



A PLAY FOR SOUTHLAND

Sir,—Your correspondent A. R. Dunlop has fallen over himself in his anxiety to rush to Mr Frank Newman's aid. He says that by judging *The Montgomeries* only from its script I have shown that "I do not appreciate what I am talking about." I think I am right in saying that Mr Newman's original judgment was made from the script alone. That being so, the same objection must surely apply to his opinion as well? Or does Mr Dunlop have a conveniently double standard? Secondly, Mr Dunlop admits there are weaknesses in the play, but they are not the same as those I have pointed out. This gives me even greater cause for thinking that *The Montgomeries* is an indifferent play. Mr Dunlop's insinuation that I am acting on behalf of someone else I consider both distasteful and impertinent. I am quite capable of independent action, but Mr Dunlop evidently believes that no sensible person would find *The Montgomeries* less perfect unless he had some ulterior motive for doing so.

I have had some 10 years' professional experience overseas, but since my qualifications have been asked for, perhaps I ought to mention that I am a third generation New Zealander—which does, I think, have a certain bearing on the subject.

Mr Newman was offended because I did not ask him to justify his decision, but merely asserted ("rudely") that it was bad. His justification appeared to consist mainly of the equally dogmatic assertion that *The Montgomeries* is "a good play, perhaps even a very good play." This may be an admirable expression of opinion, but it is hardly a reasoned argument for his case. Mr Newman also informed me that there were other plays "more pretentious, more pompous, more incomprehensible than the winning one." If it means anything at all, this means that *The Montgomeries* is pretentious, pompous and incomprehensible—which is precisely the point I desired to make.

Mr Newman complained that I missed the whole point of the play and that I had no sense of style, but he did not try to show me what point or what style the play contains. He also called the dialogue "excellent," and upbraided me for my lack of period feeling. I can only say that if Mr Montgomeries' constant ejaculation of "Haw, haw!" and "By George!" constitutes excellent period dialogue our race's forefathers must have been even more tediously longwinded than I had supposed.

I remain unrepentant and unconvinced. Playwriting in New Zealand is surely not in such desperate straits that *The Montgomeries* can be considered a genuinely typical example.

PETER HARCOURT (Wellington).

Sir,—We now have Mr Dunlop taking the stage on behalf of Mr Newman and claiming that Mr Harcourt is at fault because he did not see *The Montgomeries* performed, but judged the play from the script. Well, so did Mr Newman, and to quote Mr Dunlop on Mr

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Harcourt—"he therefore does not fully appreciate what he is talking about."

As for Mr Dunlop's assertion that "such entries as failed to gain top places were simply not good enough to do so," is it not a fact that several unplaced entries in the Southland competition have been accepted for production on the English stage? Then again, Mr Dunlop states that "the Invercargill Repertory Society undertook to do the plays (which plays and how many?), but was not bound to do so." Not bound, but under a moral obligation perhaps? And how much of the responsibility for this decision could be attributed to Mr Dunlop's influence, anyway? And do members of the Invercargill Society all agree that *The Montgomeries* was the best play in the competition? Would not Mr Dunlop agree that at least one other play in the competition was better than *The Montgomeries*? The play I refer to is *The Tree*, by Stella Jones, which Mr Dunlop has just produced for the Invercargill Repertory Society. This play was placed second to *The Montgomeries*—why, only Mr Newman can say. If he can find anyone who has seen or read both plays—including Mr Dunlop—to agree with him I will be astonished.

A number of local playgoers whose critical faculties are still intact are in agreement with Mr Harcourt's criticism of *The Montgomeries*. If this was the best play in the competition they naturally feared for the rest. They were amazed and delighted when they found *The Tree* to be a much better play. The critic of the *Southland Daily News*, for one, has recanted his earlier estimate of Mrs Black's play in his review of *The Tree*, and in doing so has voiced the thoughts of a good many others.

Like Mr Newman I do not know what Mr Harcourt's qualifications as a judge of plays may be, but I would like to congratulate him on his judgment. As for B.E.C.M.'s suggestion that the NZBS should broadcast the top plays—provided they do not have to be altered too much to fit the broadcast medium—I am all for the idea. Then Mr Harcourt will have his attitude vindicated.

MALVOLIO (Invercargill).

PLUNKET SOCIETY

Sir,—"Sundowner" in a recent issue wrote: "It is good for farmers and everyone else to be under observation and criticism." No doubt the Plunket Society will welcome the interest in its work shown by your reviewer R.D.McE. and your correspondent D.G.

Were they to witness the activities of thousands of voluntary workers throughout the country; were they to see groups of young fathers in rural districts helping to build up-to-date clinics for the use of the Plunket nurses and for the benefit of their wives and children; were they to follow the medical adviser, Dr Neil Begg, in his campaign up and down the country in a determined attack on hydatids; or were they to acquaint themselves with the Society's constant work in the prevention of accidents in the home, I am sure they would not fear the "danger of inertia."

Our critics also deplored Dr Truby King's "wholly physical concept of health." Yet it was claimed that more cures were effected at Seaciff under Dr King than at any other asylum then south of the Equator. It is hard to believe that a lecturer in Mental Science at the University of Otago could have a "wholly physical concept of health." The frieze round the old room in which

he taught reiterated the Latin tag "Mens sana in corpore sano." Later in life he wrote: "Great injury may be done to the nervous system in childhood, especially in the first two years when the brain grows very rapidly. Normal development of the nervous system demands quiet handling, regularity, the maximum of sleep and freedom from undue excitement."

Long before Dr Grantly Dick Read's excellent suggestions were published, Dr Truby King had stressed the possible dangers of surgical birth and urged mothers to prepare pre-natally for healthy natural delivery and, of course, breast feeding. In the early days of the Plunket Society Dr King had to fight ignorance, indifference, infantile diarrhoea, rickets, scurvy, and malnutrition generally. There was not much point in talking psychology when there was a tremendous infant mortality through physical causes.

Once the first battle was won, and when the late Dr Helen Deem began her long and distinguished career as medical adviser to the Plunket Society, she was able to devote her energies to psychological problems. After years of research in this field, the Society, with the co-operation of the Kindergarten Association, established a Pre-School Education Centre in Dunedin. Advances in psychology and nutrition led Dr Deem constantly to revise Plunket policy. To her, "inertia" was anathema. One of her important reforms was the appointment of special "breast-feeding" sisters in State maternity homes.

New Zealand's mothers and babies still need the Plunket Society to protect them, not only from physical illness, accidents on tractors and scalding from hot-water jugs, but also from the spate of child psychology publications and cheap psychiatry that are having disastrous effects on family life in some areas abroad.

M.O.D. (Invercargill).

THE OLD MUSIC BOX

Sir,—I read with interest your article "The Old Music Box." I have in my possession a musical box similar to the one photographed in that article—the one dated 1823, playing four tunes. If anyone would be interested in seeing it, it is available at the address given below, by appointment.

(MRS) R. H. GRANT COWEN,
The Deanery, 78 Armagh Street,
Christchurch.

SUNTANNED AND CAREFREE

Sir,—May I quote for the benefit of Mr Bruce Mason an Arabic proverb: "One hair does not make a beard, my son."

I have not read the article *Les Robinsons du Pacifique*, but have heard (judging by the reaction of both Mr Mason and F.L.W.W.) similar comments by Europeans. One Frenchman, since gone back, felt that "The New Zealanders are not so much culturally dead but culturally impotent." His mistake lay in generalising, but I feel there's a lot of New Zealanders to whom the statement would apply.

Would Mr Mason give us his definition of culture? Perhaps it differs from the European. Europeans, of course, compare other countries with their own, always to the other country's detriment. We should try not to fall into the same habit.

An Italian said to me, this very day: "The New Zealand is all right, but what do you want, it is not Italy!" New Zealand

land is NOT Italy, New Zealand is New Zealand. What else should it be?

While I have the pen in my hand, could I reply to Sarah Campion's statement, "I... reflected that some of us, sometimes, tend to be rather hysterical about hygiene. We may even be confusing it with culture." I feel that we often confuse it with virtue. Bad little boy to get all dirty... good little girl to keep your nice new frock clean... Such a nice, clean boy... etc.

MIRELLA HALL (Auckland).

THE GREAT DETERRENT

Sir,—We are told that Britain has developed a "clean" bomb. Can someone tell us exactly what this means? Does such a bomb explode without releasing any radio-activity, strontium 90, or other harmful material into the air, or is it called "clean" simply because it causes no immediate "fallout"? If it releases harmful material I take it that this material would permeate the upper air and then fall slowly over every part of the globe.

Scientists are not yet agreed as to whether the amount of harmful material from nuclear explosions may not even now have come very near the danger level. Perhaps only future generations will know. They will be the guinea pigs.

Are we, even with our "clean" bombs, jeopardising the welfare of those yet unborn?—their food and their right to normal healthy physique and mentality?

ELLA BROWN (Auckland).

Sir,—Deterrents: against the Use Of. It would appear that your correspondent Mr Jim Henderson is not familiar with the Papal Bull forbidding the use of a

More letters from listeners will be found on pages 26 and 27

new weapon of mass destruction by any Christian State against another on the grounds that it might wipe out Christian civilisation.

The author: His Holiness Pope Innocent II. The date: 1139 A.D. The weapon: The crossbow.

MOA (Cambridge).

QUESTION BOX

Sir,—What frustration to awake from a dream in which Spinoza, Freud, Ingersoll, and Russell have mixed it with our four ecclesiastics. Seriously, is not Christianity molly-coddled? Why no vigorous debates? Why does the cleric have the last word in "answering" questions on the air and in the newspapers?

M. G. STROUD (Christchurch).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

M. Maxwell (Palmerston North): Not a talk, a reading—one of a series—from the celebrated book *Tutira*. The piece to which you refer was read in the same tone as the rest of the extract.

Ronnie Smith (Wellington): Alas, you must try to bear it.

El Dorado (New Plymouth): No longer; the last of this year's series was heard on May 23.

