

'Twould be endless to tell you the things that he knew,
All separate facts, undeniably true,
But with him or each other they'd nothing to do.

GET on to the subject of Quiz Kings with E. R. Dearnley, who was crowned last week New Zealand King of Quiz, and he'll quote these lines, giving their author, of course—James Russell Lowell—and the title of the full poem—"A Fable for Critics." Ask him, "Is that a portrait of a Quiz King?" and he'll answer, "I'm afraid it may be."

Call on Mr Dearnley in his office at the Department of Agriculture and you'll find him with a calculating machine at his right hand, and his desk and the only other chair piled with papers, the raw material of his work as a research statistician. Nauru phosphate trials were his concern the day *The Listener* looked in, and he was quick to explain that a statistician doesn't only compile figures—he interprets them as well.

Bright and amiable and easy to talk to, Mr Dearnley admitted that he was "rather naughtily pleased" to have "done down" the former Quiz King, J. W. Winchester, this year after being beaten by Mr Winchester in earlier contests. With two finals drawn he was rather browned off when he came to the third, but even more nervous than before. Some of the questions in the series of finals had been especially difficult. He had never heard, for instance, that Andrea del Sarto was known as "the faultless painter," that All Souls College had no undergraduates, and that President Buchanan of the United States had remained a bachelor throughout his term of office—all questions from the first final. And he agreed with Mr Winchester that the question, also from the first final, about the most deadly battle fought on English soil (Towton) was a particularly tough one, which neither of them answered correctly. Some of his failures—such as the omission of the final "o" in the spelling of pharmacopoeia—had rather annoyed him. But he was more amused than annoyed at answering too quickly, both he and Mr Winchester had given Valhalla instead of Asgard as the name of the realm of the Norse Gods—though both knew the correct answer. On the other hand some of his own answers had surprised him—the one about Lake St Clair, for instance. "It just came up when I wanted it, though geographical details are not really my strong point. There were three or four of that sort in this series."

Otherwise Mr Dearnley seems for the most part to have had his usual experience, which he summed up: "Either I know an answer or it floats up, generally fairly promptly, from the subconscious." Like Mr Winchester he is no believer in the photographic memory idea. "I remember things I've been told quite as much as things I've read and seen. Trinacria, for instance, I remembered as an ancient name for Sicily from a poem quoted in a wartime broadcast—I think by Vernon Bartlett. On the other hand I read of William Adams (Mr Dearnley's answer was "John Adams"), the English sailor who settled in Japan in the 17th century, in a digest article,

and my recollection of nitroglycerin as a heart stimulant came from an O. Henry story—though which one, I don't remember."

Are digest and O. Henry stories typical sources of a quiz king's knowledge? Mr Dearnley told us that according to his father he will read "anything from the Bible to the paper round the fish and chips." He remembers reading the Bible when very young and to his mother's protest, "Shouldn't you be reading stories?" answering, "These are stories." And the charge about chip papers seems to be borne out also by a family story that when young Dearnley visited England before he was six years old and was sent out once to buy something at the shop, he was found, overdue, sitting on the kerb reading the newspaper wrapping round the groceries. "I have pretty vague memories of the trip myself," he says.

In fact, Mr Dearnley's reading has been wide, and still is. "We've got the *Britannica* at home. I think of some subject, and from there find myself skipping on through the volume. I was brought up on *The Children's Encyclopedia*, and there is something photographic about the things I remember from that: they've become associated with the picture on the opposite page. I pick things up pretty well at random, I'm interested in such a variety of subjects—any sort of science (astronomy is rather a pet subject), history, travel, music, literature generally, not quite so much in painting. Generally I take two books out of the library at a time—I've got into the habit because I'm entitled to two—and always two different kinds of books. I read two newspapers a day pretty thoroughly—not the racing page, though. I read practically anything, really. And most nights when I'm not doing anything else, I'm reading something, if it's only *Britannica* or the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*. No, I

KING OF QUIZ



E. R. DEARNLEY

N.P.S. photograph

"Either I know an answer or it floats up from the subconscious"

wouldn't say I have a passion for knowledge. But I get pleasure out of reading, and what I read largely sticks with me the first time I read it. I read fairly rapidly, too—I don't think reading slowly gives you any advantage at all." Mr Dearnley's own library includes "quite a bright collection of poets, from Shakespeare to Anton Vogt."

Where does Mr Dearnley get his good memory? He shakes his head vigorously

if you ask him whether he has done anything to develop it, and says, "Just heredity." Both his parents have pretty good memories—"for people, which is more than I have. At least, I remember faces and names, but I don't associate them." Quite apart from the kick he gets out of quiz contests, in which his experience goes back to the time of Kingi Tahiwai, he finds that a good memory comes in "pretty handy." He always did quite well at school, though he wasn't good at arithmetic, and recalling his last course in botany at university—he graduated M.A. and B.Sc.—he says, "Half the lecture was new to me, the other half wasn't." Other people find his good memory handy, too. "Yes, people have been known to ring me up. They'll say, 'We were having a bit of an argument and couldn't find Mr Winchester in the phone book, so we thought we'd ring you up and ask you to settle it.'" Occasionally a mother will ring because a son or daughter wants something for a school project.

Although Mr Dearnley has now been 10 years in his research job at the Department of Agriculture, and declares that he "likes the work and likes the company," he first intended to be an analyst but as he puts it, "I didn't seem to have the practical ability." In spite of his weakness in school arithmetic, mathematics has always been his best subject, and his first job was in the Census and Statistics Department, as it was then called, which he joined because he thought it used a lot of maths. But he found it didn't, at that time at any rate. However, working there certainly improved his arithmetic.

Mr Dearnley would probably agree with the King of Quiz questionmaster, Lyell Boyes, that sport is not one of his strong subjects, any more than it is Mr Winchester's, but he says he's "fairly keen" all the same on table tennis, and at his local club at Cashmere plays a backhand style all his own which upsets the boys somewhat. He is also quite interested in cricket—doesn't insist on going to see a match but may go to see the M.C.C. His real spare time occupations are Esperanto—he is secretary of the Wellington Esperanto Club and editor of its news-sheet—and working in the garden.

"You can't prepare for these quiz contests, of course," we suggested to the new Quiz King as we said goodbye. He shook his head and grinned.

"No, but people ask me all the same if I'm swotting. And I say, 'What?'"

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