

## "THE WAITING PEOPLE"

Sir.—Listeners to this programme may wish to do something useful about what they hear. They will realise that, great as are the physical miseries of these people, which can, if we care, be alleviated by your money, they suffer also from the realisation that they personally don't matter very much to anyone in particular.

About seven years ago in Belgium, and a year or two later in Britain, Aid to Displaced Persons was organised "to find for each of these persons a friend who will write to him, say once a month, calling him by his name." At times, of course, circumstances may suggest practical help, but the central concern is the offer of individual interest and human affection. The language difficulty is met, where necessary, by panels of voluntary translators.

The organisation is registered under the War Charities Act (1940) and is affiliated to the Standing Conference of British Organisations for Aid to Refugees; it has no religious affiliations.

A letter (or an aerogramme, postage 8d) to Mrs. E. Russell, 53 Draycott Place, London, S.W.3, giving such particulars as one would supply when asking for a pen-friend, will bring information and open the door to a thought-provoking experience.

I. A. ANDREWS (Christchurch).

## THE HYDROGEN BOMB

Sir.—If I heard him correctly before his interesting talk on the hydrogen bomb faded out altogether, Mr. T. A. Rafter stated that the explosion of one of the latest super-bombs could mean either sudden or lingering death, or else the probability of generations of deformed progeny for every man, woman and child in a circle about four hundred miles in diameter; and that the alternatives before us are either to bow to an awful dictatorship or else to be prepared to inflict these same horrors on other ordinary men, women and children who happen to live in another part of the world from ourselves—unless, of course, the Soviet leaders choose to come to heel like good little doggies and believe what we would like them to believe.

If these are the only visible alternatives, how bankrupt is leadership! Other alternatives there are, of course, though less comforting to our smug attitude that we are the goodies and they are the baddies. We must dig deeper foundations than this is if we want real peace.

We like to think that "democracy" is the whole answer; that our ideological equipment is necessarily superior to that of the Communist East; that because we have freedom of opinion, therefore our thinking, our ideas, our beliefs, will necessarily progress. Actually, none of these assumptions is justified.

Ultimately, the beliefs which we are prepared to "defend" by such horrible means are an unresolved contradiction. As nation-groups, to which most of us feel emotionally attached, we accept as precious the religious attitude which believes wholeheartedly and unquestionably; and we accept also as precious the scientific attitude which—in its own field—would regard such uncritical belief as heresy. Champions of these two opposed attitudes fought a great battle in past centuries—and simply agreed to differ.

If it were part of our fundamental beliefs that out of such an opposition there must emerge some new concept in which both elements can be carried forward to a higher level, then we should have at least some firm principle to support us during the transition from

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

the old faiths to the new. Lacking such a principle we cling to our two opposed faiths but shrink from the contradiction with which they present us.

We in the West have looked askance at the restrictions on freedom in the U.S.S.R.; yet, if all the hardship and sacrifice and restrictions—material, intellectual, and spiritual—that have accompanied the development of the U.S.S.R. have done nothing more than to raise the concept of the dialectic to the status and force of a great world power they will have been worth while; because we in the West need the dialectic, and we shall get no further forward without it.

I'm not suggesting that the Communists on their side are likely to get much further with it, being too much in love with their theory of dialectical growth to allow it itself to grow dialectically; but I do suggest that when we begin digging the deeper foundations of real peace between the Communist East and the West we shall have to start by reconciling first the duality in our own beliefs, and that this job starts of necessity from the proposition that "they have what we need."

In such a spirit of intellectual humility we may hope to get something done. MACK SOUTON (Auckland).

## "THE SUNLIT HOUR"

Sir.—Mr. Baxter has done more to explode than to expand his criticism of Ruth Gilbert's poetry. His broadcast review, he says, was mainly directed against "emotional falseness," particularly in her religious poetry. I have reread his review, of which I have a verbatim note, and I find that he referred solely to "Once in a Market Place"; and I wonder again why he picked out this, single, slight fancy, as if it fully represented the rest, and fired both barrels into it. Now he adds another example—this time, of the woman poet's "temptation to moralise about her biological function"—in "The Blossom of the Branches," where Ruth Gilbert "identifies her (poetic) attitude in child-bearing with that of the Madonna at the Nativity." Quite true; she does. But Mr. Baxter, who told us in his broadcast that he "thinks in images," assumes the right to forbid Miss Gilbert to use that image. Why? He is so sure that here, as elsewhere, Miss Gilbert's image derives from "a way of feeling what one imagines should be felt," as he put it, and not from intense, authentic, and self-directed emotion. This is dogmatism—and dogmatism of one who, having hard-earned his own creed and skill as a poet, suspects that any different creed or skill must be a sham. Mr. Baxter's genuine quality as a poet is not expressed in such closely traditional forms, rhythms, diction, and range of image as Miss Gilbert's; but moleskin's not the only wear. Poets turning critic might sometimes try a hair shirt instead of a high hat.

GRUMPY (Wellington).

Sir.—As Mr. James K. Baxter has elected to descend from the Olympian heights to reduce the issue of his recent radio review to mere quibbling, I desire to put the writer of *The Sunlit Hour* back where she belongs—in the hands of a competent reviewer. In the cable news from London—March 1—the *Times Literary Supplement* has this to say (referring to the *New Zealand Poetry Year Book, 1955*)—inter alia—"Here again are a handful of poems by Allen Curnow, Charles Brasch, Denis

Glover, James Baxter and Ruth Gilbert that would not be out of place in any company." It is also pertinent to mention that inside the dust jacket of *The Sunlit Hour* we read that Miss Gilbert's poems have been published in English periodicals and broadcast by the BBC. Needless to say they also have their own place in New Zealand publications and have been found worthy of commissioning for the NZBS. In other words, Miss Gilbert—as a contemporary of James K. Baxter—has her own individual distinction which quibbling and pretence cannot deprive her of.

As a final paragraph may I add that I was surprised to find Mr. Baxter so insensate in his reaction to justified criticism. I had thought such self-esteem must be unshakable. Maybe a little humility is possible, too. Even a stray bullet sometimes ricochets in the right direction. That my original letter put Mr. Baxter on the defensive—even still somewhat illogically—means something has been achieved. I have nothing more to say on this subject.

MARGARET N. KELLY (Wellington).

Sir.—Mr. James Baxter, in taking a pot-shot at a sitting pheasant, mowed down a lot of other innocent fowl at the same time. Did he use a Tommy-gun instead of a shotgun, or is his eyesight as bad as his judgment? Closer inspection would have revealed it to be a song-bird, not a pheasant. But in any case, he made it quite clear that he has no love for song-birds, particularly of the female species. Does his preoccupation with stuffed pheasants and basket chairs betray his innate Victorianism—an idea that is still further borne out by his scorn of the female as a creator? K.L.B. (Wellington).

## HAYDN'S TOY SYMPHONY

Sir.—Most of the correspondence on the subject of the Toy Symphony has missed the point. Of course we should enjoy a "musical joke," of course we should allow ourselves to laugh, at a symphony concert or wherever we meet humour, and of course we do not have to be solemn, earnest, owl-like audiences that repel the young and the less classical-minded listener. I am sure that all music-lovers would agree that this is so.

The only valid criticism of the National Orchestra's presentation of the Toy Symphony is not that it was played, but that it was played *wrongly*. If the National Orchestra had been able to give us a true performance of the Toy Symphony as it is intended to be played, instead of a burlesque which was full of mistakes, there would have been no furor, no correspondence except adulatory. Hand-in-hand with the enjoyment of the "musical joke" by all sections of the public, would have gone genuine appreciation by serious music-lovers of a fine performance of this delightful classical composition.

PHYLLIS M. SHORT (Henderson).

## BBC BROADCASTS

Sir.—With reference to letters from Keith Mitchell and Barbara Jekyll, of Christchurch, on the subject of bad enunciation by BBC announcers: if they would write to the BBC direct, instead of to *The Listener*, they would find, as I did some time ago, that their helpful criticisms of the announcers' speech would be appreciated and attended to.

I had occasion some time ago to complain of the way the Foreign Affairs talk from the BBC, given over the air at

1.30 p.m. on Sundays from 2YA, was received in New Zealand. The speaker was a leading authority on foreign affairs, but his way of talking over the air was so bad that it was quite impossible to follow; he had the habit of emphasising unimportant syllables in every sentence in a most annoying manner. My letter was acknowledged and appreciated (in fact, the BBC said it was some two years since they had last heard from me, which certainly was the limit, I thought), and that particular speaker was very promptly taken off the air and another authority on foreign affairs (there are plenty of them in England) took up the talk, and later the talk was discontinued.

Constructive criticism is usually much appreciated by the best people.

C. W. THEVENARD (Kimbolton).

Sir.—I listen daily to the BBC news from London. The cultivated voices of the announcers make a welcome change to the slovenly way some New Zealanders speak. Atmospheric certainly make listening hard at times, but rarely does the announcer stammer or mispronounce. Perhaps the manner of speech is a little above Keith Mitchell. I suggest he listens to the ZBs. Incidentally, I have heard the news from Wellington at 9.0 p.m. gabbled in such an uninteresting manner that I have switched to another programme. POLLY (Manurewa).

## NZBS PLAYS

Sir.—A correspondent in your issue of March 23 complains of "the rapidly deteriorating standard of plays being broadcast by the NZBS." I think I express the opinion of many others in stating that I have not noticed the deterioration referred to. On the contrary, I have recently listened to NZBS plays which, I think, do not compare unfavourably with BBC productions. As an instance I would mention *The Young Mrs. Barrington*, which I thought well selected and well played, as well as having a timely and practical message. Thank you, NZBS.

A.H.R. (Dunedin).

Sir.—I write in protest at the quality of some plays offered to us by the NZBS. In my opinion *Order of Chivalry* is one and a half hours of cheap and false sentiment—a tawdry story devoid of humour, devoid of drama, with a plot that might pass for a story in a modern comic. Surely there is better material than this available, and I suggest that both players and listeners are deserving of more careful work by whoever is responsible for choosing the play.

T. M. MOORE (Naenae).

## MUSICAL PROGRAMMES

Sir.—I wish to endorse the remarks of J. Edmonds on the Dinner Music programme from 2YC. I also hastily reach for the switch. If we must have linked stations radiating the same programme, why not allow each of the main stations to originate the programmes in rotation, thereby introducing more variety?

Also, at 9.0 a.m., it is exasperating to have no choice other than Aunt Daisy or the Correspondence School session. In fact, to one who enjoys good music, almost the whole of the morning programmes are a dead loss.

H. BURTON (York Bay).

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. J. Aitken (Te Marua): Thank you; it is a question whether that arrangement or an alternative would be better. No decision yet. Just a Housewife (Christchurch): Name and full address are required, even when a pen-name is used.