and hell.

In fact, Mithra was canonised by the Church as Saint Peter. Mithra was worshipped on the first day of the week called Sun Day, known as the Lord's Day, the Lord being one of his titles.

Apart from weekly worship, there were two great Mithraic festivals, one at the winter solstice (now our Christmas), and the other at the vernal equinox (now our Easter). The first celebrated the birthday of Mithra the Sun God, and the second was Mithra's season of sacrifice and triumph. An emblem, a stone image, was buried in a rock tomb, and on the third day it was withdrawn as re-living, amidst great rejoicing.

The fascination of Mithraism lay in its very elaborate initiation, baptisms (both by water and by blood), probation, sacraments (the mass, for instance), and mysteries. The initiates were born again for eternity, with the promise of immortality. All these and very many more were absorbed into Christianity from Mithraism.

ARGOSY (Te Awamutu).

(Abridged.—Ed.)

DUTCH COMPOSERS

Sir,—I would like to bring to the notice of the author of the article "Music from the Netherlands" that Willem Pijper was never a pupil of Bernard Zweers, as he states. He was instead one of Dr. Johan Wagenaar. He received his education from him, together with Alexander Voormolen and Bernard Wagenaar (who now teaches at the Juilliard School in New York).

Although I understand that *The Listener* would not have enough space available for a more elaborate review of Dutch music, I was a little disappointed not to see a list stated of Pijper's pupils, which is a very impressive one. However, we do appreciate the initiative of the NZBS in giving not fewer than 13 programmes of music by Dutch composers.

I have a feeling that several of these Dutch compositions will make a good impression, and I hope some day we will have a living performance by the National Orchestra of one or more of those compositions which in Holland itself belong already to the standard repertoire. H.S. (Wellington).

NEW ZEALAND PLAYS

Sir,—May I correct a misstatement in the recent letter by the secretary of Unity Theatre? Miss Mitchell refers to "plays by Kate Ross, Bruce Mason, John Mihell, Marie Bullock and Margot Roth—the first three of these authors have all won awards in Drama League Contests." Actually, both Mrs. Roth and I have been similarly blessed. Since I cannot imagine that Unity Theatre, with its proud record of concern for the local playwright, is unaware of the achievements of two of its own members, this omission must spring, consciously or subconsciously, from the reluctance of a modest mother goose to claim too high a proportion of swans among its own young. Still, presumably we slighted cygnets have the right to squawk!

MARIE BULLOCK (Wellington).

CONTROL THAT HABIT

Sir,—Being somewhat depressed by overdoses of moral delinquency and atom bombs with which we have been regaled by the Press recently, and becoming conscious of the rather disquieting fact that my mind has indeed in the past forty years become cluttered up with utterly worthless information, including telephone numbers, anniversary dates, prices of various commodities—

to mention but a few—I was delighted to find in your October 25 *Listener* a remedy, the Fairburn Collapsible Library System, which seemed eminently worth trying.

I determined to start with Sterne in following out Mr. Fairburn's idea of reading for pleasure; I never get further with this book than "Alas, poor Yorick," at which point I fall away into unseasonable laughter—and so, indeed, I looked forward to many evenings of quiet enjoyment.

Being unable to afford shock treatment to induce the retrograde amnesia, I had to call upon my wife to crack me over the head. She was glad to do so, and the scheme worked admirably—so admirably, in fact, that apparently my wife couldn't bear the endless repetition of "Alas! poor Yorick," and my insane laughter any longer. She got them to certify me yesterday.

HAPPY AT LAST (Avondale).

A STATESMAN'S SPEECH

Sir,—The criticism levelled at your editorial by G.H.D. in your issue of October 22 is a typical illustration of the "closed mind." Arthur Koestler, who joined the Communist Party, left it disillusioned, and co-operated in writing *The God that Failed*, says: "The mentality of a person who lives inside a closed system of thought, Communist or other, can be summed up in a single formula: He can prove everything he believes, and he believes everything he can prove." If the cold-blooded slaughtering of human beings is to be universally accepted as justification for total condemnation of those employing it, a backward glance along the historical road furnishes matter of interest. The extermination of the Albigenses, the Inquisition, St Bartholomew Massacre, Franco in Spain and the religious massacres in 1941 in Yugoslavia, on this basis of judgment, form grounds for totally condemning the religious communities responsible.

Communism is a closed system forbidding the free functioning of the human mind. The believers in, or victims of, any closed system of thought can never concede any good in any part of any other closed system. Hope for mankind lies in the continued functioning of the liberal spirit and everlasting resistance to dogmas—religious, political or social—that stifle thought and obstruct the full spiritual development of the human being.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Qamaru).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. G. Flynn (Auckland): See page 11.
N. R. Williams (Te Awamutu): Sorry; it arrived too late.

Miss E. Morgan (Opotiki): You are right, and we were wrong. Peter Pan also won the Melbourne Cup twice.

P. S. Lewis (Cambridge): The discussion in which Mary Field takes part will be heard from other YA stations early next year.

Bohumir Novak (Wellington): You are getting away from the subject under discussion. And your use of the word "defamation" is a little careless.

Mrs. E. Reid (Temuka): Thanks for suggestion, but afraid arrangements for that period already completed.

R. A. Brinsden (Wellington): You begin by offering an explanation and end by asking for one. (1) The balance was, thoroughly tested and satisfactory. A microphone temporarily failed. (2) One player did not notice that the studio was off the air, at the other's request, while he tuned. (3) Unexplained; otherwise unreported.

Mrs. Lily C. Rayner (Rai Valley): Ministers very rarely fail to attend, but recordings are kept in case they are unavoidably delayed or prevented. In the instance you cite one such emergency was followed the day after by another. The recording used on the first occasion was inadvertently used again on the second.