

(continued from previous page)

a bit above themselves. But very seldom, I think, do we fail to find some trace of that Colonial inferiority feeling which lurks at the back of our minds.

For the benefit of these people who hesitate to attempt to speak well it should be pointed out that the proper speaking of English has nothing to do with snobbery or pedantry—which are at the root of most of the ultra-genteel dialects I have mentioned. It is my belief that standard English can be described and defended in terms that are purely aesthetic and functional.

### Production of the Voice

Let us deal first with the functional side of the matter. To speak well, a person must have good voice-production, and use all the organs of speech in a flexible and controlled way. A good deal of the harshness of quality one hears in ordinary speech in New Zealand is due to pinched mouths and constricted throats. The development of the muscles of the throat, mouth and face, and their efficient use, is exactly on a par with the development and use of other muscles. A boy who has a normal and healthy desire to be athletic will often use his speech-organs in a most unathletic fashion. Faulty voice-production is therefore of the same order as hunched backs, knock-knees, and hollow chests. If this idea could be got into the heads of school athletes (who usually set the pattern of behaviour for the rest), the standard of spoken English in New Zealand could be jacked up half-a-dozen notches within a generation.

Voice-production, however, is not the whole story. If a person uses his speech-organs efficiently, he will probably produce good consonants and vowel sounds; but will he use the right vowel sounds in pronouncing his words? There is no certainty that the diphthong in "rain" will not become a perfectly produced *i* sound. Nor is there any guarantee that an important suffix such as *-ly* will not be given a false stress, leading to such solecisms as "quicklee" and "nicelee"; or that "beauty" will not be debased into "beautee."

In trying to establish a "right" enunciation of vowel sounds we can of course fall back on usage and convention. But they in turn call for some justification other than the fact that educated people—or some educated people—support them. I think we can find another touchstone—one that is purely aesthetic.

The science of phonetics presents great subtleties, and uses a system of symbols that is familiar to perhaps one person in every 10,000. Since I am one of the 9,999 I propose to use a very simple and arbitrary, and not at all subtle, phonetic scheme to make certain points that seem to me to be important.

### The "Colour" of Language

First let me offer an analogy. The opaque colours which artists use in painting pictures are related to the spectrum of sunlight. A rainbow is, by common consent, a beautiful thing. It would not be so beautiful if it consisted of only one band of colour. Nor would the artist be able to paint so effectively if he were restricted to using nothing but monochrome.

Just as the spectrum of sunlight shows a graduated series of light emanations ranging from red to violet, with a constantly-changing wavelength as we move from one extreme to the other, so there is a sort of "spectrum" of vowel sounds,

on the proper use of which the "colour" of spoken language chiefly depends. Vowel sounds are made by a resonance in the open throat, the degree of openness depending on the particular vowel. (The formation of consonant sounds always—with the exception of the sibilants and the *r* sound—involves making a temporary and complete obstruction with the lips, teeth, or tongue.)

In using colours the painter is, as a rule, attempting to imitate or to represent nature. And in nature there is a jumble of colours, just as there is a jumble of sound. If the painter were doing something parallel to what we do when we speak, he would select certain slabs of colour and use them as a sort of sign-language. He would find it best to keep them separate, without mixing them, in order to preserve the meaning of each distinctly. And it would be desirable for his colours to be sufficiently few in number to retain their distinctive characters; yet sufficiently numerous to make full use of the range of the spectrum.

### Take Postage Stamps

To make the point clearer, let us take another analogy. If we are issuing postage stamps of various denominations we shall also use the range of colours derived from the spectrum. If we have too many denominations of one pattern, we shall be compelled to grade the colours very close to one another. But if we have a comfortable number to deal with, we can space them out over the range of colours, and make every one quite distinct from the others.

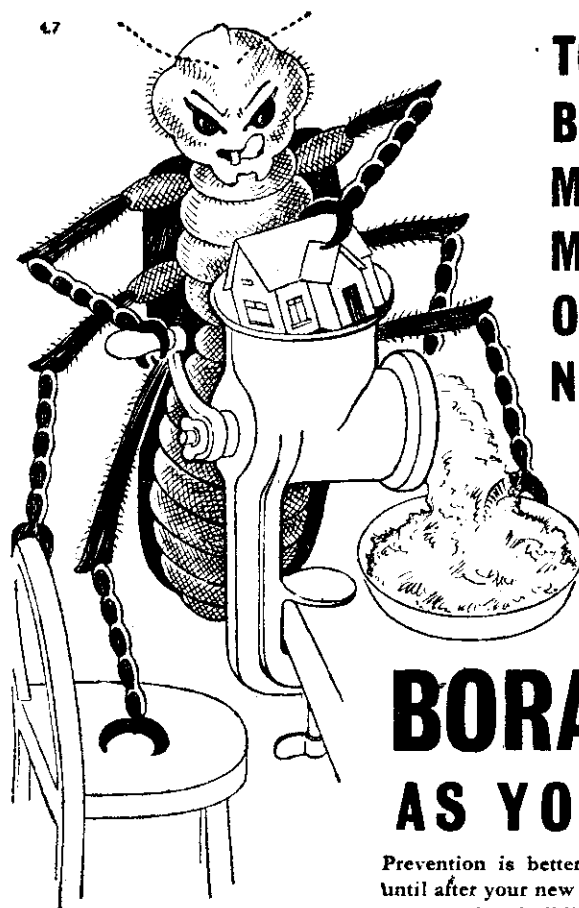
The thing I want to emphasise is the advantage of spacing the colours more or less evenly. Not only will they be more distinct, but they will look more pleasing when seen all together.

Similarly, with our range of vowel sounds it is desirable on aesthetic (as well as functional) grounds to keep them evenly spaced over the range of our "spectrum" of sound. In that way we shall maintain distinctions, keep the character of each sound separate from its neighbours, and provide the basis of a spoken language that is rich in its diversity of sounds, and at the same time a thoroughly efficient means of communication.

(To be continued)

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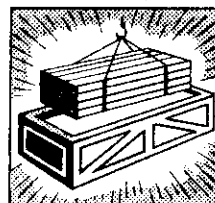
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