

NATURAL CHILDBIRTH

Sir,—Listening to the discussion by a Christchurch panel, I felt my usual wry amusement at hearing the professional belittling Read's contribution to natural childbirth by saying, "This is no new thing—we have known about it for years." If this is so, we women ought to erect a statue to Read as The Man Who Told. Possibly much of the medical opposition to Read springs from his violation of the sacred principle of medical reticence.

Of course, there has always been such a thing as natural childbirth, in so far as there have always been women who had their children comparatively easily. But Read's thesis of the interrelation of fear, tension and pain and his discovery of the application of relaxation techniques has enabled far more women to have their babies without excessive discomfort. There is all the difference, however, between the grin-and-bear-it form of natural childbirth, practised perforce by most mothers when pain-relieving drugs were only for the wealthy, and the relax-and-more-or-less-enjoy-it technique indulged in by followers of the Prophet. The point is, that relaxation techniques must in most cases be learnt well beforehand, or there is little hope of practising them successfully at moments of crisis, even if you have what passes in our hospitals for co-operation—a nurse who from her position of complete invulnerability watches your struggles and says testily, "Come on, you're not trying to relax!"

I was further amused at the naive belief expressed by the doctor on the panel that attending doctor and clinic supplied all the necessary education for childbirth. Every mother knows that it's possible to attend doctors and clinics for several pregnancies without being told much more than the date of your next appointment. And I did laugh at the ex-matron's assertion that a woman in labour receives continual support and encouragement from the nursing staff. Every mother knows that until you're in extremis the staff is usually much too busy. Even then, encouragement is usually limited to being told you're coming on nicely when you're convinced the human frame can stand no more.

MOTHER OF SIX (Wellington).

Sir,—I fear that the Christchurch panel discussion on natural childbirth (2YA, August 26), instead of reducing muddled thinking on the subject, will only serve to increase it. The various members of the panel seemed to have different ideas about the definition of the subject. Natural childbirth, as now understood, is a programme of training in relaxation, and breathing and other exercises (with, of course, some instruction in anatomy) during pregnancy, which enables a woman to have her baby with the minimum of discomfort and the maximum amount of co-operation with her doctor and nurse.

"Preparation" is the big point of natural birth. Women have to learn to relax, which cannot be accomplished on the spur of the moment, but must be practised for many weeks. This relaxing, along with special abdominal breathing, greatly reduces the pain of the contractions in the first stage of labour, and actually quickens the process. A birth under these conditions decreases the need for sedatives, but, of course, drugs are available if required. And a birth such as this can be a most wonderful and satisfying experience, as I have discovered.

Miss E. M. Sparks stated in the broadcast that, in her experience, a

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nurse is with the patient from the minute she begins labour. That does not appear to be so in the majority of New Zealand hospitals. The patient is often left alone for long periods, which can be rather terrifying when a mother is expecting her first baby. She also suggested that it would be sufficient help to the mother to have an attendant who would explain and help her in each stage of labour as it occurred. But this is not enough. The mother should have behind her the confidence of weeks of practising relaxation and the use of the relevant muscles—rather like an athlete training for a big event. After all, having a baby is largely a muscular feat.

Dr. H. T. Knight's remark that natural childbirth is a craze that will be replaced by something different in a year or two seems rather extraordinary, considering that this method is in normal practice in many places overseas. J.C.B. (Wellington).

(Abridged.—Ed.)

MODERN BRITISH COMPOSERS

Sir,—In your issue of August 14, which I have only just read, Mr. John Longmire is reported as having made two untenable assertions—first, that the Victorian era produced only minor British composers, none of real eminence; second, that music has become, in the course of centuries, gradually more discordant and is now preponderantly discordant. "This," says Mr. Longmire, "is natural and inevitable—we must accept it."

It is almost incredible that any musician should utter such nonsense. The 20th Century has as yet produced no British composers of the calibre of Elgar, Hubert Parry, Villiers Stanford, Edward German, Coleridge Taylor, etc. Present-day specimens are, as Mr. Longmire admits, preponderantly discordant, therefore not acceptable as writers of real music. The listening public has shown unmistakably that it will not tolerate "music" written in the so-called modern idiom. Not long ago, Sir Thomas Beecham had to abandon a concert of works by modern British composers, which he was advertised to conduct, simply because there was practically no advance booking.

My reply to Mr. Longmire is that we must not and will not accept dissonance as an inevitable element in today's music or that of the future. The dictionary defines "dissonance" and "discordance" as "harsh, ugly, jarring, clashing sounds, offending the ear by inharmonious combination." No intelligent music-lover will submit to this preposterous noise purporting to represent what Shakespeare calls "the concord of sweet sound."

L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

"LITTLE MURDERESSES"

Sir,—I heartily disagree with J. Ryan and S. Hayman in their mistaken ideas about *Little Murderesses*. If they can't understand that most delightful of all humour, good burlesque, then they are

in need of sympathy for all they must be missing in life. The more outrageous it is, so much the better. Mr. Wall is to be congratulated on this particular burlesque of *Little Women*, also on the very fine way it was acted and produced. As for "horror-thinking," surely there can be no stronger case made against that evil than to treat it with ridicule? As for daring to burlesque *Little Women*, don't we enjoy the same treatment, of say, Shakespeare? Why all the fuss about it? I, for one, could wish for a lot more of this humorous radio fare, and hope that *Little Murderesses* will be broadcast again soon.

EMILY BAIZEEN (Christchurch).

NEW ZEALAND CRITICISM

Sir,—"E.R.H." says: "Now Mr. Curran, Mr. Fairburn and Mr. Keith Sinclair each know (sic) who, between Denis Glover and C. Day Lewis, is the better poet." I should like to know what "better" means here. Faster over seven furlongs? Containing more vitamin B1? More beneficial if massaged into the roots of the hair?

I have a greater respect for Mr. C. Day Lewis than I have for most other English and American poets today, but I fail to see why I should be expected to adopt a servile attitude when dealing with a book of his which, in my view, has serious shortcomings. Nor do I understand why it should be so easily taken for granted that praise of Mr. Denis Glover's work implies that some sort of "double standard" is being used.

Your correspondent speaks of "world standards, meaningful standards." Here, I think, we have the authentic voice of barbarism. Are we soon to have the world tennis ranking system applied to holiness? Is poetry shortly to be graded like export mutton?

A. R. D. FAIRBURN (Auckland).

CHURCH BROADCASTS

Sir,—As I am one of those who believe that, if the present decline in our people's recognition of ethical values is to be halted, religion must be re-established in human society, I am glad indeed to learn that this question has been under discussion in Wellington. On the ministers of the Christian churches rests the duty of awaking the people to a sense of their peril. The needs of the large congregation of listeners must receive special consideration. Long experience as a member of this congregation convinces me that just at this point a good many preachers fail. They say to us what would be appropriate for their own Little Bethel. Consider what a curiously compounded lot we are: believers, agnostics, sick ones, backblockers, travellers by land and sea, simple folk, critical folk. No preacher born of woman could satisfy us all. In this tangle one might reasonably suggest that the preaching should be sincere, well-informed, broadminded, evangelical rather than sacerdotal. A Wellington clergyman suggested "studio" services. I disagree. I like to feel myself included in a congregation, worshipping in a

church, and most preachers make a point of including those who are "present in spirit." Certain aspects of some broadcast services are distressing. The beautiful Communion Service should not be broadcast. This solemn and impressive rite has its proper setting in church. Earnest clergymen are always ready to celebrate with sick folks in their homes. In any case, this service, as celebrated by a particular church, can make little or no appeal to the majority in the composite congregation, quite unfamiliar with the form used.

LISTENER (Auckland).

PASTEURISATION

Sir,—Having nursed cases of typhoid and undulant fevers, I think that the people who insist on raw milk should be lectured on the sufferings and complications of the patients with those illnesses. I listened to the panel discussing "Raw versus Pasteurised Milk," and it appears that the right of choice is the point at issue. I wonder if people realise that, if we did not have pasteurisation of cream, we would have no butter during the winter months.

J. C. RALPH-SMITH (Christchurch).

WORLD GOVERNMENT

Sir,—Your article of August 21 outlining the movement for World Federal Government shows that world unity is the goal towards which evolution is moving. Once we all see the pattern of life as a whole, we shall realise that the ingredients are waiting.

A world government will make it possible to organise an economy giving all a share of the world's plenty; education and the right to work, also a universal religion embracing all other religions. If this is to be brought about, we need spiritual leaders, and more important still, the right education for our children. It will only be when spiritual concerns are put first in our lives that we will bring forth good fruit. Through war and suffering, civilisation has been crucified, but after crucifixion comes resurrection, a fresh start for reconstruction. The formation of a world government should engage our first attention, for upon its success everything else depends. E.H.F. (Wellington).

THE EARL OF SUFFOLK

Sir,—I feel it only fair to the memory of the late Earl of Suffolk to protest against the garbled version of his life broadcast recently over 12B by John Nesbitt in *Passing Parade*. Lord Suffolk had been interested in some of London's theatrical ventures before we left Southampton on the Ruahine on December 18, 1925. The Earl was quiet and well bred, and the very antithesis of roistering. He was not then known as Jack Howard, and his "big bushy moustache" was but a neat affair. True, he had served before the mast, but he always said his mother was responsible for this in order to toughen him up.

We landed at Wellington about January 25, 1926, not in March, and he proceeded to his Australian sheep station, which was not called Charlton Park, that being the name of his English home. Unfortunately, I was unable to accept his kind invitation to join him at his station, and we therefore parted company.

JOHN V. McMANUS (Auckland).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT
David S. Marshall (Auckland).—The report has been confirmed.

MORE NEWS FROM NEPAL

"BACK FROM THE HIMALAYAS," a report by the New Zealand climbers Athol Roberts, Graham McCallum, Philip Gardner and Morris Bishop, on their return from Nepal, will be broadcast in a National Link of the YA and YZ stations at 6.45 p.m. on Tuesday, September 15, in place of Radio Newsreel. All four members of this 1953 New Zealand Himalayan Expedition will speak in the programme. Subsequently there will be a series of talks on the Expedition, starting on Thursday, October 1, at 9.15 p.m., in a National Link.