

This Week's Special Article

Read One Hundred Letters To The Editor

AN authority once wrote: "Anonymity is the institution on which the peculiar success of British journalism is founded." If this might be applied equally to the entire Press of the Empire, might it not also be extended to amateur journalists, contributors to the correspondence columns of the daily weekly Press—the Pro Bono Publico's of every hole and corner of New Zealand?

I wonder.

One peculiarity of New Zealand Press correspondence is most marked—its lack of weighty signatures. Is this because there is a more democratic flavour about the columns headed "Letters to the Editor," or is it because the weighty signatures can find a place so much more easily in the news columns?

I wonder again.

Though lack of signature and authority characterise correspondence column contributors in New Zealand, it is not to say that the opinions they express are either less sound or provocative—it is merely that they are expressed, so often behind the cover of either nonentity or anonymity. The "Record," for instance, receives a steady, if not a swollen, stream of correspondence from its readers which some might regard as a cross-section of listener opinion. In a mood of curiosity I recently perused a file of the "Radio Record" and made notes on one

A CONTRIBUTOR who, with nice humour, signs himself "Pro Bono Publico" here analyses a hundred letters to the Editor of the "Record" and makes a few thoughtful remarks about correspondents to the New Zealand Press.

hundred successive letters from readers touching the activities of the National Broadcasting Service. The percentage of letters on Commercial Service matters being too small to analyse with any

accuracy, I left them entirely out of account.

The number of correspondents who signed their names was six, the remaining ninety-four were anonymous! This must surely go on record as an overwhelming tribute to the modesty of New Zealanders. (Home papers please copy).

And out of these hundred listener-correspondents, what proportion filled the air with wails of complaint? Precisely nineteen (19) appeared to have specific objections to either programmes, announcers, the Parliamentary broadcasts, or something else. The remaining one-and-eighty all wrote approving either the announcers or programme material, or made constructive suggestions. And regarding the suggestions, it should be understood that this little survey did not take into account any letters that were published on the page headed "Your Side of the Microphone."

One thing the analysis of the hundred letters showed—it was that there is a broader spirit of tolerance abroad among listeners than is generally understood. To set forth the various objections, suggestions and compliments in detail would take much space and probably prove nothing, but there is an outstanding aspect of this "Letters to the Editor" question and that is that the classical music devotee is a dumb dog. He evidently declines to permit himself the luxury (Continued on next page.)

In the Wake of the Week's Broadcasts:

It is a sad fact, known to every newspaper man, that one slip will attract more attention from his readers than one hundred noble efforts at good writing. And it is precisely the same with

THIS SPOILS THE GOOD EFFECT.

radio work. When Station 2ZB announced that Mr. Montagu Norman, chairman of the Bank of England, would speak over the air, and half an hour later told listeners that it was not Mr. Norman, but a Sir Montague Burton who had spoken, much value was straightway lost from a good effort to give listeners a live programme. It is an unhappy but amusing trait in mankind that it gives full marks for the defects of its

friends and half marks for their virtues.

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So Chaliapin is dead! On the evening the sad news was received by cable from Paris, 2YA paid a dignified tribute to the great Russian basso during its news session, underlining the brief recorded sketch of his career by playing his recording of Varlaam's song, "In the Town of Kazan," from Moussorgsky's opera, "Boris Godounov." Kazan, incidentally, was his birthplace. Chaliapin's gorgeous voice is perpetuated in his superb recordings, and

THE PASSING OF A VOLGA BOATMAN.

generations as yet unborn will hear him in his native operas and folk songs, one especially, "The Song of the Volga Boatmen." It was a rare experience to hear this song sung by one who, years ago, was actually a Volga boatman. In a minor capacity, Chaliapin obtained employment with the local opera company, but it was so unremunerative that he was forced to increase his earnings by acting as porter in the railway station and helping unload the barges along the wharves of the Volga. This humble interlude in his career, however, served to enhance the brilliance of a certain jewel in the crown of his later success. No one has, or ever will, sing the "Song of the Volga Boatmen" as