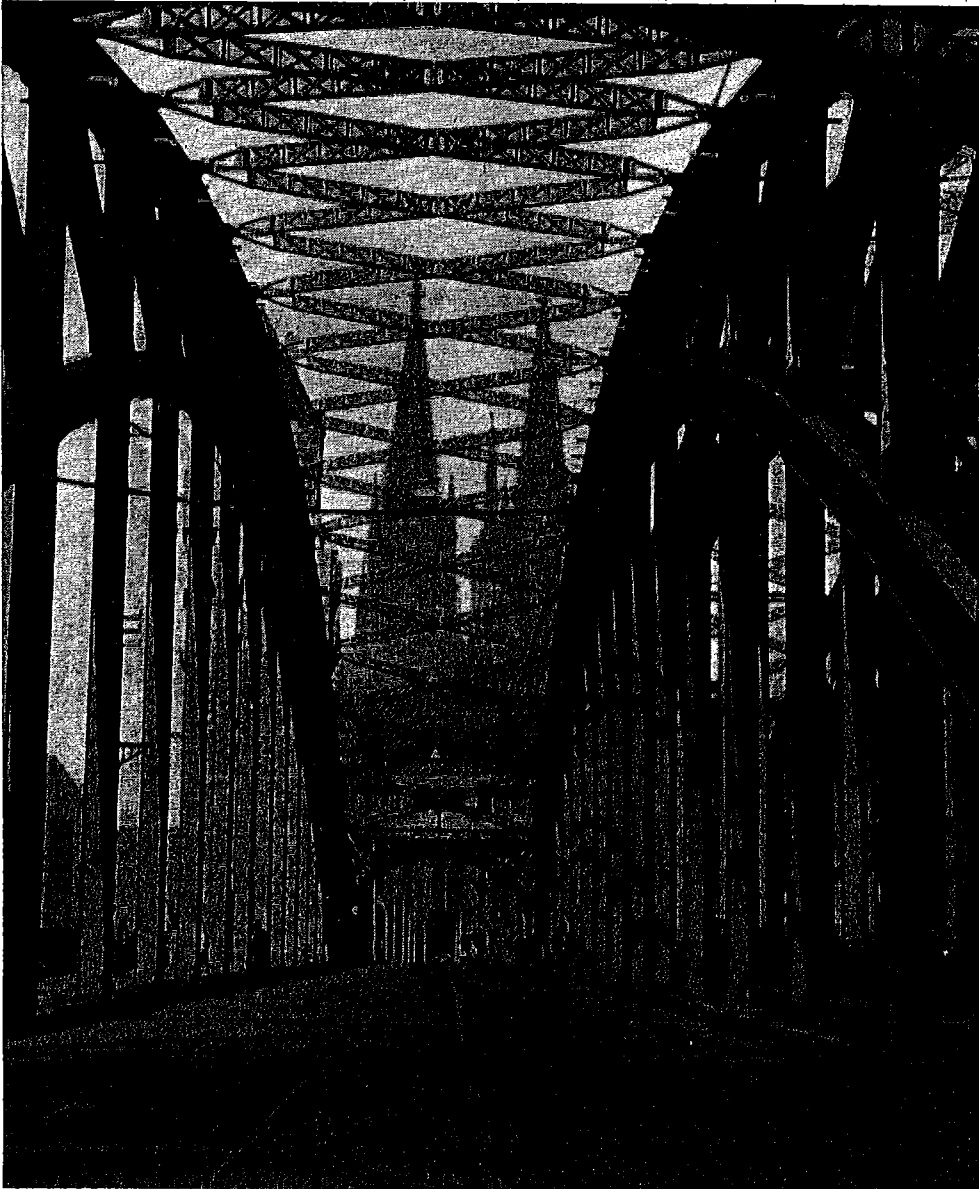


The Listener

Published every Thursday by The British Broadcasting Corporation



Cologne Cathedral seen through the girders of the Hohenzollern Bridge.

The Battle for the Rhine

(see pages 260 and 266)

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Germany's Tightened Belt (Leonard Ingrams) | 257 |
| Romain Rolland and the Hero (E. M. Forster) | 269 |

THE WORLD TODAY:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Should We Call a Halt to Science? (C. E. M. Joad and J. D. Bernal) | 255 |
| Congress and the President's Speech (Alistair Cooke) | 259 |
| Laying Mines in Enemy Waters (Rear-Admiral R. K. Dickson) | 263 |
| Four Years of Aerial Minelaying (Richard Dimbleby) | 265 |

THE LISTENER:

| | |
|---|-----|
| The Last Ditch? | 260 |
| What They Are Saying (foreign broadcasts) | 260 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| DID YOU HEAR THAT? (microphone miscellany) | 261 |
|--|-----|

| | |
|------------|-----|
| NEWS DIARY | 266 |
|------------|-----|

CORRESPONDENCE:

| | |
|---|-----|
| Letters from Herbert Ward, Sir Muirhead Bone, Henry Reed, M. Beddow Bayly and E. S. Lindley | 271 |
|---|-----|

GARDENING:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Answers to Questions (C. H. Middleton) | 271 |
|--|-----|

ART:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Velazquez: A Great Spaniard (John Russell) | 272 |
|--|-----|

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| THE LISTENER'S BOOK CHRONICLE | 273 |
|-------------------------------|-----|

CRITIC ON THE HEARTH:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Broadcast Drama (Philip Hope-Wallace) | 276 |
| The Spoken Word (Martin Armstrong) | 276 |
| Broadcast Music (W. McNaught) | 276 |

MUSIC:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Brahms and the Symphony (Colin Mason) | 277 |
|---------------------------------------|-----|

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| THE HOUSEWIFE IN WAR TIME | 279 |
|---------------------------|-----|

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| CROSSWORD NO. 782 | 279 |
|-------------------|-----|

Should We Call a Halt to Science?

A discussion between C. E. M. JOAD and J. D. BERNAL

C. E. M. JOAD: I'll tell you why I want to call a halt to science. It seems to me that science goes on giving us powers which are dangerous because we don't know how to use them; that our knowledge of how to live as individuals, our knowledge of how to live together in societies, hasn't really increased since the time of the Greeks, but our powers have increased enormously. Take the aeroplane. Here you have got men of genius by the dozen, men of talent by the hundred, labouring to produce a machine which is heavier than air, yet will remain in the air. What knowledge of mathematics, what power to tap the hidden forces of the earth are involved in the making of the internal combustion engine! What intrepidity and courage on the part of the early airmen! Now look at the uses to which the aeroplane has been put in the past: to drop bombs that burn and destroy and mutilate, frequently quite defenceless people. So that if the superman made the aeroplane, the ape in man has got hold of it.

It seems to me that this process isn't going to stop—that there is no limit to the increase of our powers. In fifty years' time science may have learned how to harness the power of the tides; conceivably in a hundred to release the forces locked up in the atom. Given our present wisdom, our present conception of ethics and politics, what use can we be expected to make of those powers? Isn't it fairly obvious that we shall do ourselves in altogether? The thing, it seems to me, is pretty simple, really; take a schoolboy and give him an air-gun; he can break a few windows, shoot a sparrow or two, and that is the extent of the damage; give him a modern tommy-gun and you turn him into a public danger. You don't give children dangerous toys to play with until you know they can use them without harming themselves; you don't give the baby a box of matches.

Now I don't think we can expect our ability to control the powers science has given us to increase commensurately with the powers. And

therefore the time has come to consider—how shall I put it?—not so much arresting scientific research, as putting a veto upon publication of scientific results; so as not to let loose on the community a flood of new inventions before we have learnt to manage them without destroying ourselves.

J. D. Bernal: The question of powers and the ability to use them doesn't disturb me as much as it disturbs you, Joad. I think that in fact an analysis of history shows that the two grow on together. In fact the only way you learn how to use powers is by having them to misuse. You talk about dangerous toys. Actually if you never gave children dangerous toys even, if you never allowed them to play with matches or walk in places where they might fall down, they would never develop the restraint—the capacity to manage their lives at all. But I really want to ask this: Who are *we*? What is this community we are talking about? To whom, in fact, has the power of science been given? And here you see clearly that it isn't gifts of science to the ordinary man which have made the difference. It is the use of science by the powers in the world—by the people who actually control things in this world—that's what we really object to. Science has grown up as part of the same movement, as an off-shoot of the great commercial industrial movement that we call capitalism. It has never got clear of it. Not until recently, and then only in the Soviet Union. Now your original scientists—your Bacons, even Newtons—thought of science simply as a new means to enrich individual people. They considered, according to the philosophy of their times, that if everybody were making as much money as they could the whole community would be better off; and so the scientist, by enabling the business man to increase his profits, was creating a public benefit. Now, that did work for a time. But conditions have changed. It is now that very capitalist philosophy and practice which prevents the full use of science. It has grown restrictive and monopolistic and has caused the cycles of

Points from Letters

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Nazism and Humanism

Your correspondent G. A. Allan says: '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', but what would he think of a dog living near the Great West Road who declared that the Rule of the Road was a dog-made set of values which did not exist in the absence of traffic along that particular section of it? Would Mr. Allan prophesy a long life for a dog holding such views? Why, the screeching of brakes which has followed man's adoption of a similar fallacy is still loud in our ears.

London, S.W.7

HERBERT WARD

Sir William Rothenstein

In his sympathetic words on the late Sir William Rothenstein, D. S. MacColl does not happen to mention a striking characteristic—the many and ready letters of appreciation 'Will' wrote to his fellow-artists about their work. The private trouble he took there resulted, I think, in great public good, for nothing puts new heart into an artist (and ours is a wearing profession) more than the praise of a brother-artist.

And of an elder artist: for it was not to lumber an arrived man with helping hand that he wrote, but rather to the young, needy and unpopular—casting about as well to find purchasers for the work of his unknown friends. Nevermore will come those letters (in his exquisite calligraphy) and they will be missed. He took trouble when and where he need not have done—surely not the worst of lines in an epitaph.

MUIRHEAD BONE

Poetry in War Time

Rupert Brooke's romantic view of war was not the reason I gave for denying him 'any particular poetic merit'. It was the reason, I suggested, for his popularity. Mr. Richards has, however, lost sight of what he first wrote to ask. He is now, with Major Hunter, out in the open, developing a broader and more familiar theme: that modern poetry is, for the most part, uninspired, ungifted, shapeless, formless, artificial, adolescent and as often as not hysterical. The Muse has withdrawn herself. Reasons? None.

Nor indeed have Major Hunter's and Mr. Richards's predecessors in past centuries ever been able to suggest a reason for the perennial absurdity of the contemporary. For it must not be thought that it is a new situation they are deploring. 'Q's' grandfather, reading a poem of Tennyson, described it as 'prolix and modern'. There is nothing to show that years earlier the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge were less coldly received. We know what the *Quarterly* thought of Keats. And it is inconceivable that to the conservative the later versification of Shakespeare can have seemed other than uncouth to those brought up on Marlowe. One cannot convince this point of view; one can only point out that it is immemorial. Reasons? One only: that it is an ineradicable human belief (so great is our fear of the creative) that only the dead are harmless and praiseworthy. Is it insignificant that Mr. Richards selects for a meagre word of praise only Keyes and Lewis from among those I wrote about; and that those two poets are the only ones who are dead?

There is only one other point I wish to refer to: when Major Hunter and Mr. Richards demand 'finish', they are not really disagreeing with me, as they will see if they can bear to re-read the second of my articles. There are, however, different opinions as to what constitutes finish, and I am arrogant enough to believe I can usually distinguish between the bitterly-achieved artistry of the true poet (however original), and the glibness of the *pasticheur*; and impolite enough to doubt if, judging from their admiration for Brooke, they can. I must add that I believe 'pattern, form and finish' to be only part of poetry; to put them at their highest they are only co-equal with what poetry has to say. I do not believe, with Major Hunter, that 'to turn a commonplace sentimentality into poetry is the mark of a poet'; I believe that sentimentality and commonplace will corrupt even the brightest gifts, and that, setting aside the charm of light verse, the best poetry is the repository, not of platitude and banality, but of wisdom.

May I be allowed to add that since writing my last letter I have read the American edition of Mr. Auden's verse and prose commentary on 'The Tempest', and that I share almost all of Mr. Geoffrey Grigson's warm and understandable enthusiasm for it?

Bletchley

HENRY REED

Inoculation Against Diphtheria

Dr. Rewell still maintains that the B.B.C. were in error. He writes: 'Let me repeat, serum is not used in the prophylaxis of diphtheria', and is apparently under the impression that saying a thing twice proves it to be true. He goes on: 'All preparations used for this purpose consist essentially of "toxoid", i.e. the actual toxin produced by the living culture of the diphtheria organism which have (sic) been rendered harmless in various ways'. The fact of its consisting essentially of "toxoid", i.e. the actual toxin pro-statement, for which I gave scientific evidence, that T.A.F. also contains serum, both being combined together in the final precipitate. In fact, Dr. Rewell admits this further on in his letter when he explains that this 'precipitate is freed carefully in its preparation from all other parts of the serum'. I am as well aware as he is that the precipitate is washed, but if all the serum were removed thereby there would be no sense in adding it in the first place.

Evans' Journal (November, 1938, Vol. 4, No. 2, page 64), published by the Evans Biological Institute, states: 'It [T.A.F.] is a good immunising agent, but has the same disadvantages as T.A.M. resulting from the horse protein in its composition' (italics mine). These disadvantages, the chief of which is that the patient is rendered allergic or sensitive to subsequent injections of serum, rule out Dr. Rewell's claim that the prophylactic is harmless. Moreover, in the Therapeutic Substances Regulations, 1931 (page 23), it is laid down that the toxicity of Diphtheria Prophylactic must be reduced to a low value (i.e., not obliterated) and the tests insisted upon before it can be issued for inoculation are: (1) that five human doses when injected into each of five guinea-pigs shall not kill them within six days after injection; and (2) that one human dose thus injected shall not kill the guinea-pigs within thirty days after injection. It is quite clear, therefore, that potentially the prophylactic (toxoid) cannot be considered harmless; in

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M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.

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Spraying and Bees

On page 185 of your issue for February 15 you print advice from Mr. C. H. Middleton to enquire, that he spray open blossom of raspberries with derris, nicotine or arsenic of lead and saying that this will not injure more than the few bees which may actually be hit by it spray. This is correct as far as derris and nicotine are concerned, but most harmful in the case of arsenic, which wipes out whole colonies of apiaries.

When an arsenical spray is unavoidable 1 per cent. of lime-sulphur should be added to make it nasty to the bees. When used on open blossom the arsenic poisons the pollen which the bees collect and take home to their brood poisoning the nursery as well as themselves: this is not prevented by lime-sulphur or anything else. No competent authority recommends the spraying of open blossom with arsenic: for years the Ministry of Agriculture have warned of the danger in their bulletins and in their advisory and propaganda services. Arsenic neither nor should have been included by Mr. Middleton, as derris and nicotine were quite sufficient.

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Hon. Secretary, Honey Producers' Association

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Question: Which is best for killing soil pest a hard winter with plenty of frost, or a mild open winter, which enables the birds to find the insects?—(J. W. F., Worksop)

Reply: I should favour the mild winter. Birds and moles would certainly account for a good many pests; but I think the insects in the soil are well able to protect themselves against frost.

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Reply: They may have been annual weeds which are not serious so long as the lawn is being mown. If they appear again in the spring give a dressing of lawn sand. Or mix three parts sulphate of ammonia with one part sulphate of iron, and sprinkle it over the weed patches in dry weather. But it is no use doing this until the weeds appear.

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