

THE WRITERS' CONFERENCE

Sir,—As a former executive member of the parent branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Sydney, I was interested in your report of the recent Writers' Conference in Wellington and also in Mrs Elsie Locke's reference in your issue of October 2 to a suggestion, made at that conference, that "something equivalent to the F.A.W. in Australia" might usefully serve writers in this country.

As a national institution with branches in all mainland States and Canberra, able to speak for Australian writers as a whole, including those associated in group organisations, the F.A.W. has been in many ways of considerable value to Australian writers and Australian literature. On the one hand, it has developed a sense of community in writers in diverse fields; from those who endeavour to practise writing as an art to those who frankly use their pens to earn an extra ten bob. On the other hand it has made available to writers (a notoriously unbusinesslike sector of the community) reliable guidance through the many snares and pitfalls laid for them—in contract clauses and otherwise—by a certain type of publisher.

Another service the F.A.W. has provided—in this case to native literature as well as to writers—is to bring together writers and, through associate membership, those interested in Australian literature, using for this purpose talks and discussions, led usually by a Fellow, and social occasions such as birthday parties for Australian literary works on publication. At such parties and most of such talks "friends" as well as Fellows and Associates are welcomed.

One realises that the development of a strong Fellowship of Writers in New Zealand would probably be slow and difficult. In Australia, the Fellowship developed slowly, and often painfully, from occasional meetings some 30-odd years ago of a small group of established writers who discussed their work and its problems over a cup of coffee (six o'clock closing!). Today, most State branches—or Fellowships, as they prefer to call themselves, having complete autonomy under a common Constitution—have their own club-rooms, a strong membership of both Fellows and Associates and a considerable audience at all "open" gatherings. Membership and audience combined give the F.A.W., acting as a national federation of writers, considerable influence when action at the national level is necessary.

In New Zealand there appears to be scope and, one feels, need for a Fellowship of New Zealand Writers: (a) to bring writers and their audience together as a means of enlarging the latter and (b) to co-ordinate at the national level the activities—the non-literary but essential subsidiary activities of writers and, on a federal basis, those of the existing groups.

Under New Zealand conditions, however, it might be desirable to reverse the Australian procedure and commence at the top, as a national federation, and from there to work towards the establishment of provincial, and even regional, branches more or less on the lines of the State branches of the F.A.W.

L. G. ASHTON (Whangarei).

CHINA AND UNITED NATIONS

Sir,—In common with Mr Youren in the *Point of View* discussion I incline to the belief that the Peking Government regime would be better inside the United Nations than outside it. It is also true that there is a strong tendency to use a double standard of political

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morality with reference to China and Russia and that dictatorship and aggression are to be found in the so-called Western camp as well as in the Eastern camp. But I cannot leave unchallenged the bald statement by Mr Youren that China has exercised suzerainty over Tibet for many centuries. In the major part of the last 1200 years, the claims of Peking to suzerainty over Tibet have been as unsubstantial as the claims of the English kings to suzerainty of Scotland in the time between William the Conqueror and the accession of James the First of England and the Sixth of Scotland. Once or twice alien invaders such as the Mongols succeeded in forcibly unifying both China and Tibet for short periods but these conquests never lasted. In the 18th century, at about the time that Britain was establishing itself in India, Chinese armies managed to enforce a species of sovereignty over the Tibetan people.

One thing is undeniable, and that is that from the time of the Chinese revolution in 1912 onwards, until Communist armies invaded their country, in 1950-51, the Tibetans were completely independent of Chinese authority. This is a longer period than the years of nationhood enjoyed by Ireland, Poland, Czechoslovakia and other resuscitated nations. And at no time, even in the 19th century, was Tibet governed from Peking as were Ireland and Poland or India by Britain or Russia. Surely the only test of a nation's right to self-determination is whether it regards itself as a nation with its own culture and territory. Are we to have one standard of nationhood for Ireland and Czechoslovakia, Poland and India, and another for Tibet? Was it right for the Chinese people to fight foreign imperialists and yet wrong for Tibetans to struggle for national independence? Not! What is sauce for the Chinese and Russian goose is sauce for the Tibetan gander. By all means let China have her rights and let Tibet and every nation, big or small, in East or in West, have them also.

S. W. SCOTT (Waiheke).

Sir,—I grant that Chiang Kai-shek was not elected by popular and free election. He never pretended to be, but Communists do pretend to hold elections and do claim to be democratic. Very well. When Communists genuinely hold elections I will admit that they are the elected governors of the people, but until then I refuse to acknowledge them as the chosen rulers of the people.

I did not say that Chiang Kai-shek was the proper and duly elected ruler of the Chinese people. I did not say that two wrongs make a right. I did object,

and rightly, to the statement that the present Government of Communist China represents the Chinese people.

HARD FACTS (Wellington).

HOUSING FOR THE AGED

Sir,—May I reply to your correspondents Barbara Mountier, P. M. Spencer, and A. H. Reed? Where we differ is in their assertion that New Zealand's prosperity is such that our Government can not only afford to provide for the needy aged, but also continue to make large, and even increased contributions to the Colombo and Asian plans. The latter involves resort either to borrowed money (with our national debt at the peak of £816 million carrying £34 million annual interest, borne by a population of only 2½ million); or to increased taxation. The former cannot be supported; and taxation has about reached the limit. Funds from government borrowing, and taxation, are for, and should be restricted to, internal governmental requirements, especially since the cost of everything has skyrocketed.

Moreover, with the teeming millions of Asian lands increasing annually by about 30 million (three times the population of Australia), our, and our sister-nations', contributions cannot possibly stem the tide of increasing poverty and hunger. The first essential is birth control, as many publicists have stated; and the World Council of Churches has just now, also, emphasised this need. Unless these nations bring this about, financial aid from ourselves and others is mostly wasted. If financial help is to continue, then it should come from those European nations which exploited Asian territories in the past. New Zealand (and Australia) were not involved in this. If further help is to come from New Zealand, it should be by donations from the assets of those in favour of rendering that help.

In conclusion, in every case it is not what we would like to do, but what we can properly do. Augustine Birrell put it more emphatically when he said of a leading Labour politician, "He will allow his bleeding heart to get in the way of his bloody head!"

G. C. CHALMERS (Auckland).

BOOK SHOP

Sir,—May I raise a cry of protest against the blemishes of an otherwise enjoyable programme; namely *Book Shop*? As an avid listener to this programme as well as an omnivorous reader I am, I believe, inclined to adopt a magnanimous tolerance towards the trite story-telling which too often

attempts to pass for reviewing. The policy of "author to review author" was carried to its absurd conclusion on Wednesday, September 30. The soldier reviewing the soldier demonstrated ably that the qualities that go to make a warrior do not make a critic. Indeed the bill of fare on that night seemed to me dedicated to the furtherance of at least second-rate reviewing. However, far from turning the right-hand knob of my radio set one inch to the right at 8.38 p.m. on Wednesday night, I shall listen with greater interest. Like the concert-goer who waited for the clap between the first and second movements, I wait for the delinquent to review the delinquent; the white slaver to review the white slaver; and the baby to review the next edition of *Dr Spock*.

T.A.B. (Dunedin).

POLITICAL BROADCASTS

Sir,—I note with interest and some sympathetic amusement the findings of researchers in Britain that most televisioners turn off political broadcasts. I only hope that these results carry a message to our own legislators. I have yet to meet anyone who listens regularly to our parliamentary broadcasts and my own guess is that the power and technical skill used to disseminate political proceedings is 99 per cent wasted.

In this district the parliamentary session leads to the loss of our only reasonable YC station, several days a week for about three months a year. Has any listener research been carried out in this country to see whether people listen to our House of Representatives? If not, it is high time it was. The results should be interesting.

DAVID CLARK
(Otorohanga).

SHORT STORIES

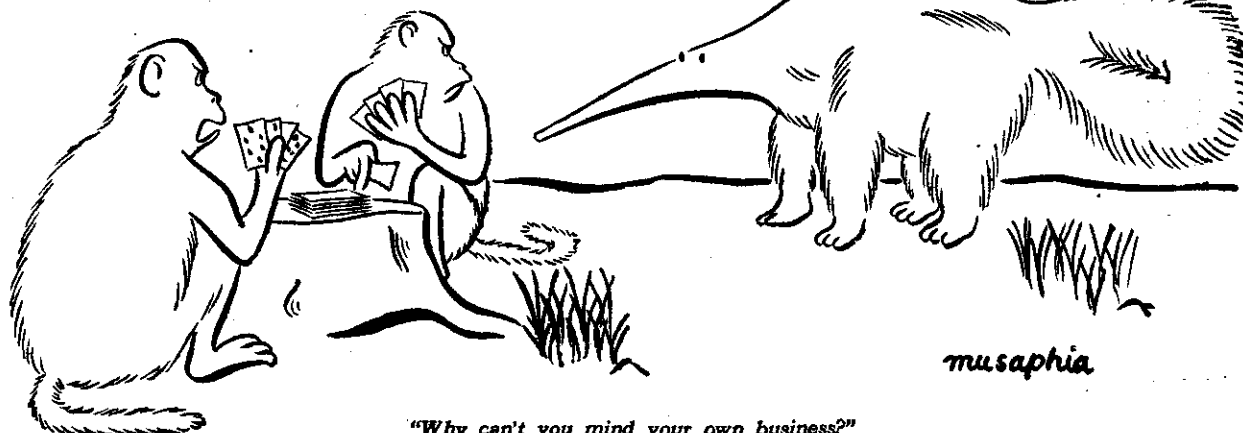
Sir,—May I record my unqualified enjoyment of two of your short stories—"Apricot Day" (which I found reminded me of much of Katherine Mansfield I appreciated in my youth) and "What a Scream." In the latter the writer gave us a delightful fantasy on a theme that many harassed housewives will appreciate. How often have we visualised ourselves just getting out and screaming at it all, and hang the consequences!

Incidentally many *Listener* short stories are excellent. Perhaps we may hope for a collection to be printed some day.

GWEN SUTHERLAND
(Clinton).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Big Ears (Katikati): 12C is a local station only, for Rotorua and its environs.
Christchurch: "Tradesman's Entrance" no longer available.
J.S. (Wellington): Thank you for the suggestion, but the Service hopes to attain the desired end by other means.



musaphia

"Why can't you mind your own business?"