

USE OF NEW DRUGS

Sir,—I was particularly interested in the letter to you under the above heading from an Auckland correspondent and also in the comments made thereon by the Deputy Director General of the Department of Health.

A member of my family spent several weeks in hospital followed by many weeks at home under private medical attention with acute dermatitis owing to the external use of penicillin and the sulpha drugs, given and used under medical direction. Dr. Turbott's statement "the public are already tending to keep on their shelves these modern drugs and are using them apart from medical advice" does not go far enough. Too many people become hospital inmates, followed by long months of incapacity at home, due to the use of these drugs by medical practitioners who seem to regard them as an easy panacea for all ills, internal and external. Yet I am given to understand that a simple medical test on the skin would advise the medical practitioner if the patient were allergic to these drugs. But, of course, in these days there does not seem to be the time for making such a test.

The patient is ultimately in such a state of hypersensitivity and nervous irritability that the convalescent stage is a protracted one and during that period and even afterwards I understand that the painful reactions can reoccur from the ordinary activities in the home and in the garden.

I would add to what has been said by your Auckland correspondent that there is too much rush today in medical practice. **DISTRESSED** (Wellington).

WRITERS MILITANT

Sir,—It was, I think, Bertrand Russell who suggested that in the event of a third world war New Zealand might be a sort of Noah's Ark, surviving alone, or almost alone, in a world reduced to rubble and ashes. In one of his more recent novels Aldous Huxley used the same idea. If it is true that we have a better chance of survival than most communities, may this not tempt us to take the sort of view of the world peace movement that you, in your editorial article, have put forward? And can we blame the writers, and the general public, of Great Britain, if they take a rather different view? It seems that today, when war is nearer to downright madness than at any previous time, it is impossible to advocate peace without being suspected of treason, or at least of blind complicity in treasonable acts. The Authors' World Peace Appeal is supported by (among hundreds of other writers) Edmund Blunden, Marjorie Bowen, Vera Brittain, Albert Camus, A. E. Coppard, C. Day Lewis, Christopher Fry, William Gerhardi, Dan Davin, Laurence Housman, C. E. M. Joad, Sheila Kaye Smith, Compton Mackenzie, Ethel Mannin, H. J. Massingham, Andre Maurois, Naomi Mitchinson, Sean O'Casey, Eden Philpotts, Herbert Read, Cecil Roberts, Siegfried Sassoon, J. W. Robertson Scott, Edith Sitwell, Dylan Thomas, L. A. G. Strong and Frank Swinnerton. It seems to me to be merely ridiculous to suggest that these people are dupes, and that their "honest aspirations" are being "exploited" in some unproven manner. They, like the millions throughout the world who have signed peace petitions, are simply people who are aware that to prepare for global war without a sustained and genuine campaign for peace (and at the same time to reject out-of-

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hand all Russian peace proposals as having sinister motives) is to make war all but certain.

You suggest to writers who signed the Appeal that there may be "occasions when it would be their simple duty to speak out against evil things" even though this "sharpened existing dangers and hatred." The Authors' World Peace Appeal is the response to just such an occasion—except that it is difficult to see how it can prove dangerous. And if a number of authors make a joint appeal, they can hardly be blamed for doing what trade unionists, business men, farmers, churchmen, public servants, teachers and many other groups do on occasion as a matter of course; and there is no need to assume that they are unaware of the nature of their actions, or that they are being used as tools by scheming politicians. The criticism, by the sponsors of the A.W.P.A., of Priestley (who made a regrettable exhibition of himself over the *Colliers* affair) and of "Pendennis" does not imply any "coercion" or "persecution." These men did not merely refrain from signing the A.W.P.A.: they said publicly (and were gratefully reported by the press to this effect) that the signatories were "mugs." The signatories would certainly be mugs if they let such an irresponsible gibe go unanswered.

The public of New Zealand has heard little or nothing of the case that has been put forward by the peace organisations. The newspapers, cynically refusing to fulfil their proper function, have declared a boycott. Is it not high time we heard some honest and uninhibited discussion of these matters from our radio stations? Or are we already at war, with a complete "security" clamp-down on all essential politics?

A. R. D. FAIRBURN (Auckland).

THE QUIZ KIDS

Sir,—Pot-hunting questioners—mostly women—who are chasing the ten bob by sending in an almost unanswerable question to the Quiz Kids, will kill all interest in this remarkably popular session if they are allowed to continue. Anyone can open a dictionary at random and immediately come across an outlandish word of Greek or Roman or Hebrew or Sanskrit derivation that may never be seen again outside a dictionary. It's not fair to these youngsters. On a recent Friday night at the Auckland session these pot-hunters were in full force, and many listeners were amazed that those responsible for the passing on of the questions to the Quiz Master didn't use a bit of common sense in their selection.

JOHN DESMOND (Mt. Roskill).

THE WRITER AS OUTCAST

Sir,—You recently printed Professor Ian Gordon's advice to writers in New Zealand, who are told not to adopt seclusionist or resentful attitudes towards people with whom they live. There is some suggestion, too, that English writers set a good example in (a) being *Business Men* as well as writers, and (b) looking at the *Simple Life* of the Common Man with unclouded eyes.

Will you permit me to offer to your contributor a low bow, together with the remark that English professors of English are also worthy of emulation. They make a name for themselves by encouraging people to read good books. Of the labours into which Professor Gordon throws himself with such welcome energy, this is still by far the most

urgent. The promise of New Zealand writers is better than their opportunity.

The poets are right and the chiders wrong. The community that cannot tolerate, provide the solace for, and eventually applaud the bitter effort of its young men will get no Shelleys and no Disraelis and—before long—no young men. This is no time to press for separate inspiration in literature, or anything else. We're in a world-age, and the poets are not alone in wanting to explore many moods and far-away places before they come home.

It's very probable that those who expect to have masterpieces placed upon their desks—like those who, a few years ago, had the habit of waiting audibly for The Great New Zealand Novel to appear—must always be disappointed. What they eagerly look for, of course, is the masterpiece that they themselves have never written. When someone else writes it, it's never quite the same.

ERLE ROSE (Wellington).

Sir,—Professor Gordon's remarks seem inconsistent. He suggests, rightly, that the writer as a creative artist must be true to his own individual vision; that is, that he must look out on life through an independent eye. But has he considered what this entails?

An artist's "eye" is himself; and independence of spirit is not to be had for so much a pound in the market. The real artist, the creative artist, the artist who moves the world, must first find a place to stand on; and gradually, by trial and error, he may learn that he can stand on nothing more secure than his own two feet, on himself and his awareness of himself as a person in his own right. This in turn entails that he must be able to make his own decisions and balances and to stand independently from all the mass of accepted conventions and attachments, the easy assumptions and comforting illusions on which the rest of us are happy to rely for our sense of security and continuity and belonging. Once he has found himself he may or may not succeed in moving the world to some purpose. But the achievement of an individual vision in the first place is by no means such a straight line development as Professor Gordon seems to think (e.g., "You don't understand people by running away from them").

In his blind struggle to find himself as a person the artist of the future can expect no help or sympathy from the rest of us—perhaps in order that we may with less embarrassment throw brickbats at him later. We consider it perfectly in order that the future leaders of a culture which we think we cherish should be left to find their own way to selfhood—in so far as they find it at all—by groping through unknown country in darkness and alone.

The making of an artist today is a haphazard process. It can be deeply painful; and it may leave permanent scars. If, in this case, the writer tends either to write about scar tissue or else to reach back to the pre-scar days of childhood, the fault—if it is a fault—is our own.

Professor Gordon cannot have it both ways. If the writer is to be left to find himself as best he may; and if he is to be true to the picture of life as he actually sees it through the windows of that self; then it follows that he can pay but scant heed—and that purely as a matter of passing interest—to Pro-

fessor Gordon's suggestions as to what that picture "ought" to be.

DICK SOUTHOON (Auckland).
(Abridged.—Ed.)

NO CULTURAL AMBITIONS

Sir,—May I suggest that you initiate a column "I know what I dislike" and invite your readers to contribute to it? Will you allow me to make a beginning and say that I dislike your title pages? They seem to lack both taste and imagination, particularly on special occasions. Your Christmas and Easter issues for instance must have seemed offensive to a good Christian, culturally inept to an agnostic, and aesthetically distressing to a pagan. Surely there are enough magnificent pictures of the Nativity and the Resurrection to choose from for

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these festive days, instead of giving us second-rate glamour girls and jazz singers? Why have we not seen any memento to Leonardo da Vinci's 500th Anniversary? Why does *The Listener* never reproduce any masterpieces on its title page?

I suppose we must put up with poor illustrations of the "inside" stories and with "People in the Programme," or at the "Open Microphone" (who incidentally appear over and over again, but I suppose artists and speakers like to see themselves perpetuated in print). But is it too much to ask to have one "decent" picture once in a while, or has *The Listener* no cultural ambitions at all?

VISUAL EDUCATION (Wellington).

THE NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Sir,—The letter from your correspondent P. H. Montague raises the question of the playing standard of the National Orchestra. His questions seem rather pertinent at a time when one reads very little, if any, criticism of the orchestra. I agree with his opinions and suggest that the main trouble would seem to be lack of experience, coupled with the fact that we get very few visiting artists, conductors or orchestras. I think the remedy lies either in more visits from overseas artists or, alternatively, the possible exchange of some of the players of the orchestra with their counterparts in some of the orchestras in the United Kingdom.

Regarding the point of lack of criticism, while I have no wish to make any adverse comments against the critics I think one of the main drawbacks lies in the fact that there are no other orchestras in New Zealand. With only the one thing to judge and no standard of comparison with which to compare it, it becomes hard to make a fair and just criticism.

In spite of the claim that audiences are increasing, until such time as the National Orchestra improves its standard all round, it will never attract sufficient people to make the orchestra a paying proposition or be in a position to reduce its present subsidy.

G. ASHLEY (Hamilton).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"R" (Blenheim).—Thanks. Will pass it on.
M.A.R.M. (Walter Peak).—Afraid it is not possible to identify the singer you mention.
R.J.T. (Auckland).—Sorry, the correspondence has been closed.

M.J.H. (Warkworth).—Is it quite fairly suggested that, at any hour of that day, from any station, you should have been able to hear the sort of programmes you wanted?