

"QUIZZOLOGY"

Radio Racing For Middlebrows

(Written for "The Listener" by G.E.E.)

"Be wiser than other people, if you can, and do tell them so." (With apologies to Lord Chesterfield).

THE Radio-Quizz was invented in the country which has propagated the idea that "knowledge is power"; that is, money. However, I can remember a game we used to play when we were children which was based on the same principle of "ask me another," though there was no pecuniary gain behind it.



"... An odd or eccentric person of ridiculous appearance."

There seem to be three main elements in the popularity of this "racing for middlebrows."

The first is the exciting possibility that you can—if you are lucky—make a substantial amount of money in the fraction of a minute. This depends of course on your lucky chance. Nobody is omniscient and knows the answers to every "poser," but by sheer fluke you might tumble on a question to which you either know or can guess the answer. Your luck is not entirely based on chance; there is a personal note in it, which allows us, as it were, to interfere with Fate, challenging it with our

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out music as the thing that has pepped up output, unless you can establish that all other things have been equal. Personal grudges, minor inconveniences, all sorts of things that you can't take into account will affect output when they're piled up in a large number of workers. I remember seeing an article in an American magazine showing how in one big electrical factory in the States they set up a separate unit to supply entertainment for the workers and then began to study the results. Output went up and up. They added some further benefit, and results mounted. They tackled on something more to improve the service and things got even better. Then suddenly they wiped it all out and went right back to where they'd started, just for an experiment. And it made no difference at all! Probably the sense of participating in an experiment and perhaps increasing experience could have accounted for the whole illusions. Anyway I think a lot more importance has been attached to the idea in some quarters than it deserves."

Knowledge. Moral prigs may draw some satisfaction from the fact that their gambling and winning depend on their learning as well as on hazard.

The third element springs from a perhaps pardonable pride in being able to test one's knowledge. This is, of course, a kind of "showing-off." People who subscribe to Lord Chesterfield's admirable advice to "be wiser than other people, if you can, but do not tell them so," will not join in this intellectual exhibitionism. For many, however, it has become one of the minor inoffensive vices that it seems safe to indulge.

So much for the feelings of the competitor in front of the microphone. What about the listener? I must confess that I find a certain fascination in it. One can "keep an ear" on the announcer and the subtle inflections of his voice, and learn a lot about people's behaviour and reactions in front of the microphone (micro-psychology, i.e., minute psychology!) Furthermore: one can test one's own knowledge — without microphone fright—before the answer is given.

Apart from all this, however, there is again the under-current of excitement which all gambling provokes: Will the competitor win? Will he lose? How much money will he make in an evening? How much could one have made in actually taking part?

Scope of Quizzes

There remains the scope of the quizzes. The "Give it a Name Jackpot" covers the largest field of knowledge; though questions pertaining to music and the fine arts are conspicuously absent, literature, science, inventions, current events, and anniversaries are all touched upon.

"History and All That" is more for the connoisseur, but does not always remain strictly "historical." The "Pronunciation Jackpot" addresses all those who like their own language. It is amusing—or shall we say a little alarming?—to hear how many even quite common words we mispronounce.

"The Movie-Quiz," finally, is for the picture fan, and is so highly specialised that one needs some training (i.e., frequent visits to the picture theatres and a good memory of names) in order to participate in it successfully.

I could imagine some novel variations for such competitions: what about a musical quizz, where snatches from famous compositions will be played and the competitor has to guess the author and give the name of the work? With small alterations (quotations) a similar literary or dramatic quizz could be staged. Painting, science, geography, medicine (first aid), all offer a field which is open to exploration and exploitation, if we know our answers!

It is interesting that the Oxford Dictionary (1940) does not yet list "Quizz" but only "Quiz," and defines it—perhaps adequately, considering our exhibitory antics in front of the microphone—as "an odd or eccentric person of ridiculous appearance now rare." But is it?

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