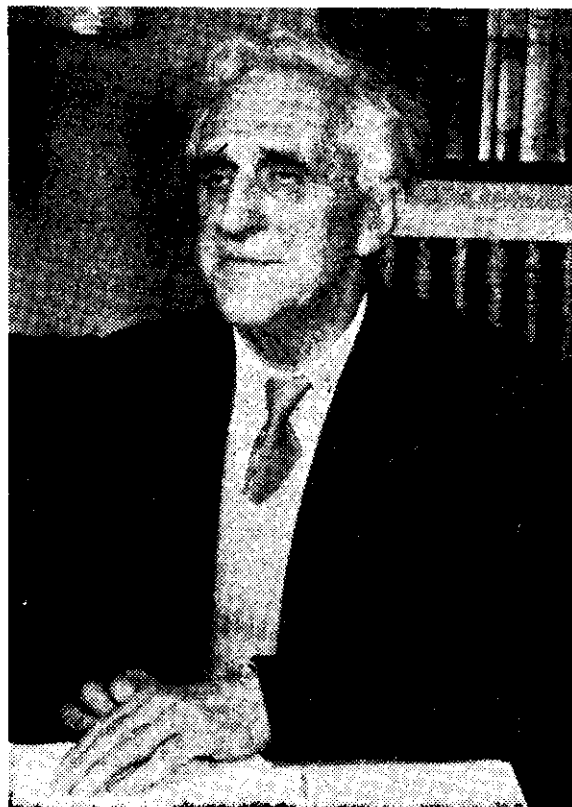


The Luckiest Man Alive

KINGSLEY MARTIN,

Editor of the *New Statesman* for the last 27 years, is now making his first visit to Australia as Dyason lecturer, a post which Bertrand Russell and Salvador de Madariaga have filled in the past. His first Sydney lecture had as its theme "The Press and Public Opinion." The public were there in force but the press, to judge from their reports the next day, were either absent or not wholly attentive listeners. Kingsley Martin, whose white hair and tall frame gave him an impressive appearance, described himself as "the most lucky man in the world" because "it's a luxury to be able to say what you think." Listening to him might have been like hearing God on "Evolution" but after a burst of irreverence at the expense of Australia the lecture was serious, entertaining and completely devoid of facetiousness.



BBC photograph

KINGSLEY MARTIN

"Happy is the country which is never in the news"

"Since my arrival in Australia I've been assailed by complaints universally made, that the British press neglects Australia," he said at the opening. "Do you want to know the reason? You are not newsworthy, you are too good, too correct and too prosperous. The things that qualify in Britain as news are crime, sexual irregularity or excess, or some kind of improper behaviour. You don't show any signs of 'Red Ruin' and your sexual behaviour, as far as I can make out, is really comparatively normal. How you can expect publicity in the British Press is beyond me! . . . Happy is the country which is never in the news."

He considered news is a commodity which is sold in exactly the same way as a detergent. Certain topics however are always news. "War, like women, is always interesting. Peace is like men. It only has interest when it's otherwise helped out." The speaker then made one of his few direct references to the Australian press. "I'm a tiny bit alarmed in Australia at what seems to be almost a monopolistic position of the press," he said. "TV is rapidly being taken over by the press proprietors themselves. You'd better keep your eyes on this if you're interested in the life of democracy." The power and influence of the press is most important when it is dealing with foreign affairs and this fact gives the great press proprietors a terrible power. "The public minds are not equipped for dealing with these subjects. In the domestic realm we know where we stand. Our minds are reasonably well furnished about the things around us—our family, our town, our country even—in these things we aren't susceptible to propaganda." Continuing this point he came to the evening's *bon mot*. "You can't propagate propaganda

unless you've got the proper geese (applause). In foreign affairs most of us are the proper geese."

Newspaper proprietors however are handicapped in their attempts to present foreign affairs truthfully by the natural resistance of human beings against the truth and their preference for entertainment. "There's nothing in the world that people dislike so much as truth. What we want is the confirmation of our prejudices. We've got to realise we all want to be entertained and therefore we're in grave danger of being propagandised into something by people who've got to earn their living. As a result news tends to go into a pattern and there'll be a particular kind of news that will appear. All I can say in conclusion is that I think our newspaper proprietors under-estimate our intelligence. They could let us rather more into the secrets of the world."

Of his own paper he said "The people who founded my paper lost money for years but they gradually managed to build something up. In the long run the steady impact of such a paper is very considerable. Public opinion means an opinion which will stand the blasts of fortune and when you have young people reading the *New Statesman* at University and for a considerable number of years, they're able to form opinions which are based on the truth of the situation. It was a group such as this which put the Conservatives out in 1945." The lecture was received with enthusiasm. His next lecture will explore "The Case for Non-Commitment."

—J. M. Thomson

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 28, 1958.

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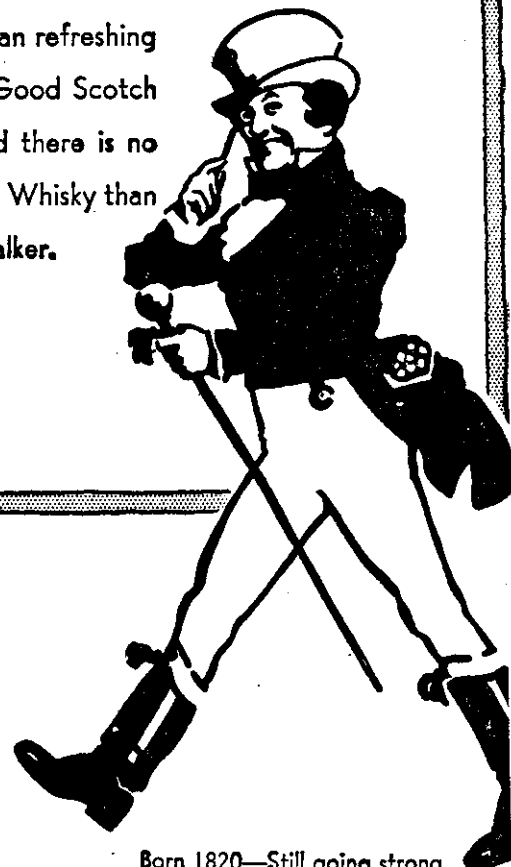
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