

MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Sir,—“Wren” (*Listener*, February 8) is justified in criticising New Zealand architecture. Certainly “it is time contemporary architects realised their duty to the community.” But it is most certainly not “an architect’s job to decorate and apply his classical education to make a thing of beauty.” This fanciful attitude has helped to frighten New Zealanders away from architects and so encourage our notoriously ugly building to date. It is an architect’s job to create and to apply his professional skill and knowledge forthrightly yet sensitively to make a thing of efficiency and beauty.

Our heritage from the past is not the art of copying but forward-thinking use of contemporary materials and bold and unhidden use of structural advances—as daring as the Gothic revolution in methods of construction—in all, carefully reasoned, scientifically deduced and sensitively designed solutions to building problems posed by our social and economic structure. Unfortunately the social structure is such that it allows economics to unduly dominate all building.

Because there are in New Zealand no “beautiful churches such as Wren built,” should we build them now when there is a wealth of new methods and materials to be used, such as space-spanning concrete relatively as thin as egg-shell, height-conquering light-weight metal construction, unlimited plastics, glass in many new forms, even revolutionary uses of wood? Europe, with all its wonderful tradition, is not slavishly copying the past even in towns full of fine old buildings.

From Norway to Spain I should like to show “Wren” beautiful exciting churches, office buildings, factories, houses, flats, public buildings, all without “motives of decoration” added on after as he would have.

“Wren” says, an engineer can design a structure, a builder can build a house, any person can plan a house, all without the help of an architect. How appallingly true! Does he expect us to cure the heart-breaking jumble in New Zealand by allowing this state of affairs to continue and by covering everything with classical decoration?

Let us for the first time forget about copying the rest of the world and create our own answers to what can be exciting problems, full of promise. Let us use decoration by all means, as profusely as in any glorious Baroque cathedral where appropriate, but not just watered down classical motives or fluting and flagpoles.

This may be difficult in this land of humdrum, the farewell state, that was once known as the social laboratory of the world, but it is worth trying. Perhaps if we can vitalise our physical environment and remove the cause of “Wren’s” lament, we may pull ourselves out of our spiritual sloth.

Much as I disagree with “Wren’s” diagnosis and proposed cure, I compliment him on his awareness of a very sad state of affairs. I hope to meet him some time wearing a zip-fastened Roman toga and morning trousers.

D. E. BARRY MARTIN (Wellington).

“SUNDOWNER” AND ISRAEL

Sir,—The Old Testament presents an aspect of the animistic form of religious belief, namely, that forces or beings controlling the universe can, by adoration, magical incantations, prayers and ritual sacrifices, be influenced to order things in our favour. It is alleged that God “reveals” Himself through this collection of Hebrew mythologies. Believers said

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their credulity by resorting to large assumptions for which there is neither biblical nor other warrant. The deity so revealed declares himself to be jealous and admits the existence of other gods, promulgates a policy of vindictive punishment of innocent—even to the third and fourth generation; inflicts atrocious plagues on the innocent Egyptian people because their Pharaoh did what the deity caused him to do; and commanded his Chosen “utterly to destroy the men, women and children” of every city of their enemies.

The idea of personal sins being atoned for or washed away by the shedding of innocent blood, animal, human or divine, is repugnant to our notions of ethics. Viscount Samuel, a distinguished Jew, one-time High Commissioner for Palestine, in his text-book *Practical Ethics*, writes: “No one who would seek to initiate a religious movement nowadays could possibly persuade the general body of opinion that the killing of animals as part of a ceremonial could have any religious value. Such a practice would be regarded on the contrary as fatal to genuine religious emotion.”

Our orthodox Christianity is a derivative from the ancient erroneous Hebrew animistic religion; which may perhaps account for the fact that the historical record of Christianity is so grievously darkened by cruelties, persecutions and slaughter carried out by those adhering to their distorted conception of deity and its relation to humanity. It may also in part explain why today ethically admirable precepts are professed by people guilty of the bitterest sectarian intolerances and supporting satanic policies.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).

(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

ENGLISH CHURCH MUSIC

Sir,—Thanks once more for the wonderful half-hour of English Church music, this time from 2YC on January 28—an ancient and modern selection from a repertory which is *sui generis*. The “Jehova quam multi sunt” motet was particularly welcome, as at last, after 45 years, I was able to test and confirm Dr. Ernest Walker’s verdict that this motet is perhaps Purcell’s very finest composition.

I was agreeably surprised to hear in this item the magnificent voice and style possessed by the bass soloist of King’s. Lay Clerks receive usually such a wretched pittance for their exacting and highly skilled duties that a Master of the Choristers can seldom get or keep such a voice as this in his choice; there’s infinitely better money elsewhere.

F. K. TUCKER (Gisborne).

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Sir,—*The Basis of Man’s Belief in a Future Life* is the title of a series of talks you announced recently. “For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it” (Isaiah, 28, 20). This seems to apply to the opening affirmation of Professor Arnold Wall as printed in *The Listener*, viz.: “We do wrong to pre-occupy ourselves with the question of survival after death in some place, or upon some other plane, of which we can know nothing, instead of devoting ourselves exclusively to the interests and duties of our life in this world and upon this plane, of which we are as certain as we can be of anything.”

Place alongside this the statement of Professor Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and compare:

There is no death! What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call death.

“Future Life” seems to have misled Professor Wall. It is more correct to speak of the “other life,” because natural life and spiritual life are lived together. The following paragraph will illustrate: “He started from a very low level, but climbed upward, rising at every step, till he reached the desired height, and from his elevated position he looked down on others less successful than himself.” Notice that you cannot say whether a physical or a spiritual ascent is meant. Professor Wall does not display acquaintance with the literature available on the subject, and, more strangely perhaps, with the significance of words. STUDENT (Auckland).

Sir,—I hope your controversy on life after death will not attract too much notice from correspondents like “The Student” (*Listener*, February 8). It is true, as he says, that there “is a science known as psychical research,” but it is certainly not true that “survival has been scientifically proved.” All that has been shown is that there are certain phenomena for which, so far, no physical explanations have been found. Parapsychology is still very much in an experimental stage, and the men and women who carefully collect and examine the data about “haunted” houses, seances and telepathic communication would be the very last to claim that they have proved anything—except, perhaps, that here and there they have proved the existence of fraud. I am ready to agree that there are unsolved mysteries; I will even admit that human survival is a possibility. But there are no “proofs,” and I doubt if there ever will be.

UNDER THE TABLE (Wellington).

CROSSWORD PUZZLES

Sir,—“R.W.C.’s” Puzzle No. 580 had the following clue: 20 down, “When Greek — Greek.” The answer was given as “meets.” Is not the correct quotation “When Greek joins Greek?”

Also, in puzzle No. 581, Clue No. 1 down is “You — snakes with double tongue” (*Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act 2, Scene 2). This should have been Act 2, Scene 3.

I get a lot of pleasure from these puzzles, and would appreciate being corrected if I’m wrong.

MIMEE GREEN (Christchurch).

(The *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* gives the quotation as “When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war.” It is described in a footnote as “the now usual perversion of Nathaniel Lee’s line, ‘When Greeks join’d Greeks then was the tug of war,’ from his tragedy *The Rival Queens*. . .” The perversion found its way into novels by Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Reade, and thereafter passed into general usage. Clue No. 1 across—not down—for puzzle No. 581 was given correctly. There is no scene 3 in the second act of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.—Ed.)

“FRED AND MAGGIE”

Sir,—Many of us feel very sorry for “Thirty Not Out” and “J.K.B.F.” Surely their remedy is to turn on to one of the other stations or to turn off for half an hour. I hope that by the time “Thirty Not Out” is 82 he will be more tolerant. It might help if he could remember that it takes all sorts of people

to make our world. I would like about half of the so-called musical items omitted from the programmes, but I also like “a little nonsense now and then.”

H. M. ROCKELL (New Lynn).

FACTUAL AND CREATIVE WRITING

Sir,—J. Toft (*Listener*, February 8) is perhaps too sweeping in his criticism of Guthrie Wilson’s letter. To support his claim that “the average well-written factual book has a wider public than the comparable novel,” he mentions, among other books, *The Holy Bible*. I very much doubt if the Bible could be described as a “factual book.” Moreover, the parts of it which have the widest appeal as literature are stories which have become models for poets and novelists. The story of Joseph and his brethren, of David and Saul and Adam and Eve have inspired some of the greatest poems and novels, though the original narratives in the Old Testament have remained unsurpassed.

Even if the Bible is left out of the argument, I think Guthrie Wilson was right in his contention that creative writing lives longer than factual writing. We can still enjoy novels written in the 18th Century, but I can remember no travel books and only one biography—Boswell’s *Johnson*—which can compete with *Tom Jones*. And I think Boswell, no matter how much “fact” he used in his biography, was a creative writer.

GRUB STREET (Auckland).

BAND MUSIC

Sir,—This letter is written to offer sincere thanks, I think coupled with the thanks of a great number of other bandmen, past and present, who have listened with pleasure to programmes of band music throughout the past year—especially for the very good music recorded at the 1951 contest in marches, hymns, selections and solo work. I am also grateful for the recordings of many world-famed English bands. Band playing still has popular appeal, and affords a great amount of pleasure to listeners.

2nd HORN (Christchurch).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Axiom (Hamilton).—Many thanks. You should be interested in a new feature which begins in this issue.

Alpha (Christchurch).—More suitable for a daily newspaper. We prefer letters which deal with broadcasting or with topics raised in *The Listener*.

T. Barr (Palmerston North).—Yes. The title was changed, possibly because West Point was not then as well known abroad as it is now.

Robert Walton (Auckland).—No detailed information is available on *The Adventures of Peter Chance*. In *Alias the Baron*, John Mannerling is played by Alistair Duncan.

G. Ashley (Hamilton).—There is a standing instruction that changes in the advertised programmes are to be announced at the time of the scheduled broadcast and a suitable apology expressed. It is regretted that in the cases you mention the instruction was not carried out.

Better Management from 4YA.—Alterations in advertised programmes, impossible to avoid entirely, are never made without good and urgent reason, as in the example you mention. The explanation would be too long for a note here; but it will gladly be supplied to you if you wish. Your other points noted; thanks.

Fed Up (Murchison).—The time between judge’s placings and the announcement of official dividends was, as the rules of racing require, five minutes, approximately. As this was the last race, the interval could not be used to give starters and riders for the next race. In the meantime, the system has been slightly changed, the announcer giving the dividends (unconfirmed) as they appear on the board and the studio later confirming or correcting them.