

CHRISTOPHER FRY'S PLAY

Sir,—Mr. Bruce Mason, like so many enthusiasts for certain phases of contemporary art, would bludgeon us out of our doubts. For me the play raised a contemporary echo. The technique and tempo suggested that familiarised by Tommy Handley in *ITMA*, probably of American origin. Of the matter, a student well read in French literature told me there were chunks of Rabelais and ideas from the French pessimists. The blasphemy and bawly—Chaucer, and Shakespeare to a less extent, perhaps—have been brought to us as part of the medieval scene. I do not object to writers using the same matter. I like Pascal's illustration from the game of tennis. Both players use the same ball but one of them places it better.

Amidst the tempest of words in the last scene there half came through some lyrical outburst about the dawn. "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank"—a more leisurely approach and development. J. P. Firth made me see something of the beauty and mystical implications of the lines at 14. I think Shakespeare placed it better. Hamlet could put over some "rough stuff" at the grave of Ophelia and in what a setting. The plot is admitted to be thin, quite a Victorian happy ending to the problems, if any, raised. The pace was too rapid to let the lyricism sink in memory, apart from the guffaws of the groundlings at the bawdy.

I agree that the eye of the producer is good, but is his ear wrong? Would the play have come off at a slower pace and without the groundlings? I turned the BBC production off. I do not remember any of Mr. Fry's coloured puddles. The most miraculous in my early youth was deposited in our backyard by an unprecedented rain storm. I laboriously shaped a stick with a blunt knife, erected a feather from the poultry yard as sail and launched it on the deep. I saw three ships go sailing.

T. D. H. HALL (Wellington).

Sir,—I have no patience with people who tell me that they have no patience with people who do not like what **THEY** like. Maybe in the eyes of Bruce Mason I am a Philistine, but I do not like *The Lady's Not for Burning*.

Christopher Fry is better to read than to play, in my humble opinion, and rather obviously in the opinion of the general public. He has some glittering gems such as "Truth became for him the sum of sums and Death the long division," and "The least I can do is to fill the curled shell of the world with human deep-sea sound"—if my memory is correct. But the effect is rather that of a brooch of precious stones set in Britannia metal. The setting is unworthy of the gems. In the case of *The Lady* we had to listen to much that is verbose and tedious while waiting for the less frequent flashes of brilliants.

At the risk of upsetting Mr. Mason's vials of wrath after his lyrical rhapsody about bass viols and viola d'amore, I would say that the New Zealand Players' production of *The Lady* suffered by comparison with the recent production of the lady in question by Wellington Repertory. Barbara Jefford was, on the opening night when I saw her, merely adequate and totally uninspiring. She certainly cannot hold a candle to Pamela Brown, of whom Mr. Mason may perhaps have heard.

Keith Michell seemed to carry over his vivid portrayal of Hotspur into his reading of the Mendip tale. There were times when in more reposeful mood he rose to real heights, and certain it was Thomas Mendip who carried the show—

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

such as it was. I came away neither happy nor bubbling, but rather with a sense of acute disappointment. Even Mr. Mason, who is so obviously prejudiced, found the play "dull at whites," but somewhat inconsistently urges us to go and be happy and bubble.

Of course, it must be understood that despite the "ballyhoo" the Stratford Players are not regarded as "tops" in England. The very name of Stratford has publicity value, and draws hordes of tourists—and this in turn draws guest stars like Gielgud and Olivier; but the regular company is not at all outstanding. Here, we are frequently carried away by the enthusiasm of advance publicity into believing that we are to see something "out of this world" just because the much-publicised performers come here from the antipodes.

I am afraid, too, that when I am weary and languid a surfeit of Fry would be as indigestible and unpalatable as the over-cooked counterpart from the butcher would be. Mr. Mason says that Fry's verse is difficult—to give it that essential sheen. This actually bears out my contention that Fry may be read with enjoyment (if you like that sort of thing) but that he does not write good theatre.

Unlike Mr. Mason I am quite tolerant and leave in peace those who choose to make a meal of an entrée, though I prefer the more satisfying diet of Roast and Two Veg. Man cannot live by Fry alone, and while Mr. Mason proudly lifts up his banner as a Fry fan, I, with perhaps more modesty but no less fervour, lift up mine as a Fry pan.

L. ASSHETON HARBORD
(Lower Hutt).

HOPE AND GLORY

Sir,—Marie Rae seems to have overlooked the conclusion of my letter which referred to that in the British character which could establish new claims for Britain as the land of hope and glory. What the British have done recently and are now doing may well prove to be a contribution to that end. They may achieve a new supremacy, not by military might and the musical nourishment of vainglorious nationalism, but by the deploying of moral and spiritual resources in the world of international relations. They may shed that smug conceit which causes so many to refer to other races by such contemptuous terms as Chinks, Chows, Dagoes, Frogs, Wogs, Wops, etc. They may escape from the attitude of mind which produced the following: "The natives of India know perfectly well that they are governed by a superior race"—Lord Shaftesbury. "Nothing is to be gained by coddling weak and primitive man. . . It is pure

sentimental bosh to say that Africa belongs to a lot of naked blacks. It belongs to the race that can make the best use of it. I am for the white man and the English race."—Kipling, 1899. We fought a war because Hitler entertained like thoughts in a German context.

Then, there is the indefensible line: "God who made thee mighty, etc." Did He? If so, how? Was it by helping us to win the Opium War and allowing us to take Hong Kong as a prize, rewarding us for forcing the Chinese to become opium addicts? Or was it by helping us to win the Maori wars when the Maoris passionately demanded that we leave their country, but we by means of bullets and bayonets convinced them that we intended to remain?

Amongst empires that have been, the British holds an outstanding place. But empires built by means of what the Victorians called "just and necessary wars" are tainted with so many evils and inhumanities that we need not weep to see them dissolving. It is a mistake to keep alive jingoism that is better buried.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).

"THE WEEK'S MUSIC"

Sir,—In your issue of February 4 appeared "The Week's Music," contributed by "Sebastian," a writer whose nom-de-plume does not hide his identity—the leopard cannot change its spots.

Two points in this review call for explanation: First, what does your contributor mean when he says, "The last movement (of Schubert's Sonata), seemed a little ham-handed in places—and yet they were just the places that beg for a little ham?"

Second, further on the writer refers to "a fine rendition." The English language contains no such word. Surely, Sir, your readers are entitled to something better than this rubbish.

L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

("Sebastian" has not previously written for *The Listener*. And if Mr. Austin consults the Concise Oxford Dictionary he will find that "rendition" is in the English language.—Ed.)

SPARS FROM HOKIANGA

Sir,—I read Mr. Ross's letter with interest, but it is unfortunate that he can quote only somewhat vaguely and from memory his authority for the statement that the Victory was masted with kauri spars.

It would be helpful if he could mention his authority for the statement that spars were loaded on to the Coromandel in the Hauraki Gulf in 1804-6. McNab makes no mention of this vessel in his *From Tasman to Marsden*. The same historian's *Historical Records of New Zealand*, Vol. I, pp. 495-6, and Marsden's *Letters and Journals*, p. 251 et seq., appear to indicate that when the

Coromandel was taken down to the Hauraki Gulf in 1820, the object was to "search" for kauri spars. There would seem to be no record of a previous visit to the Coromandel Harbour by this, or so far as I know, any other European vessel.

A. H. REED (Dunedin).

"UNDER MILK WOOD"

Sir,—I was writing—issue February 4—to protest at the expurgating of the Dylan Thomas play, not to defend it. Unfortunately, a printer's error rather confused this. I wrote: "... would it not have been better to have considered the play as a whole, rather than to have expurgated it. . ." The "rather than" was omitted from the letter, and the sense consequently altered.

I confess that the information contained in your reply puzzles me further. If *The Listener* and the NZBS knew the play was edited why did neither mention it? And just what is the Transcription Service of the BBC? As it is apparently there to transcribe BBC programmes for the use of overseas broadcasting systems, why is it thought necessary thus to edit its transcriptions?

MAURICE DUGGAN (Auckland).

(A typist's error, although regrettable, could not conceal opinions repeated by Mr. Duggan with increasing emphasis. The BBC Transcription Service sends programmes in the form of recordings to broadcasting systems overseas. In these circumstances "editing" is simply a question of meeting the average playing time requirements of stations in many different parts of the world.—Ed.)

WEATHER FORECASTS

Sir,—Thanks to the NZBS for the continuous Test broadcasts. No thanks, however, to the forecasters at the weather office for their absurdly urban outlook (and I do not mean urbane). The terminology used in weather forecasting should be precise, and should not express the opinion of the forecaster as to what is desirable. On several occasions showers have been forecast (they have, of course, never actually eventuated), with a promise that the weather will "improve later." Many listeners will consider that the only possible improvement on showers is a good steady downpour.

The terms "improve, deteriorate, fair and fine," should be replaced by "becoming dry, becoming wet, cloudy but dry, clear skies but dry," and listeners should be allowed to decide for themselves if the weather really is good or not.

C. T. COOKE (Otorohanga).

"THE MAGGIE"

Sir,—Having seen the film *The Maggie*, I feel your critic is unjust in his remarks about the supposed guying of Americans. After all, the English secretary was made to look a bigger fool and the crew of the boat could be no advertisement for the Scots.

Why would it have been better if Marshall had been a "fat, self-satisfied Sassenach"? I think the Americans will be the last to complain about this picture. After all, they have done their share of guying the English; remember Danny Kaye? It was probably a mistake to have an American in this film, on the score of expense alone, but I liked his performance.

S. BURBRIDGE (Auckland).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

R.J.T. (Auckland), G.P.B. (Wellington) and J.H.M. (Auckland): Sorry; the correspondence had been closed before your letters arrived.

THE FIFTH TEST

THE hours of play for the fifth Test match, England v. Australia, which begins at Sydney on Friday, February 25, will be from 1.30 to 7.30 p.m. (N.Z. time). Broadcasting arrangements for each day of play are as follows: 2YA will rebroadcast Radio Australia's commentary from 1.30 to 2.0 p.m.; a Main National link will rebroadcast the commentary from 2.45 to 3.0 p.m., and after lunch from 5.15 to 5.35 p.m.; 2YA only will continue from 5.50 to 6.25 p.m., and from 6.45 to 7.15 p.m. Finally the Main National stations will link from 7.15 to 7.35 p.m., the last five minutes being a summary of the day's play. As usual, the final scoreboard will be given at 9.0 p.m. and at 7.18 a.m. the following day. If the situation of the game warrants it, 2YA will also give extended commentaries throughout the day.

For the North Island v. South Island match, which begins at Christchurch on Thursday, February 24, 3YA will broadcast selected commentaries throughout each day of play beginning at 10.45 a.m., except when it links with other national stations to rebroadcast the Test from Sydney.