



PLUNKET SOCIETY

Sir,—Your reviewer, R.D.McE., has a commendably succinct and pertinent query on the Plunket Society (*Listener*, May 31). He hardly exaggerates when he mentions Truby King's "wholly physical concept of health," and he raises an overdue query in asking whether our respect for Truby King's theories has not too long been too unquestioning. Of course it has been, and is.

A complex, semi-State institutionalised society like Plunket naturally tends to institutionalise its theory. This tendency to elevate theory to dogma is not peculiar to Plunket, by any means; with it, though, it has meant that, from being a generation ahead of the world, in many ways we are now so much behind it. Compare its publications with similar material aimed at ordinary parents in Britain, Canada or the States; these show that in ours, that danger of a "wholly physical concept of health" is ever-present. Overseas, for instance, schedule feeding has long been critically discussed in its relation to mental health. Is this adequately reflected, twenty years later, in local material? The Society's suspicious treatment of ideas evolved elsewhere since Truby King's first work results from its institutionalising of ideas—to use the same example, witness the "straw man" discussion (and dismissal) of demand feeding, in Plunket's most widely read book, recently revised.

Our debt to Truby King is that he questioned practices he found. We should, too. He could not have before him the fifty years' wealth of material from psychological study of children which we have. He would not, in 1957, have passed it over so lightly with eyes turned backwards. Is it to be the fate of Truby King to suffer the worst punishment of a revolutionary—not to suffer or be ignored, but to be enshrined?

Some unpublished (but most reliable) figures on the actual practice of breast feeding in New Zealand suggest strongly that 50 years of Plunket teaching have achieved far too little in this, one of their key teachings. Why? The national conference last year learned that many mothers use the Society almost solely for its baby scales. Is the fault the mother's? Or the Society's? In many points, its teachings are more conservative than the advice parents will get from their obstetricians or pediatricians. This disparity, and that with overseas publications available, will confuse parents—unless they treat the Society's advice with less respect than it ought to have.

This criticism in no way denies Plunket's tremendous contribution to our material and child welfare. But surely, when it so justly makes a claim for public support on such a scale, it has a public duty to beware of the danger of inertia which comes from its size and complexity. Undeniably, it has taken into account overseas research less speedily, less often than it should—particularly in the not purely physical aspects of child care. If our children

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grow tall while our mental hospitals grow too small, it may not be an indictment of Plunket directly, but at the very least, it suggests that more concern might be given to this side of the work especially since Plunket has done so much to have a high standard of physical care taken as routine. The Society should not delay revision until public attitudes prod it. It is far too important an organisation to be uncritical, or uncriticised. Plunket, of all societies in New Zealand, should not become a sacred cow. D.G. (Wellington).

DESIGN FOR MUSIC

Sir,—It was with considerable interest that I read Mr Raymond Boyce's letter on "Theatre Design," wherein he makes reference to my article "Design for Music." I am sure if Mr Boyce would read my article again, he will realise that at no time was it stated or implied that I was responsible for the planning or for the acoustics of the Town Hall. As stated, I was requested by the City Council and the Architects to design a setting for the National Orchestra, and fit up the stage within the physical limits imposed.

I agree with Mr Boyce that the acoustics of the Town Hall are good. I also, however, think that they could be improved by a slight increase in the reverberation time. This opinion is based on listening to the National Orchestra, both with and without an audience being present.

My article was primarily written to explain to the average listener or audience member how good acoustics are achieved. Secondly, I made a plea to those responsible for planning, that as much attention should be given to the design of the stage and its facilities as is normally given to the auditorium. This plea was not made in reference to the traditional theatre, but in terms of our present day, flat-floored, general-purpose community auditoriums. From the remarks in Mr Boyce's letter, may I rightly assume that he concurs?

In my article, I also suggested that the greatest flexibility of planning in relation to function should be aimed at by the introduction of a flexible proscenium. Such an element of design would result in a very adaptable auditorium, permitting a variety of closed and open stage shapes. It could, in fact, lead to the development of a new type of auditorium best suited to our all-purpose community requirements.

If for financial reasons it is not possible to incorporate a proper stage when planning an auditorium, never compromise, build the auditorium first with a planning provision for the later development of a proper stage. In such an auditorium, a temporary open dais type stage can be erected at one end of the hall, permitting flexibility in shape to suit varying stage and seating arrangements.

It was such a simple stage shape that was used by Dr Richard Southern as a starting point in the design of his now world-famous Dramatic Studio at the University of Bristol.

R. GILLESPIE MELDRUM
(Wellington).

A PLAY FOR SOUTHLAND

Sir,—Peter Harcourt's recent hypercritical attack upon *The Montgomeries of Glenholme* is more evidence of how hard the idea dies that a play is a literary exercise. Unless Mr Harcourt came to Invercargill for the only performances the play has yet had, he is

assertive about something he has not experienced. He therefore does not fully appreciate what he is talking about and his letter must thus be very largely irresponsible.

The Montgomeries proved itself in the theatre. Like the Invercargill Repertory Society's performances, it not very strangely revealed a dozen weaknesses and faults, but, amusingly enough, almost none of those which Mr Harcourt so dogmatically defines. It is, indeed, the full measure of his indiscretion that what he sees on paper as in the nature of caricature and distortion are the play's most effective, most theatrical situations and characters.

Mr Harcourt's attack upon the judge of the Southland Contest (Mr Frank Newman) is in every way unjust and unfortunate, and, in one respect at least, rather objectionable. And that is his reference to authors suffering in reputation by having to see their work stand below *The Montgomeries*. As Chairman of the Competition Committee who ultimately read most of the entries, I cannot be sure who it is he is putting in a word for, but I can perhaps make a guess. Can neither Mr Harcourt, nor any others concerned understand that such entries as failed to gain top places were simply not good enough to do so?

His "regional" argument is beyond me. We did not care if authors chose Invercargill or Timbaktu as their locale, as long as they gave us quality. We were concerned with the greater, not the lesser, and now that the best work is being produced, let it be remembered that two sieves have been at work. The first sieving was by Mr Newman, and there is in New Zealand no more experienced judge than he; the second was by the Invercargill Repertory Society which undertook to produce the plays, but was not bound to do so. Mr Harcourt may be sure it has not committed itself to such foolishness as he has been at pains to describe.

It would have been so easy for him to say his piece in balanced terms. What he has done is to put in doubt the competence of an excellently-qualified judge, to disparage an important artistic event and to belittle the effort of those who would help raise the stature of our writing. It is a contribution as peculiar as it is uninformed.

A. R. DUNLOP (Invercargill).

Sir,—The review of *The Montgomeries of Glenholme*, quoted by Peter Harcourt in his letter in your May 24 issue, was published not in *The Southland Times*, but in *The Southland Daily News*.

READER (Invercargill).

THE DREAMING ISLANDS

Sir,—From all my reading of reports of Mr Goldblatt's sayings (and I have read whatever I have seen) I have to infer that he has not so far told us how to achieve the economic freedom which he advocates. There appears to be agreement that economic freedom includes the right to unrestricted competition; yet unrestricted competition is not possible without unrestricted capital investment. But no business firm lacking the invidious privileges of the monopolies can embark on unrestricted capital investment, because the investment system doesn't provide the necessary money for such investment. In economic theory, all firms can acquire unlimited money for capital purposes by charging whatever prices they please for their products—and the resultant expenditure of investment money is supposed to give consumers all the purchasing power

they need to pay the prices demanded. That the theory is fallacious is proved by the existence of economic restraints which retard economic development sadly below the theoretical rate. As far as I can tell, Mr Goldblatt has no remedy for the economic restraints, but in the tradition of King Canute, he expects them to vanish if he removes the political restraints which have been imposed to reinforce the economic restraints. K. O'BRIEN (Hastings).

MUSIC IN THE DARK

Sir,—Your correspondent "Player in the Dark" is still in the dark concerning the priority of cinema orchestras in silent film days.

It is true that the De Luxe Theatre Orchestra was established in 1924, but it was exactly the same ensemble which originated at the King's Theatre, Wellington, in 1919, of which I was conductor, and was transferred five years later to the De Luxe. Therefore, we beat Everybody's, Christchurch, by five years. But quite apart from this fact, I assert that the first, and best, cinema orchestra ever heard in Christchurch was at Fullers, in 1910.

L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

POET—AND MURDERER

Sir,—Under this engaging caption you have announced an NZBS play by a Mr Gore-Browne. The title of the play is *Poet's Progress*. Now the NZBS players are adept, one knows, at lifting every known accent from every known nation (except New Zealand). But from this country they have now lifted a living author's title. *Poet's Progress* is a book by W. D'Arcy Cresswell, and its use for another context is dubious.

DENIS GLOVER (Wellington).

(The play was produced from a BBC script, and its title was supplied by the author, an Englishman who has probably not heard of Mr Cresswell.—Ed.)

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Avril B.M.B. (Napier): Much appreciated. Marie Rae: Sorry; too long. J.A.M.B. (Birkenhead): Afraid no space for a long quotation from another journal. Ex-London Bus Driver (Papatotetoe): Thank you.

L. N. Wogan (Christchurch): Regret cannot supply details you ask for. Your other request noted.

W.D. (Whangarei): The series has a special value for students and teachers throughout the country, and is appreciated by a wider circle of musical listeners than that. One station in each island would not reach all to whom it is directed.

Chocklit (Wellington): Completing a series—Christian sportsman, Christian author, Christian minister, and Christian businessman. Quite a poser, your question; time, perhaps, will tell.

E. W. Flint (Auckland): Controversy of the kind you want, certainly, in its place and at its time; but that is not what that session is for.

Fair Play (Manurewa): It is about an even chance whether letters on that point of selection complain, as you do, that they are all strong conservatives or that they are all extreme Socialists.

W. G. Warren (Rotorua): The 18-episode radio version of the early *Journey Into Space* story called *Operation Lunar* was not issued by the Transcription Service of the BBC, and we have no other information about it. We shall inquire.

