



TALKING ABOUT BOOKS

Sir,—What would Mr. O. E. Middleton like for criticism? My dictionary, to start at the bottom, says criticism is the "judging of merit of works of art." Personally, I enjoyed Mr. Reid's talks and did not find it difficult to jot down the names and authors of a few of these books which I have since read. Unfortunately, we have no journal exactly equivalent to the *BBC Listener* which could reprint such talks for study at leisure. Radio talks on "vast and important" subjects always suffer from the fact that they cannot be studied, but that is not a good reason for not having them. To expect Mr. Reid to mention the number of books he did and include all those outstanding ones known to Mr. Middleton is to expect too much.

It is difficult to understand why Mr. Middleton is aware that the NZBS "places a high value on volubility," since he makes no attempt to prove it. He does go on to say that more than volubility is required; true, but in my view we were given more than that, even if it was limited by the number of the talks.

Mr. Reid, according to Mr. Middleton, cannot resist making moral judgments—as though this is a tremendous trap for any critic to fall into. I can see no reason why a critic should confine himself to the pure technicalities of the novel. Mr. Reid believes that a book can suffer from a false approach to some problem and he says so. What is wrong with that?

We come nearer to the point when Mr. Middleton suggests that these talks were a waste of time and should have been used for some purely creative work—such as good New Zealand stories. If he means by this more slices of life, then let Mr. Reid's series be rebroadcast. Good stories about New Zealand are rare because, at least in the Maugham, Kipling, Hemingway, etc., understanding of the word "story," few of them exist. What many of our writers—in the style Mr. Middleton suggests to me—give us, is not a story but an incident; and these, I consider, would have to be superlative to broadcast well, since they depend on the evoking of an atmosphere and not on a plot.

M.F.McI. (Gisborne).

OPEN SKIES FOR PEACE

Sir,—May I be permitted two comments on "Open Skies for Peace" (*Listener*, February 15)? First, the Eisenhower plan for aerial inspection is claimed to eradicate fear of a nation being suddenly attacked. Many scientists, however, have carefully explained that the space required for enough modern explosives to blow the world to pieces can be measured in inches. This was again stressed by Sir Winston Churchill in the Commons when he tapped the mail despatch box on his desk and remarked that it could compass enough modern explosive power to destroy the whole human race. Nuclear weapons of such small size could be stored underground in the desert or in underwater caves with no possibility of

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discovery. It is obvious that aerial photography could easily be defeated.

Secondly, nuclear weapons with their consequent radio-activity introduce an entirely new factor into the urgent need for disarmament. When the Hiroshima bomb was dropped, many expectant mothers got off without contamination, but through the mysteries of radio-activity, every one of the children they were carrying was still-born. Thus for the first time in history we execute the next generation as guilty before ever they are born. Surely this must be the final atrocity and ultimate blasphemy against God.

What is needed today is an act of courage and faith by individuals and a nation to categorically renounce war and war preparations. If disarmament is the morally right step, then it should be taken regardless of the actions of other countries. The whole world awaits this moral lead in courage and faith, which it seems is not apparent in either Russia or America. It is an opportunity which may never come again, but I believe that Great Britain and the Commonwealth can yet rise to prove this true moral greatness in accepting the challenge of unilateral disarmament, thereby taking a major step toward extending the Kingdom of God on earth.

REX BENNETT (Manurewa).

ENEMY OF FREEDOM

Sir,—Mr. N. E. Downey has no faith in the ability of the democratic citizen to choose between good and evil, so he would appoint an inquisitor, to protect us. It is a step towards a dictatorship. As has been stated, it is to America's credit that she has discarded McCarthyism, and now can laugh at a parody of it. In a democracy it is impossible for any part of Communist economics to be adopted, except at the wish of a majority of the population. Why then the fear? If our would-be saviours would describe clearly the evils of Communism, instead of repeating "Beware!" perhaps we would feel less like sheep. And surely the evils of a system that would make us "less than animals" must be so vivid as to be almost self-evident. But until Mr. Downey enlightens us further the perils of Communism remain as obscure as the relationship between Christian ethic and Capitalist society.

N. M. ROE (Tauranga).

Sir,—In his defence of Senator McCarthy, your Lower Hutt correspondent represented him as a moral crusader against an evil which is unique. In this he is wrong. That which is unique and which provides the motive for McCarthyism is the fear of the consequences of that evil being applied to ourselves.

The defence of political actions which depart from what is generally considered to be lawful usually rests on their recognition as preventive medicines, distasteful perhaps but sanitary. The restriction of personal freedom in order to safeguard freedom, however, is the most pernicious of medicines known to the body politic.

The economic creed of Communism has one important similarity to our own; it rests entirely on finance. Not until this relationship is altered can liberalism become effective in politics.

NORMAN WALWYN (Te Kuiti).

MARIA CALLAS

Sir,—With reference to your article in the issue of February 15 on the "Willowy, Ash-blond and Wild" Signorina Maria Callas, there are one or

two points in her singing the writer has missed. When I first heard Callas on a record at a friend's home we differed as to the lady's voice, and especially on the harshness and thinness of her upper register due to faulty breathing. To find out the true position I wrote for an opinion of the Callas to a musical authority in London, and this was the reply: "I heard Callas in the flesh at La Scala and I can vouch for her being a very fine soprano of many fine sopranos in Milan today. I don't like her as much as Tebaldi (also at La Scala), but she is very good indeed. I don't like her as much as Sylvia Fisher, an Australian here at Covent Garden."

Since the Callas record I have heard Tebaldi, also on a record, and I think the latter is a very fine soprano with a greater control and command of the upper register. I would respectfully ask your writer to listen to the recorded voice of Mado Robin, a French coloratura soprano. To me Robin is the best of the four. PHIL BOX (Gisborne).

AUCKLAND NOTEBOOK

Sir,—Your correspondent "M.M.," who writes from Invercargill lyrical praise of Auckland's "wonderful people dining at those wonderful restaurants-plus-atmosphere," must be easily impressed. My last and most vivid recollection of dining in Auckland is of a cheese omelette consumed in semi-darkness, but still not too dark to see a mass of egg with a slab of tasteless cheese lurking in the middle of it. The atmosphere of this particular restaurant was subsequently helped along by my hiccups. I'd advice "M.M." to shop round a little in Invercargill—the quality of the food down there is excellent, and if he sticks to the specialties of the area, oysters, whitebait, crayfish, etc., he'll find they will more than compensate for the lack of Auckland's half-baked atmosphere.

G.H. (Wellington).

Sir,—I too read with dismay of the passing of *Auckland Notebook*. Also in temporary exile on the airy, wide-open plains of Southland, I had come to welcome its weekly gulps of well-remembered steam and humidity—not as so much "hot air," as "Closed Notebook" (of Wellington!) has suggested, but as refreshing draughts.

One can only assume that your correspondent has some sort of personal grudge against the Queen City—could it be because the gaily-decked lady passed him coldly by? (And no wonder, if his stares were as rude as he intimates!) However, he does unwittingly pay us one compliment when he likens an Auckland to a Cyclops. True, this character had an optical shortcoming, but he was also by way of being head and shoulders above his fellows.

MORE NOTEBOOK (Edendale).

NZBS PLAYS

Sir,—Recently there appeared in *Radio Review* an article "New Voices of 1957?" the writer ending his title with a hopeful note of interrogation. I, too, feel that this is a matter to claim the close attention of the NZBS. Last year must have reached an all time high in monotonous casting, play after play revealing William Austin, Roy Leywood and Davina Whitehouse as its principals. Messrs. Austin and Leywood are, I understand, on the staff of the NZBS, and to some extent their constant inclusion is understandable. On the other hand, that good character actress, Davina

Whitehouse, is very often sadly miscast. I refuse to accept the inference, often made, that New Zealand radio, and Wellington in particular, lacks good actresses and actors. On the rare occasions when they have been given the opportunity, we have listened to excellent performances from seldom-heard voices. Why, then, are they put in the discard, or assigned to "bit" parts while the NZBS reverts once more to its cosy casting?

It is a matter of regret that whilst the NZBS have made enormous progress in every other department of their productions, they should fall short in this one important aspect. Although it has started ominously enough, let's hope that the NZBS will infuse new blood into its plays for 1957.

FIDGET (Raumati Beach).

ESQUIRE

Sir,—I was surprised by "Sundowner's" violent objection to the use of "esquire" when addressing letters, on the ground that it is snobbish. I thought it was used instead of Mr. because Mr. and Mrs. so often look alike (especially to an inquisitive spouse). This view seems to be supported by the fact that a letter intended for both is always addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. X," not to "Mrs. X and Esq."

I believe "esquire" is derived from the name for a knight's servant in old times, and "mister" from "master," which should put it in a higher social grade and should cause "Sundowner" to consider it more, not less, snobbish.

A. DE VILLIERS (Kumeu).

MEN'S HAIR

Sir,—In a few short sentences Mr. L. D. Austin has solved the problem of baldness in men, a problem which has baffled medical science. However, he goes too far when he wishes to turn our toddlers into two-legged versions of the Old English Sheepdog.

Listener readers are aware that Mr. Austin's statements are made as incontrovertible facts and that there is no argument about them. Therefore, I suggest the time has come to accept them unreservedly or refuse to take them seriously. The latter course should be more entertaining.

C. E. THATCHER (Whakatane).

BOOK SHOP

Sir,—May I express my appreciation of *Book Shop* as prepared and presented by G. C. A. Wall? This session seems to me the ideal of its type, for it has so many worthwhile qualities, among them being discerning criticism. But it is the pleasant personality of Mr. Wall, his wit and humour, that give this feature its particular charm.

I hope to speak for many others when I say it is one of the few radio features of which I should feel deprived were I to miss it.

DAVID H. MacKENZIE (Nelson).

