

(continued from previous page)

specialised training for those who showed a capacity for using it fruitfully. Even then there is the danger of too much standardisation, if the system hardens into rigidity. We must not reach the condition in which the goal of education is to provide the ideal tenant for the State house.

I think we are up against a fundamental difficulty, in that a secular system of universal education can go only a certain distance in pursuing its true end—the inculcation of a sense of values. But we are justified in going as far as we can. I see no purpose in teaching children English literature unless we have first established in their minds some awareness of the true context of literature; otherwise we shall spend millions of money in producing digest-readers, subscribers to commercial libraries, and students of comic strips. It is assumed nowadays—so hallowed is the very name of "education"—that any sort of reading is a useful and virtuous activity. It is not sufficiently realised that for most people reading is a minor vice. For some of these it is equivalent to taking soporific drugs; for others, no better than biting the finger-nails.

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I LIKE Mr. Scott's keenness of judgment when he is dealing with matters of detail. His reasons for disliking some of Barrie's plays are, for me, just the right reasons. His discussion of digest reading is brief, restrained, and dead on the bull. "Digests are a logical fruit of an urban machine-age culture . . . etc." When he advocates "a breaking-down of the larger schools into smaller units with a closer sense of community" as a necessary measure he shows, I think, a keen perception of realities. Again, his remarks on the effects of radio, cinema and comic-strip "pottings" of classical novels are very much to the point.

Here is a sentence that should bring a warm response: "It is almost certain that the tendency to restrict poetry to the elevated and uplifting kind, and to introduce it to the pupils before they are mature enough to enjoy it, has been partly responsible for the distaste felt for it by many of them." Again: "Because it is such an intensely emotional art, it is important that pupils should not be asked to read and study any poetry that expresses emotions too mature for them to understand."

This remark about the Press goes right to the point! "It is, I think, fair to say that, by committing itself to a defence of a materialistic, business conservatism, it has greatly weakened its power to defend the more genuine conservatism that seeks to preserve the tested ethical, social, and cultural standards of the past." That is a shrewd blow. Many people imagine they can dispose of the press by describing it as being "conservative." Mr. Scott makes the right and telling distinction.

One thing that astonishes me when I look at Mr. Scott's list of the most popular books among boys and girls is the fact that, with only one or two exceptions, the authors they read are the same as those we were reading 30 years ago—Stevenson, Ballantyne, De-foe, Conan Doyle, Orczy, Dumas, Kings-ley, Marryat, and so on. Hardly anything seems to have been written for boys and girls in recent decades that can compete with the older books. I am not

sure just what may be inferred from this. I am inclined to take it as further evidence for the belief that, half-way through the 20th Century, we are still, at heart, living in the 19th.

Mr. Scott finishes up his book with a question from the Harvard Report on the Training of English Teachers: "To the extent that the nation is ignorant of its literary heritage, it is ethically ignorant." Earlier, near the beginning, he has this to say: "On the whole, the pressure of contemporary popular culture will probably lead to a decline in the amount of reading of the classics by individual boys and girls as they become adults. It is not likely that people

who become responsive to the films, the magazines, the best-sellers in fiction, and the radio serials of the day, will for long maintain their taste, if they now have it, for books whose appeal is so differently based. When we add those two statements together we get something that is not pleasant to contemplate. But it is probably true enough.

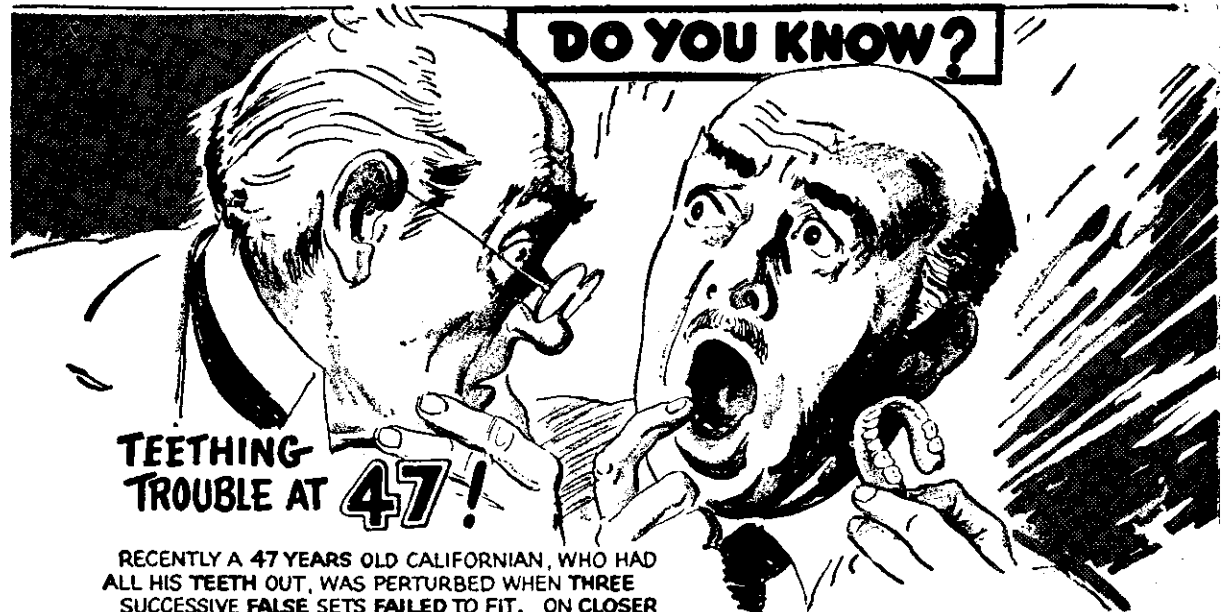
I have written at length about Mr. Scott's book with the object of trying to persuade readers of *The Listener* to get hold of it for themselves. It is, I think, one of the most important contributions to the documentation of New Zealand that we have seen for some time.

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