

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES

I WAS corrected today by my grand-daughter of four for saying Wensdy.

"Not Wensdy, Grandad, Wens-day."

"No, Weddensday," her sister of seven told us both.

I knew then that I was being corrected by the Queensland Department of Education, and that it was right. I will go on saying

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Wensdy, often, et (ate) and agen, but that is habit and lack of boldness. I have succumbed to the fashion, but it is a bad and foolish fashion. The Queensland way is right, the New Zealand way wrong. We are as wrong as everybody is who uses words to register social status and not to convey meanings and facts. But we will go on being wrong. It is a case where we would sooner be wrong than sensible. If I say Weddensday the best people will think that I am the first of my generation to be able to read, that my father ate with his knife, and that my mother did her own washing, fed her own babies, served the meals in the kitchen, and had never seen a cocktail cabinet. Inevitably the son of such parents will harbour dangerous thoughts and not merely make barbarous sounds. No one could be respectable and safe if he had heard agayn and agayn that everybody at the Last Supper avt with his fingers.

MR. HOLLAND, I seem to remember, travelled from Wellington to Invercargill some months ago without seeing many rabbits. I have just travelled from Rockhampton to Sydney—about 1250 miles, by inland roads—and

seen one rabbit, though it was daylight all the way and I was constantly on the watch. It was a dead rabbit, crushed by a car, and I must not forget the bus driver's reminder that Australia has

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thousands of scavenging crows. Snakes, he said, are killed by traffic every night, but it is unusual to see them on the road next day. A dead rabbit lies on New Zealand roads till it is reduced to small pieces, but Australia's casualties—snakes, rabbits, bandicoots, lizards and birds—disappear very quickly. I allow for all that, as I am sure Mr. Holland allowed for the rabbits that had not turned out to welcome him; but I feel reasonably certain, all the same, that there are very few rabbits in north-eastern Australia between the mountains and the sea. It is bush country, and although rabbits have shown us that they can live almost anywhere, they prefer the wide open spaces.

But I wonder if Mr. Holland read a cable in today's newspapers to the effect that the Government of Ecuador has asked the United Nations for technical assistance in establishing a Rabbit Production Centre. If he read that, I wonder if he will leave the Ecuadorians to smother themselves in their own fur or send a missionary to turn them back from their madness before it is too late.

I MET a child in Queensland whose name I will not repeat. When bedtime came she asked me to tell her a story, and I ran out in two or three minutes. So when

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bedtime came again I asked her to tell me a story, and she was into her stride almost at once:

"One day two kittens asked their mother for a mouse. Full stop. But she said No.

Full stop. You are big kittens now. Full stop. So they went outside and waited by a hole in the wall. Full stop. They were very hungry. Full stop."

It must have been ten or twelve minutes before she finished, and I did not then know what had happened to the kittens or the mice. I had lost them among the full stops—dropped in as regularly, and uttered as earnestly, as the Amens and Hallelujahs at a revival meeting. It seemed to me that I had never heard words dropping more sweetly from female lips. But it depressed me to think that the day might come when the full stops would all be forgotten; that this child might grow into a woman who talked without ceasing; that her tongue might shorten her husband's life, and darken all their days together; that her children might blush for her and her neighbours avoid her—and God Himself have no power to stop her. It is sometimes the sweetest children and the loveliest girls who drive their husbands to drink. May Heaven help us all to remember our full stops.

WHEN is a Show a Fair? I think the answer is when the living exhibits have to be brought from 500 to 1000 miles. From the entertainment angle I thought the Brisbane Show (until the rain came) the best I had ever attended; but I did not realise until I saw the sheep how far from the showgrounds the best flocks of Queensland

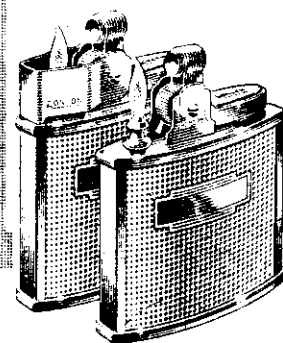
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are, and what it costs in time, money, condition and risk to exhibit them and get them home again. I thought at first that I had not seen all the pens, that there must be a pavilion somewhere which I had not discovered, and that when I found it I would forget the pens I had already

seen. I was wrong. Of the 17 million sheep in Queensland only a hundred or so had reached Brisbane, and of these only a dozen or two seemed worth a second inspection. There were, I suppose, half a dozen rams that would have made exhibitors rub their eyes in Christchurch; but most of the other entries—especially the fat wethers and fat lambs—would have made them think they were being hoaxed. The only explanation I can think of is that it costs more to show a sheep in Brisbane than either the prize or the advertisement is worth; and in many cases costs more than the animals are worth. I have no authentic figures, but a station manager who entered 26 sheep and then withdrew them all, explained that it was not worth spending £1000 to enter 26 sheep in a class of 29. I found by looking at the map that he was 800 flying miles from Brisbane, and over 1200 miles by rail and road.

(To be continued)

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