

USE OF CHRISTIAN NAMES

Sir,—It is gratifying to see that *The Listener* has taken up the important subject of personal nomenclature in New Zealand. The local conventions, it seems to me, are extremely simple and clear-cut. Amongst acquaintances and friends the surname, with the appropriate prefix, is used only at the first meeting and only then before the second beer or second cup of tea. Thereafter the Christian name or nickname is adopted. (In conservative circles, I am informed Christian names are withheld until the third beer or third cup of tea is reached, but this is merely hearsay.) In all other circumstances the surname is preceded by "Mr.," "Mrs.," "Miss," etc. The naked surname is never used unless as an extreme expression of hatred or contempt, though it is employed in a slightly different way in gaols, courts of law, boys' secondary schools, and similar institutions where archaic English customs still linger on.

These conventions are universally known and observed except, it seems, amongst New Zealand intellectuals. The greatest authority on New Zealand colloquial speech persisted in calling me by my surname until, with great embarrassment on both sides, I was compelled to ask him to desist. I have noticed the same foreign practice cropping up in certain radio "panels" where, possibly in emulation of the BBC, the speakers address one another by unadorned surnames except, oddly enough, when their remarks are directed at a woman. This adds, I believe, to the derivative and artificial effect such sessions so often produce. The speakers should either use Christian names, as they obviously do once they have ceased broadcasting, or, if they wish to be formal, employ surnames without omitting the handles demanded by the national code of manners.

E. H. McCORMICK (Auckland).

Sir,—I was very interested to read your recent editorial on the use of Christian names amongst men, and—as an Englishman who has lived and worked in New Zealand for 26 years—I have been trying to analyse my own feelings on the matter. Any views which I hold on English usage must, of course, be coloured by the lapse of these intervening years, and I should, I hope, be the first to admit that it is the intention, and not the form, which counts in matters of courtesy. Nevertheless, I think that there is something in Mr. Toynbee's contention that "The degrees of intimacy are worth preserving," and I believe that this is better effected by the English usage than by our own.

The Englishman's "degrees of intimacy" are successively represented first by "Mr. Smith," then by "Smith," and finally—rarely and after a long, long while—by "Tommy." Use of the forthright surname, far from being resented as churlishness, is valued as an expression of friendship. Retention of the prefix "Mister" over a number of years implies either that the addressee is disliked, or that the association has progressed no further than the barest acquaintanceship. To pass to Christian names does not, I think, appear to the average Englishman so much an "unwelcome short cut to intimacy" as a misapplication of a form of nomenclature properly confined to the family and to very small children.

This reluctance of my compatriots to use Christian names is admittedly curious, and can, I think, only be explained in colloquial terms. The Englishman is profoundly afraid of being considered

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"sissy" or of "letting down his hair"—a fear which probably stems from his schooldays and a juvenile contempt for the practices of the Young Ladies' Seminary across the road. However that may be, the fact remains that Tommy Smith, among his friends, drops his Christian name on leaving the kindergarten, and does not normally reassume it thereafter, except in the family circle and among his feminine entourage.

All this is, of course, a matter of comparative usage, and one would be hard put to sustain objection to the use of the Christian name as evidence of friendship if, in New Zealand, that were the real position. I do not, however, believe that this is generally so. One's eagerness to call one's boss "Charlie"—or, irrespective of any community of interest, to greet a casual tramway acquaintance as "Steve"—smacks rather of a robust demonstration of applied democracy than of true friendship.

Autre pays, autre mœurs: it would be indefensible for an Englishman to attempt to dictate manners and modes to the country which affords him hospitality; and, as I have said before, it is the intention and not the form which counts. Nevertheless, there is to me a ring about the plain surname which conveys just that sturdy confidence felt by the Englishman for his real friends, and which he is too inarticulate to express by a more sentimental approach.

J. B. HYATT, Snr. (Wellington).

BRITISH CIVIL SERVICE

Sir,—Dr. W. B. Sutch's review of C. K. Munro's book on the British Civil Service, *The Fountains in Trafalgar Square*, says the title is "silly." Is it really? An old riddle asks: "Why are civil servants like the fountains in Trafalgar Square?" The answer is "Because they play from 10 to 4."

FORTY YEARS ON (Auckland).

(A similar quotation was printed on the title page of the book.—Ed.)

WIVES AND SHEEP

Sir,—I sympathise with "Sundowner" in his difficulty in answering the farmer's wife who wanted to go back to Birmingham, but more with the woman. She belongs to the great world-wide sisterhood whose minds are more curious than the one-track mentality of their husbands. There must be Englishwomen on English farms who wish the domestic horizon was a little wider, and quite probably some New Zealand women have married into a huntin', fishin' and shootin' set in England, and as a result have grown somewhat rebellious. Corresponding to the farmer who thinks of nothing but sheep is the well-to-do chap who goes round the world fishing all day and talking fish all night. We must not suppose that there are not New Zealand-born women similarly afflicted on farms.

Grim stories could be told of the unsympathetic and even hostile attitude of husbands towards any interest in the arts by their wives. In a short play about a New Zealand dairy farm which had a vogue on the amateur stage some years ago, the central figure is a university-graduate wife who has had to let such things slide, and now sees her daughter, denied such education, getting engaged to a neighbouring oaf. The dam of frustration and disappointment bursts when she meets an old friend. "To have somebody to say these things to! To get away from cows, always cows! The people about here talk cows while they wait for

babies to be born, and as they turn from the open graves of their dead." A man who knew this passage once told me he had been with two farmer brothers as they walked away from their father's grave, and one said to the other, "About that line of ewes . . ."

Writing as a man, I should say that, as a rule, in town or country, the woman gets the worse of it. The many examples to the contrary in farm life just show what can be done if a liberal wind is allowed to blow in. The sheep or cow-bound farmer can get outside, talk to his dogs or horses or gows or sheep; gossip at saleyards or over a gate or a beer. The woman has to stay at home and look after the children and cook, and

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when the man comes back to meals and the eternal talk of sheep or cows is resumed, I wouldn't blame the wife if she was strongly urged to throw the teapot at his head. The leg of mutton would be the appropriate missile, but unfortunately that is placed at his end of the table.

WIDER HORIZONS (Wellington).

COVER DESIGNS

Sir,—It must be that muggy Auckland weather which made "Mere Mother" write to you complaining about that delightful cover design for School Broadcasts you reproduced in your issue of March 6. It was so good that I made a mental note of the artist's name and I am on the look out for more of his work; he is a chap to watch. I am afraid the sometimes tedious job of bringing up children has completely upset "Mere Mother's" judgment, for if there is one thing children nowadays can do they can draw lively, fresh and spontaneous drawings compared with the dull stuff I was taught as a boy. If you want exact static two-dimensional representations of living three-dimensional objects, you don't go to an artist, you go to a photographer; and children with an unspoilt eye are not very interested in photographs.

And there is nothing especially "correct" in printing with initial capital letters; it is just a convention, and like most conventions, rigidly adhered to it can become deadily dull. Life (like art) is not an exact, correct business, anyway; it's a bit of a muddle, but it's fun. FATHER OF FOUR (Wellington).

UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE

Sir,—I was very interested to hear Mr. Anthony Quayle state emphatically in a recent radio interview that he considers Shakespeare is not for immature minds. As an ex-teacher, I cannot agree too strongly. How often do we hear people say that having to study Shakespeare at school has given them a strong dislike, even a hatred of the Bard and all associated with him? In my teaching days I tried many methods of presentation, with few or no good results. Either it is completely over their heads, or else its beauty and meaning are killed in the process of interpretation. Always one comes up against the same barrier—they cannot understand it and therefore they dislike it and a prejudice is built up which takes a lot of breaking down. Let

us not go on forcing Shakespeare on generation after generation of young adolescents. Let us wait until they are adult and can approach the plays and the poetry with an open mind.

D. HAYWARD (Nae Nae).

SYDNEY BERNARD

Sir,—To many Wellington musicians, including myself, it was most welcome to read the very appreciative article concerning the above-named artist, whose all-round musical ability has long since deserved recognition. But Sydney Bernard in his hey-day was unique among cornet players for one particular reason not cited in your notice—I refer to his astonishing power of imitating a trombone. Many years ago he was a valued member of my theatre orchestra, and listeners often remarked: "What a fine trombone-player you have!" But it was Sydney Bernard playing, by some miracle, an octave lower on his cornet.

L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

STRATFORD SHAKESPEARE

Sir,—Miss Ngaio Marsh has lately spoken ("on the other side idolatry") of the performances of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company. Many other high-level radio speakers have similarly enthused. But why?

I have heard many of the Shakespeare plays on the air, text in hand. I find that the players leave out large slices of good Shakespeare, insert words of their own, and alter Shakespeare's words—seemingly at will.

Then, too, they almost entirely ignore the metre—so much so that one unfamiliar with the plays would usually be hard put to it to pronounce whether the scene was in prose or blank verse. The actors seem agreed that sweet William was a dramatist and humorist, but obviously they've never heard of blank verse.

I have read all the plays, some very many times over, and have always understood that Shakespeare is thought by some to be a poet of sorts as well as comedian and tragedian. But evidently I'm quite wrong, for do not these vaunted actors and actresses assure us by their speeches that—like M. Jourdain—Shakespeare wrote prose all his life without knowing it?

Give me Shakespeare on my shelves, where I can have him uncut, undistorted, unaltered, unimproved, unprosified, unspoilt!

WE ARE NOT AMUSED
(Gisborne).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Mrs. W.B. (Pelorus Bridge).—April 6, 1951.

Appalled (Christchurch).—Still not suitable.

Venezia (Te Aroha) and Loma Odlin (Wellington).—The point was made by an earlier correspondent.

Pest (Dunedin).—New talent is always being sought. Programmes show that some is being found and used.

Murikuku (Invercargill).—Agreed that the messages, the present accumulation of which will be worked off shortly, are neither news nor entertainment. But the men are fighting our war.

Human Dignity (Frankton).—Until recently, YA Women's Sessions had been doing something of the sort for more than a year, although with general rather than particular questions. People do not usually offer their intimate personal problems for public discussion.

T.A. (Hamilton).—The words meant what they said. Party politics return to the air this month—from Parliament; no other broadcasting system gives so much time to political argument. Questions of religious belief are discussed from time to time. A new series of discussions, produced in Dunedin, will be announced shortly in *The Listener*.