

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

How to Write a Letter

A GREAT deal of commercial English is thoroughly justifiable. The English a business man uses does not need to be the English of Shakespeare, of Burke, or of Galsworthy. They're doing different jobs. And that brings me to the heart of the matter. The goodness or badness of a piece of English depends on how well or how ill it does the job for which it is intended. To state the case more scientifically, the first thing that the student of English prose must look to is its function or purpose. Good prose is prose which adequately fulfils its function. When you are confronted with a piece of prose or are trying to write a piece of prose and (like the gentleman in the French comedy) we're doing that all our life in one way or another, we must say immediately: "Is this good English?" And follow it with the further question: "Good English for what?" What is the purpose of the prose which I am reading or writing? Am I attempting to state facts coldly like a scientist, am I attempting to move people against their will by appealing to their emotions, am I just writing a chatty conversational letter to a friend or relative? Am I writing a letter which I hope will bring me a job?

B: I should say a letter applying for the job was the most important. Many a job's been lost because the applicant wrote the wrong sort of letter.

A: You're right there. But my point is that all four of these tasks require good English, but the goodness of the English will be different for all four purposes. The letter to the friend will be colloquial and barely grammatical with all the ease of conversation; the letter to the prospective employer will be formal and nicely rounded. The scientific piece of prose will be a clean piece of writing where every word has a clear and precise meaning; the persuasive speech may use vaguer, more emotive language with words that neither the speaker nor his audience could define accurately, but which have a powerful emotional effect on both. Four very different styles and yet all of them can be good English. It depends on the success of each in its particular job. —(Winter Course Talk, "Can People be Taught to Write?" Professor Gordon, Victoria University College, 2YA, October 27.)

Battle for the World

I HAVE seen it stated that Max Werner is the pen name of a distinguished refugee from Europe. It is said that he was one of the leading military strategists of Czechoslovakia and now resides in America. However this may be it is certain that his books show a detailed and expert knowledge of the problems of modern warfare and an accurate acquaintance with military literature in all the countries of the world. In days such as these, when the comments of amateur strategists and the studies of military experts have been falsified by events, it is rare to come across two books written by the one author in which estimates of military strength and the details of strategy and diplomacy need little revision, although one book was written before the war and the other in the early months of this year. Werner gives the first full account of the Polish campaign, of the eight months of "all quiet," of the Russo-Finnish war, the Norwegian campaign and the super-battle in the west culminating in the fall of France, which provides adequate material for a discussion of all the military and diplomatic factors involved in the present war. Much of what he writes in *Battle*

of the World (the Military Strength of the Powers) will come as a surprise to those who have not read his earlier book. It seems incredible that facts which were well known to Werner in 1939 were not appreciated at their full value not only by the ordinary readers of newspapers who are forced to rely upon these sources of information, but also by leading experts in the different countries whose job it is to keep up to date with regard to modern developments in warfare.—(Book Review of "Battle for the World," by Max Werner. H. Winston Rhodes, 3YA, October 14.)

Geese and Swans

THOSE who are interested in modern writers and the younger and more enterprising authors of the present time, whether in England or on the Continent and elsewhere, should read John Lehmann's recent account in the Pelican series. It is called *New Writing in Europe* and attempts to tell the story of the development of the younger writers during the last ten or fifteen years. Lehmann is inclined to turn some of the common variety of modern geese into super-modern swans, and the critical reader who has read the books which he deals with may at times be amazed that it is evidently so easy to miss the world's masterpiece even when it is staring one in the face. None the less, *New Writing in Europe* is an interesting survey not only of the Auden, Spender Day, Lewis group of writers, but also of the work of novelists like Graham Greene, George Orwell, Willy Goldman, B. L. Coombes, and others. Inevitably Lehmann's account becomes not only literary history but social history as well. The new poets, with their concern for the sickness of society, their images drawn from the world of psychology and social struggle, have striven also to bring poetry more in relation to the lives of men and women. The new drama connected with the Group theatre and the Unity theatre and working-class Socialist experiments was symptomatic of the times. The development of numbers of new writers drawn from working class has been significant in a time of depressions and wars. —(Book Review of "New Writing in Europe," by John Lehmann. H. Winston Rhodes, 3YA, October 14.)

Keeping Children Busy

SMALL children grow tired of their fantasy-play, and after an hour or two of pretending, the busy fingers want something constructive to do. Christmas is coming, and here are some presents which can be made out of odds and ends of dress material, coloured wool and bits of sacking. Quite small children can sew given the right material, and enjoy it — boys as well as girls. But first of all here is something easier. Have you ever seen cushions made out of cut-up scraps of material? It is absolutely essential to have a sharp pair of scissors, and the scraps must be cut very small, so that it is not so good for very small ones. Keep all the scraps left over from dressmaking, especially those tiny ones that usually find their way into the fire. Cut them up and put them in a bag. It takes some time, and a child gets discouraged if a job takes too long to do, so I suggest starting off with a very small cushion. But the child can help to make its own cover out of some coarse material by tacking round the edge. Then he can applique with felt, or do a rough wool-work design on the outside. A very old soft felt hat can be cut up for



applique work. If it is an unsuitable colour it can be dyed first. It will make good leaves and flowers with a button-hole stitch in bright wool round the edge.—("The Child in Bed." Mrs. F. L. W. Wood, 2YA, November 3.)

Don't Laugh—if You Can Help It

SOME howlers come from the child's inability to grasp the meaning of figurative language. Thus "Julius Caesar was renowned for his great strength—he threw a bridge across the Rhine." But more commonly it is just that the word confronting the child is strange and unfamiliar, and the only course to take is to allow the imagination free rein and rely on appearances. The meaning of the word has not been properly understood or the child may never have seen the word at all, and by a natural association of ideas the child interprets it in the light of some other word of similar shape, sound or form. As good as any is the statement that a sinister person is a woman who



hasn't married. A zebra, according to one little fellow, is a sort of cream-coloured donkey with black stripes, from which they make stove polish. Biology is the science of purchasing. Spaghetti is what they throw about at weddings. Barbarians are things put into bicycles to make them run more smoothly. Immortality is when one man runs away with another man's wife. Indeed a high degree of intelligence is shown by some of the answers where the solution is the joint product of guess work and deduction. If you had no idea of the meaning of the phrase "a grass widow," could you offer any explanation of its meaning? Could you, for example, do any better than the girl who said that a grass widow was the wife of a dead vegetarian, or than the one who said it was a snake without a father? What is a Minister of War—to young children who know no politics? One lad ventured to answer that he was the clergyman who preaches to the soldiers in barracks. What do you know of the origin of Guy's Hospital. "It was founded to commemorate the Gunpowder plot." Can you complain about the intelligence of the boy who said: "Climate lasts all the time, but weather only a few days." And do you not agree that "Crooning is a special noise made by men in love?"—("Schoolboy Howlers." I. D. Campbell, 2YA, November 4.)

This Modern Age

I WILL briefly indicate how the work of engineers impinges on the work and life of the community. Let us consider a business man's day. In the bathroom he turns on the water without thinking of the water-supply engineer. Next he probably uses electrically heated water, and may use an electrically operated razor. His clothes are made from fabrics manufactured by machinery. He eats his breakfast, frequently electrically prepared; goes to business in a motor car, the work of various types of engineers; mounts to his office in an electric elevator. On his desk he finds his mail, letters, cables and telegrams transported there by land, sea or air; uses his telephone, answers his communications by the same means he received them. In fact, throughout the day he relies on the work of various types of engineer to get through in a few hours what would have taken weeks, a century ago. At the end of the day he returns home on roads designed and constructed by engineers. His reliance on the engineer does not stop at this point, for he often has him to thank for many added amenities in his home, as well as others which provide for his entertainment, whether it be at the theatre, or from the radio itself. In fact, every man, woman and child, benefits to some extent from the plans, work and products, of things done, convenience and amenities provided for the well-being and advantage of the community.—("The Popular Professions in the Choice of Careers." Irwin Crookes, sen., 1YA, October 16.)