

THE WRITER AS OUTCAST

Sir,—I find certain inconsistencies in Professor Gordon's comments (*Listener*, March 14). He chooses "two quotations to illustrate a point of view;" but as I see it the two quotations represent quite different points of view. Baxter is moral and prophetic; Sargeson amoral and backward-looking.

He criticises Sargeson for "wilful exclusiveness and deliberate restriction of his horizon," but (three columns later) praises Jane Austen for making "a whole world out of a few families in a small village."

He suggests that Baxter "may find in a few years that an intellectual cell... is a very lonely place." Baxter's quotation explicitly states that it is; not later on, merely, but now.

He suggests that "a corrupt society (inhabiting... Main St., Suburbia)" may be "blithely unaware" of the poet, but if this is a direction to the poet rather than to society, then by implication he asks the poet to give up "the individual vision" which (three columns later) he asks him to "preserve, as something precious."

He writes an amusing synopsis of a Myth for Writers; but in fact his myth is the Myth of Youth and Idealism, and equally applicable to the lover, the sportsman, the student and the artist. Dare any man scoff at this? Or should he keep his values uncontaminated, even when he is himself corrupted by failure or success?

He says that a good writer is one "who brings to writing an individual vision or point of view, and who writes about something;" and then suggests that autobiography translated into fiction, and especially studies of childhood are... nothing?

He scoffs at Sargeson's *When the Wind Blows*, as childhood stuff, but forgets to tell us that it is part one of a book in three parts.

He chooses to call a man who "by writing and example attempts to change society" guilty of "intellectual isolationism."

He can "put aside for the moment..." the Ezekiels and Blakes and Shelleys," by saying that they are "in the long run a very specialised type" (sic). Does he put aside Baxter, or is he still arguing about him? And if Sargeson is still on board, how does he (Sargeson) in fact compare with Virginia Woolf on Professor Gordon's next demand: that writers should have "lived in, and not on, the fringe of the society to which they belong"?

Professor Gordon thinks doing a job in society is important to a writer. I tend to agree, but I also agree with Stephen Spender that a poet doesn't have to be burned in oil to know what it feels like. More experience counts for less than sensibility. But allowing for Professor Gordon's argument, it is a matter of record that Sargeson and Baxter have done more jobs between them than Jane Austen, Trollope, Virginia Woolf and Joyce put together. So what?

Finally, Professor Gordon says, "Write about what you know." I agree.

ANTON VOGT (Wellington).

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Sir,—I agree with Archdeacon Whitehead's statement that we are pilgrims on our way to our true home. For such is mere sound Christian thinking. To those who are ever ready to brand Christian doctrine as nonsense or superstition I might quote Monsignor Fulton Sheen, who stated: "Using her reason in the council of the Vatican, she (the

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Church) officially went on record in favour of rationalism, and declared, against the mock humility of the agnostics... that human reason by its own power can know something besides the contents of test tubes and retorts, and that working on mere sensible phenomena it can soar even to the 'hid battlements of eternity,' there to discover the timeless beyond time and the spaceless beyond space which is God, the alpha and omega of all things."

That the soul will, and indeed must, survive the death of the body is demonstrable from many points of view. First, its essential structure forbids dissolution by death. Death is the dissolution of parts. Only composite things can die. The soul is not composite. Its power of pure immaterial thought proves its independence of matter. In short, the soul is a created spiritual being made in the image and likeness of God, the Supreme and Infinite Spirit. Truly has St. Augustine beautifully phrased the sum total of man's reason for being born: "Thou hast made us from Thyself O Lord, and our hearts shall never rest until they rest in Thee."

ETERNAL BEAUTY (Invercargill).

Sir,—D. Martin's interesting letter (February 29) exposes one of the main reasons why psychical research meets with so much biased criticism and so much ill-founded opposition.

As soon as it has been scientifically established that human personality continues to exist after the dissolution of its physical instrument the word "death" will cease to have the meaning now commonly attached to it. But why accept the conclusion that such a situation will remove the need for faith? In Chapter 30 of his *Pelican book The Personality of Man*, G. M. N. Tyrrell says: "But supposing some finite life after death to be a fact, is there any reason why it should be a religious state? It has been frequently stressed that telepathy and precognition give us glimpses of an extended realm of nature. Why should not a future life be another type of natural finite existence?"

Now, whatever sort of existence we are bound for, I cannot imagine a human personality minus faith of some sort, and I advise every inquiring mind to study that ever-growing mass of evidence which points to the supposition that human personality is not bounded by physical laws, that physical death is not the portal to Heaven or Hell, that the only true values in this life are mathematical values and moral values, and that the latter work independently of dogmas—religious, sociological, or scientific.

F. E. JENKINS (New Plymouth).

Sir,—If man has wished sufficiently hard enough down the ages for a life after death, then no doubt evolution will supply him with something to carry on with after death. Otherwise the only survival is in the atoms that make up our bodies. Probably the period which has elapsed since man first stood upright has been too short for very much evolving to be done. What about the Chinese or the Indian version of life after death? They have just as much a claim to veracity as the Christian interpretation. Why do we Europeans give ourselves such airs, and assume that we are the salt of the earth? The Chinese are not Christians, but where could you find a more peace-loving nation? Where could you find a better example of Christ

Himself than in Gandhi, who was an Indian? The Gospels were written many years after Christ's death, and a lot of wishful additions were made to the story. Imagine trying to write the history of the Franco-Prussian war from the "eye-witness" accounts now. It is better to make the best of this life, and live for other people's good, than to spend time and energy in preparing for the next. If there is life after death, I hope that I shall be showing some backward civilisation in some other part of the universe how to build a bridge.

CIVIL ENGINEER (Christchurch).

Sir,—You have given considerable space to the present survival after death controversy. Surely the classic work, which attempts neither to prove nor disprove, but sets out the available evidence for the reader's own appraisal, is *The Question* by Edward Clodd? It is surely incontestable that hitherto there has been no proof. If words are to mean anything, "proof" is a logical demonstration. The word logic should need no defining, although commonly misused and abused by controversialists.

The controversy surely reaches absurdity when one correspondent, "Spook," asks for proof that there is no proof. Logic does not allow negative proof.

People are free to believe what they choose, but make themselves ridiculous when they use words like "proof" and "proved" in connection with what are their own beliefs and opinions.

I. R. MAXWELL-STEWART (Wellington).

IMMIGRATION

Sir,—I think your listener to the 3YA Women's Panel Discussion on Immigration misunderstood my opinion, which was perhaps not expressed as clearly as it might have been in the give-and-take of this strenuous form of extempore discussion. I have no desire to suggest that New Zealanders should exploit European immigrants nor that we should "flood the country with cheap labour." I took it as understood that, since there are minimum wage laws in New Zealand, there was no question of exploitation. But I did emphasise that these newcomers are ready to give real service for the wages they earn. They are accustomed to regard work as a necessary condition of life, and are not imbued with the idea of the average New Zealand worker that the community owes him a living whether he works hard for it or not.

Your correspondent suggests that I am wrong to rejoice because many of these immigrants are willing to go into domestic service. She thinks that New Zealand should congratulate itself upon the almost total disappearance of the domestic servant. In my opinion, the near impossibility of getting good domestic help at a reasonable wage in New Zealand is nothing to be proud of. It causes real hardship in many households—particularly those in which there are elderly people, semi-invalids, or mothers with several young children. New Zealand women in general, as they are themselves often painfully aware, are becoming duller and more limited in their outlook, because their days are filled, like those of your correspondent, with scrubbing floors and peeling potatoes. Their husbands, too, have to do far more than they should be asked to do, because of the lack of domestic, and other, help. While we all spend our time being our

own gardeners, cooks, charwomen, nursemaids, launderers and odd-job men, we shall all continue to be nothing but undistinguished mediocrities.

HELEN GARRETT (Christchurch).

Sir,—What a silly piece of twaddle to call "domestic help" slavery. What else but a domestic help is any wife and mother? Some do it badly and some do it well, but a paid person who comes to "do" for you, whether on a full-time basis or just a few hours daily, is your equal or perhaps your better, because she knows her job and does it, and holds her hand out for her pay when she has done her job. A good domestic worker is worth her weight in gold anywhere. She is only a slave when she has a bad mistress. The woman who stands aloof and makes herself into an overseer is a bad mistress and will be for ever looking for help.

Domestic service is a grand job. I know because I have done it and left a good home everywhere. What is the difference between a good cook and a good secretary? Would you call a secretary a slave because she makes things easier for her employer? What's wrong in peeling potatoes and keeping a house clean?

CAPTAIN COOK (Titahi Bay).

SCHIZOPHRENIC WRITERS

Sir,—"J.K.L." maintains that language is healthier when it holds firmly to concrete words. I disagree. We owe a debt of gratitude to modern writers for reaching, as it were, under the literary wardrobe and bringing from the dust multifarious words. Surely it is beneficial if these laconic adjectives do no more than incline us towards the shaking of silver-fish from our dictionaries! In these days of collectivism, I admire the original-minded who specialise in rare words, rather than in stamps or sea-shells. If the layman could be introduced to but a few of these words, we might even yet live to hear the clear morning air described as "exhilarant," thus giving that tatterdemalion "nice" an overdue respite.

M.W. (Mangapai).

CHILDBIRTH WITHOUT FEAR

Sir,—On the morning of February 20 when the Christchurch Women's Panel was again airing the subject of childbirth without fear—and therefore without pain—my smallest son, just a quarter of a year now, was having his morning tea and he told me he wanted to stand up and cheer. Any praise of Dr. Dick Read seems to affect him that way.

Let there be fewer doctors and midwives with the attitude to conscious birth, "Oh, I'm not at all keen on the idea." Let there be fewer women willing to be smothered away from the best moment in their lives. Then there will be fewer stories of the stork's grim encounters with bad weather and of his being forced to hitch-hike for long weary miles.

Would that every prospective mother bought her copy of *Childbirth Without Fear* as conscientiously as she buys *Modern Mothercraft*.

J.M. (Wanganui).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Interested in Sports (Wellington).—Peter Sellers, formerly of Auckland.
Grandma (Lyall Bay).—Quite correct; she is in Australia, and the programmes are recorded.