

Quizzing the Question-Master

THREE men, A, B and C, are given a test in quick thinking. On the forehead of each a cross is marked which, they are told, may be either blue or white, and they are then admitted into an empty room. Not one of the three knows the colour of his own cross or is permitted to speak to the others, but each is told that he may leave the room if he either sees two white crosses, or correctly deduces the colour of his own.

A observes that both B and C have blue crosses, and after a few minutes' thought, he leaves the room after having correctly deduced the colour of his own cross. What was the colour and how did he reach that conclusion?

In which sport are the results usually "grassed"?

Who was the Maid of Orleans?

What country has the oldest Parliamentary assembly in the world?

IN case you think there's enough agony involved in answering questions like those, we'd like you to meet Selwyn Toogood, the man who suffers even more anguish asking questions like those—6000 of them a year. Quiz shows such as *It's In the Bag*, *Money-Go-Round* and *Quiz Kids* swallow up questions at the tremendous rate of something like 100 questions a week, and though questions for the Quiz Kids are sent in by interested listeners from all over New Zealand, they account for only about 1000 questions out of the total.

It was for statistics like these, which would drive a lesser man to touching every third lamp post, that we went to see Mr. Toogood in his lofty office on the fourth floor of Brandon House, in the Featherston Street canyon, Wellington. Here we found him, as seen on this week's cover, but nevertheless ready to answer questions about questions for quizzes, for absolutely no prize money whatever.

To our question, "Who looks out all these questions?" Selwyn answered, "I do it myself." We looked surprised that such a busy man, always haring about the country doing shows, could still find time to do such demanding, and (it could well be) boring work. "When I look out the questions myself," he explained, "I have more confidence in them. I set about it by just opening

a dictionary or an encyclopaedia and looking down the columns until a word or a definition strikes me as interesting. Then I frame my question around it," and he went on to give a practical demonstration. "Here's the *Oxford*. I run my finger down and see the word 'glutton'—an excessive eater, gormandizer—greedy reader of books, and so on. That gives me an idea. For instance, 'What is another word for gormandizer?' In cold blood, you might think that would be easy to answer, but you get a contestant up in front of the mike and he may very well get confused between the meanings of 'gourmand' and 'gourmet.' That illustrates another point. When I set the questions, I will probably have run through all the definitions of a word, or compared it with similar words, and so I'm sometimes able to tell how a contestant has become confused. Also I phrase the questions to suit my own style of talking. Generally, the questions are straightforward in themselves, but some of the terms used may make them sound complicated to the contestant. Take a question like: 'What was the nationality of Marie Antoinette?' The word 'nationality' sounds unfamiliar and unless a contestant has his wits about him he'll go astray and say 'French' when, of course, Marie Antoinette was Austrian. Sometimes I fall in and get a correct answer which isn't the one I'm looking for. One man I asked to describe the legs of a crane—meaning the bird. He answered, perfectly correctly, it has four legs and they're steel. Other times, I've made a slip of the tongue when I've had a question written out as plain as day on the card in front of me, like the time I asked 'Who played Desdemona in the recent Shakespearian tour by the Old Vic Company?' when the tour was by the Stratford Company."

When Selwyn fossicks for his own questions, the checking is automatic, except in certain cases which he refers to the appropriate authorities, such as the Turnbull and Public Libraries and

specialists in their fields. All *Quiz Kids* questions chosen are carefully checked by Joan ("Bunny") Kincaid, Selwyn's secretary, who says, wryly, that it's amazing how often the question senders give the wrong answer.

Questions come in various grades. There is a vast need for short, quick questions with only one correct answer. "You couldn't say 'Prince Albert was the son of whom?'" Selwyn commented. "You'd have to phrase it, 'Who was the eldest son of Edward VII?'" And the answer could only be 'Albert Duke of Clarence, who died in 1892.' In the Bell and Buzzer contest where the questions get easier as the contestants fail to answer a series of clues, great care has to be taken not to contravene the Gaming Act by making sure that there can be only one possible answer and that it is pin-pointed in the first clue." For instance, Selwyn could not use, "This is a building in Wellington," as his first clue, when the answer was to be "The Government Buildings." If it were to be pin-pointed as being a building which has 642 windows, or some such out-of-the-way description, then all clear.

New Zealand, by the way, is the only country so far as Selwyn knows, where quiz contestants are invited directly from the audience. In England, America and Australia applications apparently have to be sent in by letter. To deal with the hundreds who sometimes troop up, a simple question like "Lake Taupo is greater or less than 240 square miles



"You have ten chances of striking a winner . . .

in area?" effectively divides the sheep from the goats and reduces the number to manageable proportions. By the way, it's 238 square miles.

Oh, and about those bags, you have ten chances of striking a winner and five of getting a booby. As to which bag's which, ask Brian Petrie. He's the only one who knows—but he ain't sayin' nuffin'.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ QUESTIONS

1. A's cross was blue. He reasons thus: "If I were white, B would decide he was blue, for otherwise C would see two white and would therefore go out. Similarly C would know he was blue, as otherwise B would have gone out. If neither moves, I must be blue also. 2. Angling. 3. Joan of Arc. 4. Iceland.



ABOVE, left: Selwyn Toogood and Bunny Kincaid check listeners' questions for the Quiz Kids' session—about 1000 a year are needed. RIGHT: This could mean a home-freezer for someone—Brian Petrie, technician and man-of-all-work, prepares the "bags"

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