

HOW THINGS BEGAN

Sir,—In your issue of January 6, "A.A.N." (referring to the evidence for evolution) reminds me of "the rule of logic that it is invalid to argue from the particular to the general." All that this means is that the theory of evolution is not strictly proved, in the sense in which, say, a theorem of geometry is proved from the axioms; and this much I readily grant him. Let me remind him in his turn that the same may be said of every generalisation whatever that natural scientists make—not one of them, even the most assured, is strictly demonstrable from the data on which it is based, and all are liable to correction in the light of further discovery. When "A.A.N." thus indicates that he is willing to abandon the whole of natural science rather than accept the theory of evolution, I can only regard this as a tribute to the strength of the theory.

"A.A.N." also in effect endorses Father Duggan's demand that I give a specific case in which biologists are doubtful as to how to mark off the border between major groupings. I offer them both *Peripatus*, the difficulty about which is to place it in its proper phylum (i.e., the division coming immediately after that into plant and animal kingdoms—certainly a "major" one). *Peripatus* was originally classified along with earthworms, leeches, etc., in the phylum *Annelida*; in most modern text-books it is placed along with centipedes, insects, crayfish, etc., in the phylum *Arthropoda*—but often in defiance of the general account given by the same writers of what an Arthropod is. Thus Parker and Halswell, who classify *Peripatus* as an Arthropod, tell us that "Arthropods are characterised by the universal absence of cilia"; but *Peripatus* has cilia. They also tell us that Arthropods have segmented limbs (and in fact "jointed-legged" is the literal meaning of their name); but *Peripatus* has not. Certainly no biologist now classifies *Peripatus* as an Annelid; but some authorities prefer to treat the smaller group of *Onychophora* to which it belongs as a separate phylum. There is no doubt now as to what the characteristics of the *Onychophora* are, but there is still doubt as to whether their known differences from centipedes, etc., would or would not be usefully employed as marking off a distinct "major group." Yet Father Duggan would have us believe that all biologists not only "accept the existence of such groups as fishes, arthropods, birds, without question" (italics mine), but also "have no doubt about which of these groups a given organism is to be assigned to" (*Evolution and Philosophy*, pp. 186-7).

ARTHUR N. PRIOR (Christchurch).

YEAR BOOK OF ARTS

Sir,—After having read A. J. C. Fisher's review of the *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, and then afterwards your editorial, which has had a modifying effect on my first intentions, I still wish to congratulate Mr. Fisher on the bold and vigorous manner in which he set about his work. I agree also with your suggestion that critics in New Zealand are apt to be more generous in many cases than is deserved.

From my own observations I am convinced that public opinion is governed to a certain extent by the observations of critics—less in New Zealand, thank goodness, than overseas. Nevertheless, in recent times the so-called "modern art" is getting a great build-up even in this country, as evidence of which the *Year*

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Book is an excellent example. This book is obviously sponsored by a group which is endeavouring to influence public opinion in favour of this modern form of expression, otherwise there would be a few reproductions of the works of some of our better known artists, whose work is more truly representative of contemporary art in New Zealand than is the work of many comparatively unknown artists to whom this book gives so much space.

I could write a good deal about the subject of "modern art," but your editorial has had its effect. Nevertheless, I would like to quote a few words from Harold Speed's book, *The Science and Practice of Oil Painting*: "The use of swear words by ignorant people is quite excusable, because they have not the wit to use, or the knowledge of, just those words which would forcefully express what they want to say. And failing to give their expression the force they desire by the legitimate use of words, they throw in some nasty expressions of entirely alien association, like a bad smell, but calculated to give a shock; which gives them the satisfaction of having made a forceful remark. The violent use of colours and forms adopted by much so-called advanced art nowadays is just like these swear words. They want to create a sensation, and not having the wit to use the wonderful instruments of expression that are at the disposal of the modern artist who is prepared to follow the straight and narrow way, they would destroy the restraints of tradition and rush to the use of swearing yellows and screeching reds, of clashing lines and jarring planes, in lieu of anything really forceful to say."

I would recommend your readers to study Harold Speed's book and then glance through the *Year Book*. I am sure they will find both instructive.

ANOTHER PERSON'S OPINION
(Christchurch).

FAVoured HOUSEWIVES

Sir,—The age of the housewife has arrived! The trumpets may have been muted to the somewhat more mellifluous tones of Chopin, but the air is loud with triumph. For the world, via broadcasting, via 1YZ Rotorua, apparently recognises that the Housewife and the Housewife alone possesses (unplumbed) depths of cultural taste. Consequently, the Housewife gets nearly all of the music and most of the less flagrantly unintelligent talks available from the station, leaving the non-housewives to pant thirstily along upon a very few weekly moments of intelligent listening.

Is the Housewife to be regarded as the only intelligent section of the community? Station 1YZ concentrates upon feeding the startled Rotorua Housewife's appetite for music (need I append: GOOD?). Dare the NZBS take the responsibility of fostering the intelligence of one downtrodden section to so great a preferential extent that it may eventually become the master-section, thereby forming a matriarchy? Amazonic Rotorua! Is this a further attempt at flamboyant tourist attraction: the theme of life in Rotorua?

I feel humbled; more, I feel neglected. Are the workers to be regarded as superfluous? The working female is overlooked as purely parasitical, the working male as incidental, to Life's Function. Nobody blames the programme staff, or the policy supervisor, for a jaundiced

outlook. Perhaps it is natural to suppose that a Rotoruan has a somewhat barbaric taste in sound, and forms so loose an interpretation of language that he takes the word music to embrace Vera Lynn, Sydney Torch, Friml and Four-leafed Clovers.

May I falteringly plead our by no means humble but perhaps too civilised cause? As a clean-limbed, upright Rotoruan, I hesitate openly to admit the possession of any musical taste. I shrink from the use of the word Culture. But beneath my proverbially (and necessarily) bluff exterior, I like music. NZBS help me, I like it! Do I stand condemned because of my coincidental qualities of liking music and being a worker? There are other workers in Rotorua (despite malicious rumours). Not every one of them is a moron. They pant eagerly and provincially for each Monday night, when they may hear, bar elections and acts of God, one major work. Sometime they may even hear some Beethoven. For dinner music (occasionally as much as one half-hour) they hear music which for lack of an even more damning word I must call Nice. Innocuous. On Sunday mornings they are treated with the same condescension, with occasional brief breaks out of what is timidly called the Light Classics.

One feels that 1YZ, in appraising the essential function of life, is overlooking a collateral fact: we have at our disposal what has come to be known as a Civilisation. Must we ignore it?

In the absence of a resounding New Zealand constitution as abundant in glorious clichés on the theme of Rights as is the worshipped American one, may I bring to my aid the pre-French Revolution phrase: *Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!* May I emphasise: Equality.

S. (Rotorua).

"THE PAST HAS ANOTHER PATTERN"

Sir,—Under this unfortunately untrue statement by T. S. Eliot, Alan Mulgan in *The Listener* of December 30 reviews New Zealand's present against its past, and makes many statements, which, in my opinion, are also wide of the mark. I quote two examples. Of our "horse and buggy" years he says, "The whole tempo of life was lower. Wants were fewer and life more leisurely." I wonder what pioneer women would believe that! Writing of the years before the Great War, he claims that "very few New Zealanders wrote books and very few read them." This may be true of people living in the backblocks of the North Island, but it is certainly not correct about the people living in the mining and farming settlements of Otago. Here it seemed to be a general rule right back to the 'Sixties that as soon as any community life sprang up in a place a local library was brought into existence. The books selected by the early library committees were generally of a very high standard, but as the years passed reading habits must have declined both in volume and taste. Where libraries did survive, the later purchases of books by the local committees show that western stories and detective fiction had secured popular favour. The "yellow back" and "Deadwood Dick," by altering their covers, had secured a position on the parlour shelf instead of being hidden under pillows. New Zealanders did write books in the pre-war period,

and good ones, too. Pember Reeves, Robert McNab, Guthrie Smith, Frederick Manning, Vincent Pike, and even Katherine Mansfield all belong to the pre-Gallipoli days which Alan Mulgan, by some strange reasoning, claims to be New Zealand's birthday.

JOSEPH STEPHENS (Mosgiel).

"CRITICS ARE ONLY HUMAN"

Sir,—May I say how much I agree with the views expressed in your excellent leader under the above title. Yes, critics are only human, but our blind worship of the printed word often makes us forget this.

The critic himself knows that he can be right in some cases and wrong in others. He knows that great works of art have survived adverse criticism, while some artists, who first seemed promising, have in the long run revealed themselves as ordinary. The great critic has the virtue of all great men—humility. He is an inspiration to artist and reader alike and can dispense with academic details or petty comparisons.

How fortunate is the musician, writer or painter, who receives constructive criticism from a man with broad views and wide experience! The other category of critics has been described as "professional fault-finders." Their one contribution to human culture is to have inspired the immortal figure of Beckmesser in Wagner's *Mastersingers*.

Referring to these fault-finders, Neville Cardus quotes Dame Ethel Smyth's awe-inspiring words: "Where is the error, and can it be corrected without endangering something essential?"

GERHARD WILLNER
(Wellington).

TEACHING METHODS

Sir,—I read with some amusement F. L. Combs' references to past methods of teaching. When I helped recently, after an absence from teaching of several years, I found that the brighter children were utterly bored, and even those children who had no inclination to draw were compelled to draw, draw, draw. I think the system of allowing children to play their way through the Infants and Standard One, and then cram tables, addition, subtraction, money sums, weights and measures, etc., into them in Standard Two is a cruel and unsatisfactory system. Today they memorise songs, where before they memorised tables. Surely the songs are as great a tax on the brain. At one time they knew all their tables before they left the infant class, and they never forgot them. Today they never remember them. Learning them is sandwiched in between too many other things. As of old teachers vary—some are good, some bad. One teacher with nearly 60 in the class has not used the strap all year—he has no need to, having perfect control without. At another school a child suffered a nervous breakdown through being strapped every day. So the bad old days are by no means over.

ANTI-HUMBUG LIZZIE
(Hamilton).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Satisfied Listener (Auckland): Many thanks. Passing on your good wishes.

Movietone (Auckland): It has gone to the proper quarter.

E. de Lacey: Have been unable to trace it; but it was written recently and has not yet been included in a volume of the poet's work.