

"THE PAST HAS ANOTHER PATTERN"

Sir,—The criticisms of my article in Joseph Stephens's letter in your issue of January 27 arise mainly from misunderstanding, for which I am partly responsible. Sacrificing clarity to brevity, I wrote that in the 1900 period "very few New Zealanders wrote books, and very few read them." What I meant was that very few New Zealanders read the books that the very few New Zealanders wrote. This is indicated in a reference to conditions after the first war—"for the first time New Zealanders began to be really interested in New Zealand books." To say that New Zealanders did not read in those distant days would be silly. Possibly the people of Otago, children of the manse, read more than those of the north, but in the Bay of Plenty pioneer settlement where I was born there was a public library, and most homes had books. I did not say New Zealanders did not write books in the pre-war period, and I quite agree with Mr. Stephens about the quality of some of the books written then. From time to time I have tried to do justice to those authors. In his last sentence, the construction of which is muddled, Mr. Stephens seems to say I regard Gallipoli as New Zealand's birthday. I do so in respect to the development of a stronger national consciousness. I am well aware that good work was done before that date in the arts and in life generally.

Mr. Stephens wonders what pioneering women would believe what I wrote about life being more leisurely, its tempo slower. I was not referring to the pioneering period, but to New Zealand life in general in and about the year 1900, when the colony had had sixty years of development. The word "leisurely" means not only "having leisure," but "proceeding without haste." I am sure that nearly everyone who remembers that time would agree with me that the whole tempo of life has quickened. No change that I have witnessed seems more obvious.

ALAN MULGAN (Wellington).

Sir,—In reply to the letter of Joseph Stephens in your issue of January 27, stating that "the people in the backblocks of the North Island may have done very little reading before the First World War," I should like to state that in 1875 or thereabouts the Auckland Provincial Council made a grant of officially stamped books of a very high literary standard to all its country settlements.

As a youth living in Paparoa in the backblocks of the North Island, I became, in the late 'seventies and onwards, intimately acquainted with the works of Carlyle, Macaulay, Cervantes, Adam Smith, Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, Motley, Prescott and many others. Mutual improvement societies of the day held discussion groups, and stimulating debates resulted. We had no opportunity of getting away to a city for higher education, but I venture to say that some of those discussions would not be out of place in a gathering of students today.

It is good to reflect that even before the days of Carnegie the Auckland Provincial Council was donating libraries for the use of the people. This surely

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proves that long before the end of the century a high standard of reading was not unusual.

R. HAMES (Auckland).

THE KAFKA PROBLEM

Sir,—Your correspondent "Critic" disputes my description in a recent ZB Book Review of Franz Kafka as "the Czech writer." I did not use this phrase without careful consideration of the various elements—Jewish, Czech and German—in Kafka's background and work, and I selected it because I believe it to be the most exact and because it corrects a tendency to regard Kafka as in the German literary tradition. Kafka's father was a Czech Jew from Wossek, and most of the Kafka family were Czech patriots opposed to the Habsburg rule. Although Kafka was educated in German schools and wrote in German, he belonged, as Kate Flores writes in *The Kafka Problem*, "like Joyce, to a strongly nationalistic minority group while writing in the major tongue of the oppressing nation. He sympathised with the Czech resistance movement which before the First World War sought to establish an autonomous Bohemian state. He studied the Czech language and literature and attended mass meetings and discussions." As for Kafka's knowledge of Czech, we have not only the testimony of Max Brod and other friends, but Kafka's many references in his diary to his fluency in speaking the language and his delight in doing so (e.g., entry for November 28, 1911).

For a full discussion of Kafka as a Czech writer, I refer "Critic" to *Review 43* (Allen and Unwin, 1943), in which Janko Lavrin, discussing "the Czech Contribution to European Culture," selects Kafka as his main topic. Rudolf Vasata, a Czech critic, begins his essay in *The Kafka Problem* with these words: "Of all contemporary Czechoslovak writers, Franz Kafka enjoys more fame in this country than any other, the only exception being Karel Capek." The importance to an understanding of Kafka's work of recognising him as a Czech writer is brought out by another Czech, John Urzidil, who writes: "His style, from the beginning, was amalgamated with Slavonic elements. . . . He owes much to Czech forms of expression." Charles Neider in his important book, *Kafka—His Mind and Art* (1949) begins his discussion of the "Czechness" of the novelist's work thus: "Kafka's work has its roots deep in Czech tradition." I agree with "Critic" that a literary review should give reliable information. Would he agree with me that letters criticising literary criticisms should be based upon full possession of the facts?

J. C. REID (Auckland).

HOW THINGS BEGAN

Sir,—Mr. Prior charged me with using the term "self-contradictory" in an indiscriminate fashion, and I asked him to prove this charge by quoting several instances.

The best he could do was to quote my statement that Monism is "incompatible with the principle of contradiction."

I pointed out that "incompatible with the principle of contradiction" is not the same as "self-contradictory."

Mr. Prior now writes (*Listener*, February 3): "Father Duggan now tells us

that one of the propositions which he describes in his book as self-contradictory is only 'mediately' so."

To refute this assertion it is enough to repeat that I did not describe the proposition as self-contradictory.

The remainder of Mr. Prior's discussion rests on a view which he erroneously attributes to me and which he describes as "a novel extension of the notion of self-contradiction," viz., the view that "mediately incompatible with the principle of contradiction" is equivalent to "self-contradictory." I wrote (*Listener*, January 20): "A statement may be immediately or medially incompatible with the principle of contradiction, and only in the former case is it self-contradictory." For Mr. Prior's benefit, "the former case" refers to the term "mediately," and the meaning is: "A proposition is self-contradictory only

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when it is immediately incompatible with the principle of contradiction." There is nothing novel about that notion of self-contradiction. Comment on Mr. Prior's dialectical methods I leave to the discerning reader.

Mr. Prior seems aggrieved that I did not explain the difference between "effect" and "change." There was no need for me to do this because we were discussing the possibility of an uncaused change, and Mr. Prior dragged in the term "effect." For his benefit, the terms are not identical, because change is a process, whereas an effect may be a permanently existing thing. A motor-car is an effect, but not a change.

Mr. Prior says: "A man may hold without self-contradiction that some changes have no cause." Once again, I disagree, for it is immediately evident that every change must have some cause. Whatever the change may be, the mind has only to know it as a change to know at the same time that it must have some cause. Since this truth is self-evident it cannot be strictly proved, but only confirmed by an appeal to experience. And is it not a fact that when we perceive some change, e.g., when we get a flat tyre, we spontaneously look for the cause and would dismiss as literally absurd the suggestion that some changes (and if some, why not this one?) may occur without any cause?

G. H. DUGGAN, S.M.

(Greenmeadows).

Sir,—A. Stenberg declares that evolution is a blasphemous anti-God theory and then promptly adds insult to blasphemy by declaring that, according to infallible Scriptures, God created man in His own image. Just imagine anyone ascribing an image to that immense power and wisdom, which dominates the whole universe, and which developed the first humans on this earth, the Neanderthal and the Java man and three or four similar types (after His own image?) about 500,000 years ago. Yet, according to Genesis the whole universe was only made about 3000 years ago. Chinese records go back over 6000 years and the rays from some remote suns take 50 million years to reach our little grain of dust called earth. Since man began to study nature there has never been known one instance of any type of life having been created without a very gradual process of evolution.

Every farmer knows that and uses these laws for the improvement of his stock.

G. F. B. WEISS (Mangonui).

THE VOICE OF RUFFO

Sir,—I am, and have been for a number of years, an interested listener to the various programmes throughout the Dominion. During this long period I have never heard any record of the great baritone Titta Ruffo put over the air. Recognised as one of the greatest artists, it seems strange that the NZBS has never broadcast his records. Ruffo created a sensation with his remarkable voice in the opera *Lohengrin*. He appeared at Covent Garden, 1903, and at the Albert Hall, 1919.

MUSIC LOVER (Wellington).

(There are only one or two pre-electric recordings of Titta Ruffo in the NZBS library, but they are used occasionally in special programmes. A Ruffo programme will be heard from 2YD in the *Stars of the Concert Hall* series at 9.0 p.m. on Friday, February 24, and from some of the other stations later.—Ed.)

WORLD THEATRE

Sir,—As one of four listeners who were unable to comprehend the play *The Family Reunion*, by T. S. Eliot, in the BBC World Theatre Series, I write to ask if someone who appreciates the play will kindly explain the character and plot of the play, and point out any aesthetic or moral values.

This play about a morbid family (although the acting and voices were excellent) seems to me to be a distortion of human emotions—on a par with the distortions of the human figure as portrayed in some decadent modern art, such as in the surrealist movement or in the absurdities of sculpture which Moore recently exhibited in Battersea Park. It will be interesting if light can be thrown on the reason why intelligent authorities in the BBC selected this play.

H. M. HELM (Pangototara).

Sir,—T. S. Eliot's *Family Reunion* was such a remarkable oasis in a desert of indifferent radio programmes that it seemed a pity that its artistic continuity should have been broken by sports announcements. A brief musical interval, during which Part I of the famous verse drama could have been discussed, might have been a good idea. But a half-hour of weather forecast and sports results was simply incredible and surely an error in taste. However, one improved the regrettable half-hour with tooth-cleaning and grumbling. T. S. Eliot would have enjoyed our idiom; especially when it came to bowls and croquet.

MORE DRAMA (Kawau).

WOMEN'S SESSIONS

Sir,—The station which I can get best is 1YA, though not late at night, so that my listening is restricted. One or two mornings a week I can listen to the women's sessions. Why is it considered good enough for women to dish up on Monday or Wednesday the left-overs from Sunday's programmes? These are BBC talks or plays which I enjoyed quite well on Sunday, but do not want to hear again. When the annoyance first began with the *Art of Living* series I waited patiently for it to pass, but it has merely passed on to other repeat features.

T.E.M. (Papakura).