

★ "Please Can You Tell Me...?" ★



INQUIRER: Is that the broadcasting station?"

Telephone Operator: Yes, and the cricket scores are five for one-five four."

Inquirer: "That's great; have they watered the wicket?"

Telephone Operator: "Sorry, there's nothing through yet."

And that sort of conversation, only a few years ago, showed what many New Zealanders had uppermost in their minds. Lords and The Ashes were BIG NEWS!

Naturally, during the last five years, inquiries have been directed, for the most part, towards war news, working up to how many atomic bombs had been dropped and how many days off would be allowed for the peace celebrations. But the casual inquirer, with his queries about chess problems and the date of some long-forgotten sensation such as the Lorraine Balloon Disaster, is still active, as 2YA's diary shows.

"Has the Mayor of Wellington a wooden leg?" is one inquiry on record, and then there is the man who asked 2YA where he could hire a bicycle. Though it has been explained scores of times that the singer, John Charles Thomas, is *not* a Negro, the belief that he is coloured still persists strongly. Announcers are sometimes telephoned for tips on pronunciation. One was recently asked if "louse" was accented in the name of the song, "Jealousy."

Race meetings arouse prolific inquiries for turf data. Has Kindergarten any offspring? And who trained Sasanof for the Melbourne Cup? But two of the best came from the man who blamed 2YA for "holding race meetings on wet days," and the other who thought it was the fault of the announcer that his horse had not romped home.

Lost Dogs and Missing Words

Always with extreme politeness, the operator tries to satisfy questioners, but it was with some quiet personal satisfaction that she answered the man who complained about the dullness of a certain session. This happened to be the

Listeners' Own Session. Then there was the ship's stewardess who was in despair because she couldn't find anyone who would give her a pet dog. Could 2YA help?

Lots of people want the words of songs, but here the law of copyright enters. They are not so difficult to attend to, however, as the person who whistles tunelessly over the telephone and says: "Now, can you tell me the name of that?" Frequently the questions show a biographical or historical twist. For instance, there was an earnest inquiry about the age of King Christian of Denmark, and the names of the Governors-General of New Zealand since 1915.

Person-To-Person

Recent close-down periods to conserve electricity have produced complaints that listeners' sets are not working or that the transmitter has broken down. Popular misconceptions of the functions of radio are many, for during the preliminary peace proposals concerning Japan, shopkeepers telephoned to ask if and when they were to close their shops, while one listener was vituperative towards the whole of the broadcasting service because her shopkeeper had sold out of bread. For some reason a country listener had taken a dislike to an announcer or something he had said. She went to the extraordinary length of putting through a person-to-person call to tell him what she thought of him.

What instrument does George Formby play? Has Jessie Matthews ever been to New Zealand? Is it raining in New Plymouth? What is the real meaning of sedition? Where are the premises of the French Club? How do you pronounce Chaliapin? Are there any wallabies in New Zealand?

So it goes on, day after day. The staff make every endeavour to give satisfaction. Meantime the diary is filling up. Many a newspaper man has kept a cutting-book of paper misprints which range from the delightfully humorous to the "unprintable." Station 2YA's diary has something of the same fascination, in the sidelights it throws on human curiosity.



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