

AGILE MINDS IN AGILE BODIES

Educationist Goes Back to First Principles

"If a writer doesn't entertain, as well as instruct, his readers stop reading. If a broadcaster doesn't hold interest with his presentation his listeners turn the knob to something that does. Why should teachers expect to be treated differently? Why should they feel any right to demand attention instead of attracting it?"

THAT is the approach to education of Dr. J. Macalister Brew (J. for Josephine; Dr. for LL.D.) who has been giving short courses to New Zealand "youth work leaders" in all the New Zealand main centres on her way home to Britain from the New Education Fellowship Conference in Australia.

"We are just about through with writers who expect their readers to work hard at understanding them," went on Dr. Brew. "It only means that they have not worked hard enough themselves at comprehending what they are trying to teach others. And I hope we are getting suspicious also of people who cover up the deficiencies in their thinking with polysyllabic words. For 'anything that is clearly conceived can be clearly expressed,' as Aristotle said long ago. Education, once schooling is passed, is a leisure-time occupation for practically everybody. And people who have worked hard all day have a right to be entertained in their leisure; not made to work more. Besides, education for the majority of people is not an intellectual activity but a social one. Therefore it takes place in the places where they eat and dance and play. So those of us who want our fellows to be better educated need to get out

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would be descriptive of a wretch of his species (cheers and laughter). His name shows he is by descent a Jew. His father became a convert. He is the better for that in this world, and I hope he will be the better for it in the next. I have the happiness of being acquainted with some Jewish families, and among them more accomplished ladies, or more humane, cordial, high-minded, or better educated gentlemen I have never met. (Hear, hear). It will not be supposed therefore when I speak of D'Israeli as the descendant of a Jew that I mean to tarnish him on that account. They were once the chosen people of God. There were miscreants amongst them however, also, and it must certainly have been from one of these that D'Israeli descended (roars of laughter). He possesses just the qualities of the impenitent thief who died upon the cross, whose name, I verily believe, must have been D'Israeli (roars of laughter). For aught I know, the present D'Israeli is descended from him, and with the impression that he is, I now forgive the heir-at-law of the blasphemous thief who died upon the cross" (loud cheers and roars of laughter).

of our cold classrooms and dingy activities to where people are actually doing the things they want to do and insert education into those activities."

These were Dr. Brew's "first principles" of education for adults and young people. She proceeded to illustrate them



Spencer Digby photograph

DR. J. MACALISTER BREW
Education by second intention

from her own experience as the "officer responsible for the educational content in the activities of the groups that are served by the National Association of Girls' and Mixed Clubs—a pioneer body in informal education which is backed by a substantial British Government grant."

Poetry in Pubs

"For example, someone started a 'Poetry in Pubs' movement about 1937, and I 'opened' the first Pictures in Pubs exhibition just before coming out here. Pubs, of course, are not drinking holes in Britain, but quite often a sort of poor man's club. Well, the men there can 'take' poetry, and Shaw, and Priestley, and Shakespeare—though I don't see them rolling up to lecture rooms in response to invitations to 'a Poetry Reading' pasted on the Town Hall notice-board. The only time that any of us got chucked out, in fact, was when a party tried to 'talk down' to the audience by putting on a West End Comedy. Only don't suppose that we went in saying 'gentlemen, I'm going to read you some Tennyson.' No, you just sat and read poetry yourself the first evening. Next evening probably someone asked you what you were reading and you started discussing it. A group gathered round and you found yourself spouting to the whole room.

"There's no halo of sanctity about the other method of teaching—the formal invitation, the 12-lecture series, and the rows of seats. The great teachers who launched mankind on to new seas of thought never worked that way. Socrates kept questioning his friends as they sat enjoying the sun in the street.

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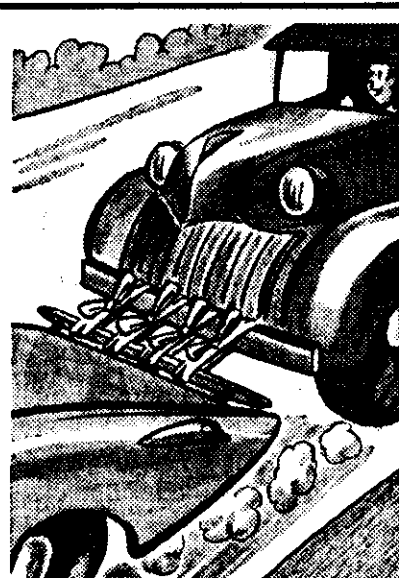
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