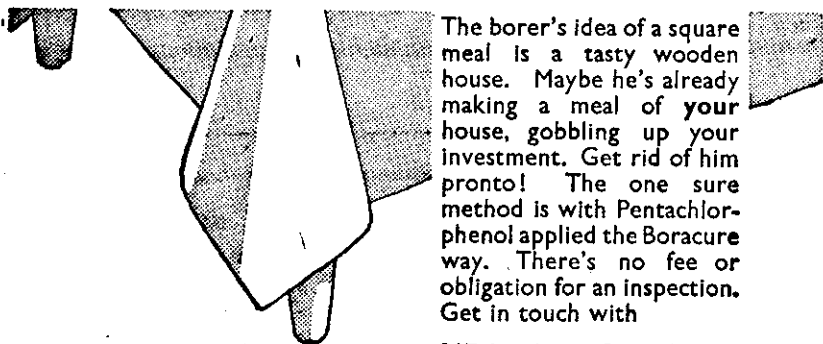




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The Bible is Still the Best Seller

"HUNDREDS of millions who never read before will learn to read in the next decade. It is one of the major revolutions of history."

THUS did the Rev. J. W. Platt, English Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, answer *The Listener's* inquiry why he came to New Zealand. "As a 'Director' of the world's largest bookselling enterprise," he went on, "I have come to report to my New Zealand shareholders and to get their co-operation in the enormous expansions we have planned. Of course this commercial metaphor is purely metaphor," he commented. "The Bible Society, as everyone knows, exists to serve, not to profit. Its employees, like those of every religious body, draw just a living wage, and 'a share' in its work means a contribution, not a claim to some disbursement. New Zealand sent £20,000 to the Society last year. It is very fitting—and significant—that this year, the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the New Zealand branch, should see that Branch in consultation, through myself, with all the other Branches throughout the world on the biggest job we have yet tackled."

"So you are on a world tour, Mr. Platt?"

"No, not I. That would be far too slow. The Society's six 'Executives' are each consulting an area simultaneously and we meet on May 6 in London to complete the plans. One of the six is in Finland at present, another in Canada, another in Brazil. The fourth, who was in Japanese hands through the war, is returning from China. The fifth has spent six months in Paris to get the 'feel' of the new Europe. . . . The B.F.B.S. is an auxiliary to the whole Christian Movement throughout the world, all sections included, and we have to know the world if we are to serve it."

Literary Revolution

I asked to hear more about "the literary revolution" that these investigators were concerned to make provision for.

"Drives against illiteracy, which hitherto has been the normal condition of the great mass of mankind, are nothing new," replied Mr. Platt. "For example, Japan made itself practically 100 per cent. literate in one generation some 70 years ago. And Russia made terrific advances in the 'twenties and the 'thirties. But the war, by shaking us all together, has made it impossible for any community to survive whose people have not some smattering of modern techniques. There have been 45 million new readers in China since the war began, and I could tell you also of Mexico, where two years ago every literate was required by law to teach one

illiterate and where this year it became illegal to be illiterate. Or of Egypt, where the King has paid for every peasant on his enormous estates to be schooled and where the army is being taught letters. Or of Persia, 20 years ago totally without State schools, which now has half-a-million pupils in 8,000

A "Listener" Interview by A.M.R.

day schools and 157,000 attending night-classes. Or of India and the conservatism of its peasants and the fraud that is practised on them by the educated, and of much else that lies behind Nehru's conviction that "every social reform in India will founder on the stumbling block of illiteracy."

Light for Africa

"That still leaves Africa," I suggested.

"I know Africa," said Mr. Platt. "At least I lived 21 years in French West Africa. At the earliest school I started we had to cut 3,000 applicants down to 100 to fit our space. Then on the first day, the room was absolutely jammed full. While I had been filtering the chosen hundred through the door nearly a hundred more had climbed in the windows behind my back. Hitherto all native African education has been like that. It has been, for one thing, by missionaries not by Governments, and for another, only able to meet a fraction of the demand. But in November, 1944, a British White Paper, drawn up by missionaries and educationists like Julian Huxley and called 'Mass Education in African Society,' pledged the British Government to teach 40 millions in the next 25 years."

But was all this teaching people to read really education, I asked. Did it not leave them a prey to propaganda?

Mr. Platt had just been coming to that point, he said. "When you have taught people to read and write you have not educated them. You have only given them the tools by which to educate themselves. You have not, indeed, even showed them how to use the tools. To-day that takes more time and expense than Governments have to spare for the millions. And, in any case, Governments, generally speaking, are not concerned to have their people educated. Their aim is competent workers and malleable citizens."

"Spiritual Man"

As for propaganda, well—"All Governments to one degree or another rely on propaganda. But the Christian does not believe in propaganda. What he believes in is propagation—the propagation of his own species in the world. Spiritual man is a new species in the