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LETTERS from LISTENERS

ARGUMENT OF POETRY

Sir,—In his letter, E. Schwimmer clarifies his position and goes some way to meet the views expressed in your review. One impression I get from his essay is that, like some other criticism and a good deal of contemporary poetry, it over-emphasises the philosophical, the intellectual, at the expense of the emotional. So much of the fine poetry of the world, especially the "artless" songs that live from generation to generation, has no intellectual content in this sense. The question of the relationship of the local to the general is fascinating. I agree with your reviewer that "it is through the immediate and local that a poet expresses what is distant and universal," but possibly reservations and explanations have to be made in this as in most generalisations. Perhaps the argument is more plainly illustrated by prose than by verse. The "universal" novelists, such as Tolstoi, write about the society around them. An analogy might be suggested between the local and general in literature, and good citizenship as the necessary basis of world order. We know the type of man who works enthusiastically for world peace, but is difficult to deal with in the daily affairs of life. An English publisher told us not long ago that there was no recipe for a best-selling novel, and that the surest way to fail was to sit down determined to write one. I suggest there may be an analogy here, too. If a poet sits down deliberately to write universally, he will almost certainly fail. If he truly absorbs what is local, and works upon that sincerely, he may achieve something universal.

Linked with this is Mr. Schwimmer's theory, expressed in his essay, of a "myth" created about "a lonely island-desert discovered by navigators and developed by baffled explorers, which was identified with New Zealand." He says "only a handful of literati were ever touched by this 'myth.'" Mr. Schwimmer is confusing myth and historical fact. The discovery and development of this "lonely island-desert" is a solid fact of history, which has profoundly influenced the lives of New Zealanders. Though they may not rationalise their feelings, New Zealanders are aware of their geographical and cultural remoteness. Mentally as well as physically they look out on to long distances. It has even been suggested that you can tell a New Zealander partly by the look in his eyes—the look of a man habituated to gazing, literally and figuratively, across the unbroken ocean.

ALAN MULGAN (Wellington).

"SOLDIERS THREE"

Sir,—I have not seen the picture *Soldiers Three*, but, knowing my early Kipling pretty well, and judging by the summary of the film given by your critic, I should say the action of the story had little if anything of Kipling in it. I have checked on the volume of stories entitled *Soldiers Three*, and see no resemblance. The faces of the three soldiers on the hoarding posters were about as much like Mulvaney, Learoyd and Ortheris as I am like Ronald Colman. If I am wrong and the plot has been more or less taken from Kipling, I shall cheerfully apologise. Meanwhile, I am curious to know why and how such things are done. I hope your critic will not be deterred, by the reactions of H. E. Bates, from reading more of Kipling. Bates's estimate of Kipling is among the curiosities of criticism. However, we all

have our blind spots. I have known well-read men who could not read Dickens, and a University professor who could not abide Thackeray. Kipling is a great writer. One pointer to his stature is the space given him in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, published after his death.

TERENCE MULVANEY JUNIOR
(Wellington).

DECLINING FESTIVAL

Sir,—I read the letter from "A Scot" (Auckland). I, too, was an Edinburgh lassie round about 1900, and still remember "Hansel Monday" and "The Guisers." I write to say that here in Hamilton we still open our door wide to the New Year and welcome first-foots when they come—bagpipes included. And I bake by own currant bun each year as well as several others for friends. I send greetings to all Edinburgh folks and say "Lang May Their Lums Reek."

AULD REEKIE (Claudelands).

SPORTING ROUND-UP

Sir,—I am sure that many listeners throughout New Zealand would join me in expressing thanks to 2YA for the excellent coverage of all sporting events during the holiday period. To a listener not interested in any one particular sport the recording of distant race commentaries, the Plunket Shield and Australian cricket, and the Davis Cup and local tennis championships rebroadcasts have been of great interest. Many thanks to 2YA.

W. J. AITKEN (Johnsonville).

"TO A JET PILOT"

Sir,—One assumes that by now the Intelligentsia has regained its equilibrium and is patting itself on the back for having so successfully confused the minds of your readers with its meaningless verbiage. If this be the case, one wonders vaguely at its intelligence, for from where I am sitting it would appear that the correspondents who so readily condemned my analysis of James Baxter's poem have merely substantiated my views.

Let us examine D. A. St. John's letter. His first paragraph introduced the subject, his second was devoted entirely to an absurd criticism of one minute phrase, and his third contained the unproven statement that there were many other points he could have criticised.

Louis Johnson wrote in an equally foolish manner. It is unfortunate that his desire to find fault caused such an unhappy descent to garbling. To the other correspondents: I would suggest that "D.S." acquaint himself with the biological development of the caterpillar, and that "D.G." refrain from criticism until he is capable of combining his flair for words with a little intelligent and constructive argument.

DAVID R. WATSON (Dunedin).
(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

"FRED AND MAGGIE"

Sir,—I am convinced that the older one becomes, the less tolerant one is with the inanities of life—and the radio programmes. I refer to those two nonsensical purveyors of present-day humour—Fred and Maggie. Ten years ago in my much earlier youth I listened with some amusement to their perambulations, and did at times manage to enjoy their particular brand of humour, and in moments of stress even imitate Maggie's "H'm, fancy!" But tolerance of such mediocre entertainment does wane