

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER

INCORPORATING N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday

Price Fourpence

APRIL 10, 1952

Editorial and Business Offices: 115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.1.

G.P.O. Box 2292.

Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

Telephone 70-999.

Wings Over the Frontiers

A PARLIAMENTARY debate in Queensland recently had one of those interludes which help to keep politics interesting. One speaker was reported to have said that he could not see "why migrant birds from Siberia should be protected while they fatten up in Australia and then return for the Russians to eat." The discussion which followed, or the small part of it cabled to our newspapers, was perhaps not meant to be taken seriously. Moreover, comment in New Zealand by Dr. R. A. Falla showed that it rested on inaccurate knowledge. The jack-snipe, or godwits, breed mainly in Alaska and the eastern tip of Siberia. "They are not really 'Russians' or 'Communists' at all. You could better call them 'Yankees.'" Nevertheless, it is true that birds cross frontiers. They do not declare themselves, answer questions about their antecedents, or repudiate subversive intention. Can such freedom be permitted?

These ideas are no more absurd than some other notions which have been reported from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Political anxieties and the extremest forms of nationalism have odd results. If we are on the wrong side of the frontier there is no good in us: we are the fallen ones, the untouchables, and safety is to be found only in exclusion and segregation. The present division of the world is a fact in politics. Some day, if there is no improvement in international affairs, it will be a fact in war. We may, however, take a little comfort from the thought that the division is not, and never can be, absolute. Curtains of any sort, iron or bamboo, may be high and closely guarded, but birds can fly across them. Further, if godwits return from New Zealand or Australia to nests in frozen parts of Russia, it is also true that Russian music is played every day in western countries, and without sinister results, though according to Soviet

views even music should be ideological. Literature, too, takes no notice of frontiers. There is, fortunately, a widespread belief that writers cease to be dangerous when they are dead. And although we cannot be sure that Shakespeare has not by now become a Russian (he might have become a German if Nazism had prevailed) it is pleasant to think that Hamlet and Lear are known in Moscow. They were, of course, settled in the country long before Communism. Was it not Lear who inspired the title and central idea of a classic tale by Turgenev? And did not Tchaikovski find two of his most romantic themes in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*?

The Iron Curtain is a flimsy barrier for the arts. Music flies above it as easily as birds; and the stories, legends and ideas of east and west have been enriched by ceaseless traffic. In some of the sciences, especially atomic physics, the traffic is surreptitious, leading to treasons and trials, betrayals and abductions; but the theft of information, where it cannot be obtained freely, illustrates needs which cannot be satisfied in isolation. Although the movement of knowledge becomes sinister when the aim is to make new weapons of war, it is still part of a process which implies the dependence of nations, one upon another. Long ago a genius in Athens wrote a comedy in which the birds were persuaded to build a city in mid-air, thereby cutting off the gods from all intercourse with men. If Aristophanes were writing today, the idea of *The Birds* could be applied differently, though with the same ironic intention. Migratory birds are the only true internationalists. Frontiers are human devices. If birds could see them for a moment, as anything more than shadows of land and sea, there would be laughter in the rustle of their tireless and innocent wings.

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 10, 1952.

more
motorists
use **SHELL**
than any
other
spirit

For Power . . . lively
performance and clean combustion, go for Shell, the
research-backed, power-packed Motor
Spirit. You must have Shell for
best all-round performance.



The Shell Company of New Zealand Limited (Incorporated in England)
K10.2C



Every piece an heirloom

W. T. COPELAND & SONS LTD.
SPODE WORKS
STOKE-ON-TRENT, ENGLAND

Trade Enquiries to:
New Zealand Representative,
J. H. Oldham & Co. Ltd.,
Hannahs Buildings, Lambton Quay,
Wellington.