

# The Listener

Published every Thursday by The British Broadcasting Corporation



Detail from Botticelli's 'Primavera': the goddess Flora

*Anderson*

**Works of Art in the Firing Line**

(see page 235)

# The Listener

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## America's Confidence in Mr. Roosevelt

By JOSEPH C. HARSCH

IF anything more is needed to testify to American approval of the actions of the Crimea Conference, it is the fact that during this second week after the results became known,\* there was almost literally no further discussion of them. The Isolationist minority did its best to spread the idea that the Crimea represented an abdication by the west to Russia, particularly over Poland. And there were a few sparks flying last week; but when a fire dies out as quickly as this one did, there is obviously very little inflammable material to ignite. The whole controversy seemed to end on a semi-comedy note over the difficulties the President and General de Gaulle had in getting together—or not getting together.

It was not entirely harmless, of course. The American people yield to no others in their freedom to criticise their own head of state; but they do not like it quite so well when outsiders do it. General de Gaulle's snub to the President rubbed away some French credit with American public opinion. And that credit is not thick enough to stand very much more such erosion. If the President and your Prime Minister could travel all the way to the Crimea to see Marshal Stalin, it is difficult to explain to anyone here why the head of the Provisional French Government could not travel at least from Paris to the Mediterranean to see the President. I do not want to make too much of this incident. Its importance lies only in the fact that there was more interest in this and other relatively minor and passing phases of the Crimean affair than in the controversy which Isolationists tried to stir up unsuccessfully. America did not record this week any deep feeling that injustice had been done to the Poles, or that Marshal Stalin had carried any points at Yalta which were unfair or unjustified. I think that

one of the more accurately expressive aftermaths of the whole Crimean saga, was a cartoon in the local *Washington Star*. It portrayed the President sitting comfortably at his fireside, reading *Tales of a Travelling Man* to little John Q. Public, gazing up from the hearth-rug and saying, 'I love that part about King Ibn Saud and the destroyer. But tell me about Ed Flynn and the magic carpet'.

Ed Flynn is a fairly renowned New York State politician who once had some difficulties over a shipment of Belgian paving-blocks which were apparently rather expensive. He had been out of the public eye for some time and then turned up as a traveller, with the presidential party to the Crimea—he on his way to Moscow. All of which probably sounds extremely trivial to you at a time when so much of vital importance is going on. Yet I think it is revealing that America—two weeks after the Crimea Conference—is seeing it in these light and easy terms. America is curious, in an entirely digressionary way, about why Ed Flynn does go to Moscow; which is a trivial thing. America is curious about General de Gaulle's touchiness, which is also a minor thing. But it is not arguing about the serious aspects of the Crimean decisions. This is the evidence that it has accepted them; has accepted the steps which lead from them and the aims which lie ahead, at the foot of the Golden Gate in San Francisco on April 25. And accepted them beyond the point of acute public controversy.

America had such a thing as that Crimea Conference in mind when it re-elected Mr. Roosevelt last autumn; many and many an American thinks of both your Prime Minister and Marshal Stalin as being extremely shrewd and rather tough poker-players. There were

\* Broadcast on February 25

# Points from Letters

THE LISTENER undertakes no responsibility for the views expressed by its correspondents

## Nazism and Humanism

May I reply to Mr. H. B. Atkins by saying that men do indeed create their own moral and aesthetic values. The Platonic myth that values lie right outside human nature, and would exist even if there were no men to observe them, is no longer convincing. The Nazis have neither created nor respected any of the civilised and humane values so far achieved by reason and imagination, and their work is certainly not marvellous in my eyes, as Mr. Atkins seems to think. I do believe that the social and ethical order of humanity is the supreme reality on earth, and I know nothing of values beyond the stratosphere.

The criteria by which any philosophy or political system must be judged are surely those of the highest well-being of the entire human race. By such standards Nazism fails completely, for its values are related to what is conceived to be the well-being of the *Herrenvolk* alone. It would be interesting to know Mr. Atkins' definition of the word 'totalitarianism'. If the totality is that of the human race, I gladly admit that I am a totalitarian.

Edgware

G. A. ALLAN

## Poetry in War Time

Mr. Reed is of course entitled to his tastes. It is only natural that he should account for my distaste for the typical modern poet on the assumption that the fault is not in him that he is precious, esoteric and artistically embryonic but in me that I am a philistine—'and proud of it'. Indeed, after a duly appreciative reading of his succulent letter I would say I revel in the attribution from such a critic. So 'Rupert Brooke's talents were of the slightest'. His five war-sonnets 'show a defect of imagination which in a poet is serious to the point of catastrophe'. Now we know! After this, to call Mr. Reed a prig would be insipid. I prefer to say instead that I believe these and other passages in Mr. Reed's letter will survive as classics of the Higher (literary) Criticism.

But Mr. Reed is wrong. I am not a philistine, but, rather, a *Finishtine*. That is I believe that there is no true creation without toil and torment, that the activity indulged in by the mis-called poets of today (the fashionable ones, that is) lacks the *afflatus* and is essentially uncreative, that this modern poetry is by any serious artistic standards of former times a great sham, a prodigious bubble and a naive hoax. I believe, in short, in a rather old-fashioned way that art of all kinds is a matter of pattern, form and finish, not the noise made by an aggrieved and bewildered adolescent trying to get something off his chest. Even in the case of the most sincere, serious, interesting and gifted of these modern poets such as Keyes and Alun Lewis, I would say that the poets of an older day began where these leave off. It is true that many modern poets do not, superficially, lack form but it is imposed, inorganic. Specifically modern poems are of two kinds: (a) cerebral word-jugglings or aerostics, and (b) the result of a feeling in the young poet-impressionist that 'there is a poem there'. The poet of the older generation knew that he had to write it.

Most instructive of all is the reason Mr. Reed gives for denying Brooke 'any particular poetic merit', namely that he took a romantic view of

war, unlike other poets who 'saw what war was really like'. One must give Mr. Reed full marks for the uncompromising honesty of his views, but could anything be more crude than this confusion of point of view with power and quality of utterance in expressing it? If to Brooke 'death in battle appeared lovely', it was perhaps from Homer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Burns, Campbell, Browning or Tennyson that he got the eccentric idea. In any case poets are not war correspondents but immortalisers of moods. That fine and true critic Earle Welby put the point definitively thus: 'The question with a poet must always be of what value his thought is to *him*, not to us. Philosophically it may be almost worthless: if it can call into vivid activity his peculiar powers, it will possess the only kind of value we can rightly attach to thought in poetry'.

Poole

GEORGE RICHARDS

There is too much high falutin' talk about the responsibility of the poet to society. If, in his art, a poet is to be responsible to society at all, he must be wholly himself, *i.e.*, completely irresponsible: with something of the spirit and moods of Pan, St. Paul, J. M. Barrie and Charlie Chaplin allowed free play to be juxtaposed—to blow as the spirit listeth, *i.e.*, exactly as he may be inspired. The only condition that society must make is that its poet sings: not necessarily in metres and rhymes, but in cadences and rhythms; that his meaning or message is magic not logic, politics or metaphysics; that it is a thing of beauty and abandon like 'Kubla Khan' or 'The Ancient Mariner', nor a pundit's dissertation or a doctor's prescription. Edwin Muir, Vernon Watkins, Norman Nicholson, Henry Treece, Clifford Dymont, Lieutenant Popham have some of this music and magic: and the vogue is all for a return to metrical and even rhymed forms, contrary to Mr. Hunter's impression.

Hampstead

FREDOON KABRAJI

## Life in a Children's Hospital

We have just been listening to a highly idealised version of life in a children's hospital. For the past two or more years we have been patients in a children's orthopaedic hospital.

The attitude of the Matron and Sister in the programme, extremely sweet and concerned about the happiness of staff and patients, is not, we are afraid, typical of that normally experienced by staff and patients alike. Usually one finds that more attention is paid to the superficial appearance of the ward than to the comfort and well-being of those in it. Although this seems slightly exaggerated it is, in fact, an understatement. The normal attributes of childhood are noise, untidiness, etc, but these are absolutely forbidden. The mere suggestion that a hospital is a place for a patient's welfare, let alone a patient's comfort, is frowned upon by the whole hierarchy.

Food is often of a very inferior quality. For confirmation of this read a recent issue of *The Lancet*. There is never a choice, one is not even allowed to refuse one's food. A patient is never credited with a mind of his own, and is never consulted about the smallest detail in his personal welfare. We could write very much more

on this subject, but perhaps you would do us the honour of publishing this letter. For obvious reasons please do not mention our names.

THREE PATIENTS

## Inoculation Against Diphtheria

Despite Mr. Bayly's assertion in your recent issue, let me repeat, serum is not used in the prophylaxis of diphtheria.

All preparations used for this purpose consist essentially of 'toxoid', *i.e.* the actual toxin produced by the living culture of the diphtheria organism (*Corynebacterium diphtheriae*) which have been rendered harmless in various ways. I am as well aware as he that in one of these the antitoxin from immune serum is used, but the essential part is still the toxin and the final precipitate is freed carefully in its preparation from all other parts of the serum. Moreover the preparation used in the immunisation of small children in the best modern practice is one in which the toxin has been precipitated with alum (A.P.T.).

It is essential to keep the distinction between these preparations and serum in mind, even for the 'intelligent layman', since in the first place the immunity which they confer is relatively long-lasting as opposed to the short period of passive immunity conferred by large doses of serum, and secondly, untoward reactions are very unlikely to follow if serum is given for other purposes. Moreover, if a child has been given serum it is not immune for any length of time unless it has the actual disease as well, and its parents should remember this. True, many serums also are highly refined these days, but they do not stimulate the production of active immunity as the toxoids do.

In a general journal I refrain from quoting the most extensive literature.

Coulson R. E. REWELL, M.D., M.R.C.P.

## The German 'P' and 'B'

Contrary to Mr. Cooper, I fully agree with Mr. Wickham Steed concerning the difficulty which Germans find in distinguishing between 'p' and 'b'. But I would refrain from generalising as I think the Prussians—Borussians—are not affected whereas the southern Germans—Bavarians and Austrians—have often given cause for amusing misunderstandings by confusing 'p' and 'b', *e.g.* *Gepaeck* and *Gebaeck*.

MARGARET T. LEONHARDT-SEIDLER

Crawley

Those interested in this subject may like to hear the story of the German, who, wishing to buy butter in occupied France, asked of the shop assistant: 'Tu as peur, hein?' She very proudly snapped: 'Moi? Je n'ai pas peur', and was astonished to hear the laconic demand: 'Alors, si tu n'as pas peur je prendrai du fromage'.

Menai Bridge

FRANK MINCHIN

## White Bread

Mr. Howard would have us eat white bread because it gives relief to those suffering from colitis. There is a bread available for diabetics. Perhaps he would suggest that its use should become general.

Hanwell.

C. BIRKBECK