

HE LEARNS FROM HIS PUPILS

THE slightly-built man who rose from the studio piano had all the modesty of one who could well afford to be modest. He had been playing a concert paraphrase by L. D. Austin of Poldini's "The Dancing Doll," and he showed pleased surprise that his hearers had recognised it. After an early-morning tussle with the New Zealand customs, the distinguished Hungarian-born pianist Louis Kentner had wasted little time in getting down to work. He broke off, however, to adjust the photographer's flash for him, and to speak to a representative of *The Listener*.

One of his principal interests, he said, had always been the composer Franz Liszt, and it was true that he was one of the founders of the Liszt Society. "The purpose of the Society," he said, "is to make propaganda for Liszt's music, which is too little-known in English-speaking countries. We have already published three volumes of otherwise unobtainable piano music, some of which has never been published before. Since the war, of course, it has been most difficult to obtain much of the manuscript music Liszt left behind. It is mostly in Weimar, which is in the Russian Zone. Our secretary did penetrate there once, and he came out with one very interesting work—a piano concerto version of a known work for two pianos."

Some of Liszt's later piano works had not been published because the composer never intended to publish them, said Mr. Kentner. "But they would probably interest people today. They were very personal and very strange. They looked very far into the future. Liszt and Berlioz were the revolutionaries of that day, much more so than Wagner or Chopin. Liszt was essentially a modern composer. Bartok has acknowledged his debt to him."

The final remark was probably the best tribute Louis Kentner could bestow. He regards Bartok as the last great composer for the piano.

Among the Liszt works which had been brought to light, Mr. Kentner named a *Fantasia* on Verdi's little-known opera *Simon Boccanegra*, and *Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses*, which he himself had performed for the BBC.

Though most of his time is taken up by public performances, Mr. Kentner still gives a few lessons. The Wellington pianist Ida Carless, who studied under Kentner in London, will be having some lessons while he is here. "I teach mainly for the purpose of learning from my pupils," he said. "I only hope they don't get wise to my designs and dismiss me one day, saying 'We can teach you no more.'"

On his way to New Zealand the pianist performed in Ceylon, Malaya and Hong Kong. In the last two places he found his audiences were at least 50 per cent Chinese, the rest European. There were no Malays. "I was surprised," he said, "at the passionate interest the Chinese take in Western music. They were mostly young, and very earnest. Many of them sat with scores and followed the music as it was played. Considering the immense

difference between their music and ours, the interest was amazing."

"In New Zealand," said Mr. Kentner, "I shall play a lot of Liszt and Chopin, and several of the big Beethoven sonatas. It is all music that I love and have played all my life. Of course, I have played under Warwick Braithwaite before—many times—and I am looking forward to doing so again."

Before leaving, *The Listener* could not refrain from mentioning a Kentner performance that has been heard many, many times in New Zealand—the *Warsaw Concerto*. "Yes, I must confess to that," smiled Mr. Kentner. "It was one of the worst-kept secrets of the war. I am still trying to live it down."

LOUIS KENTNER practises in the Wellington studios of the NZBS shortly after his arrival in Wellington



National Publicity Studios photograph

TO SMOKE OR NOT TO SMOKE

Herein is not only a great vanity, but a great contempt of God's gifts, that the sweetness of man's breath, being a good gift of God, should be wilfully corrupted by this stinking smoke.

JAMES I, A Counterblast of Tobacco.

No woman should marry a teetotaler, or a man who does not smoke.

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

DURING the three hundred years which elapsed between these statements by a pair of shrewd Scotsmen, a great change had taken place in European manners. Smoking, which today has become almost as universal a habit as eating and drinking, was unknown in England before the day when Sir Walter Raleigh came back from Virginia with a pipe presented to him by his friend Ralph Lane, the colony's governor and the first known English smoker. Through Raleigh's influence and example (he even "took a pipe of tobacco a little before he went to the scaffold") the habit spread among the bearded sailors and knights who thronged the court of Elizabeth I. Despite the strictures of James when he became king, the smoking habit rapidly took hold throughout the world.

Is tobacco a curse or a blessing, a noxious weed or a heaven-sent anodyne? The BBC has now issued a transcription of Nesta Pain's feature programme, *Smoking*, which examines the history and practice of smoking since the introduction of tobacco to Europe in the 16th Century. The script was written by a young doctor named Richard Gordon, and he weighs the evidence for and against tobacco, from the condemnation of James I to the considered opinions of a modern psychiatrist, a physiologist, and a statistician. He surveys the habit



in its various social aspects, its probable physical effects, and the reason for the hold it has upon people today.

Whatever the doctors say it is certain that the mild narcotic effect of tobacco satisfies a secret craving in most of us. The average Englishman smokes something like 2000 cigarettes a year, and in America and other countries where the tobacco duty is less, the average is probably much higher. Tobacco was thought to have almost miraculous healing powers when the Spaniard Francisco Fernandez first brought the plant to Europe. Jean Nicot, whose surname was given to it by scientists, recommended the consumption of tobacco leaves as a cure for everything from ulcers to apparent drowning, and even smoking was thought to be a preventative for disease in the 17th Century, when schoolboys at Eton were taught pipe-smoking to ward off infection during the Great Plague.

In the Victorian age, however, it was accused of causing a number of com-

plaints from nervous irritability to general paralysis. Anti-Tobacco societies sprang up, and the report of a meeting at one of these societies contained the following stern warning:

One gentleman at a lecture took a fine cat from under a table, and poured a small quantity of liquid upon the cat's tongue, through a glass tube, and the cat was dead instantaneously. But what was it that had poisoned it? It was the juice from the stem of a meerschaum pipe, which some of our young men delight so much in smoking!

Probably this apocryphal report was used as the excuse for a piece of satiric doggerel published by one of the big tobacco firms in a pamphlet called *The Smoker's Garland*. The booklet contained literary praise of tobacco from people as varied as Carlyle, Lamb, William Cowper, and the anonymous contributors to the *Harvard Crimson*, an American undergraduate magazine.

Tobacco brands once had more exotic names than they possess now. Rifle Cake, Navy Cut, Rose Bud, May Flower, Bristol Bird's Eye, The Prairie Flower, Golden Cloud (Finest Bright Honey Dew), The Right Sort, were some of them. Our Mutual Friend was advertised as being "mild and sweet-flavoured. It is like your first love—fresh, genial, and rapturous. Like that, it fills up all the Cravings of your soul." Old Crow always came with an illustration on the packet of "Pocahontas interceding for the life of Captain Smith, founder of the Virginia settlement, 1607." Another advertisement said: "C—'s cigarettes are made by English Girls, Made in a Model English

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