

## THE KING'S ENGLISH

Sir,—In my view F. K. Tucker and "English I, 1947," are absolutely right in their well-reasoned contention; the verb contact is now "in" the language. On the other hand, I do not think the learned judge was wrong in objecting to its use in his court, for in narrative this verb is imprecise and unnecessarily vague. By the same token it is interesting to note that at least one judge has objected to the title Doctor, applied to non-medical men.

I think "Via Veritas Vita" has taken "No False Colours" up wrongly. For did the latter not say that whilst some doctors are not technically entitled to the title Dr., he would not think of otherwise addressing them? "Via Veritas Vita" is also wrong to seek a solution in a Latin root meaning. This noun is also verbalised, as may be seen in any standard dictionary.

I think Dr. Johnson would have agreed with me and not with Mr. Hyatt. In his day there would have been no confusion, the word not having then acquired its present meaning. Contemporary literature shows clearly that the term doctor was little used to describe medical men; in those days, not completely removed from the era of "barber surgery," one consulted an apothecary or a surgeon. The usage of the latter term still endures aboard ship, and in neither case is there necessarily any reference to surgery.

I think the practice of addressing non-medical graduates as Dr. when they work on or at the subject in which they qualified is quite harmless, on the job. But to introduce them socially as doctors is incorrect and misleading, for they are not doctors.

As for Mr. Hyatt's contention about the steamroller driver I can only say that in my present occupation, which is not in any way connected to my qualification, I should be grievously embarrassed to be addressed as or introduced as "Dr." Surely most graduates working outside their field of qualification would agree with me?

I. R. MAXWELL STEWART  
(Wellington).

Sir,—The 1950 reprint of the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* gives this item in its supplement: CONTACT, v. trans Get into contact with. (Orig U.S.) 1929 H. P. HANIFY, JNR. (Wellington).

Sir,—While the above subject is being discussed in the correspondence columns of *The Listener* one wonders why reference has not been made to the glaring examples of the use of the adverbs "awfully" and "terribly." One hears of someone being awfully or terribly thrilled or pleased, or something was awfully or terribly nice or good. Even educated people make use of these terms. The neat little adverb "very" seems to be becoming obsolete.

L. GERARD (Christchurch).

Sir,—Surely the subject being discussed under the above heading is to what extent colloquial English should become the English of the NZBS and the BBC. Two colloquialisms have been referred to, the use of the verb "to contact" in place of "to communicate with," and the term "doctor" to denote a person licensed to practise medicine. Most correspondents have agreed that these words are now part of our everyday language. All that is required is a ruling as to whether they are in fact "the King's English."

It is also necessary to be fair to those men who have obtained doctorates other

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

than the relatively uncommon degree of M.D., that is, in faculties other than that of medicine. They usually find after years of post-graduate study, often undertaken overseas at great personal expense, that their status is confused with that of holders of the courtesy title.

I wish to thank "A.M." for his letter. Does he imagine that a Doctor of Philosophy is by profession a philosopher? In this country he is much more likely to be an agricultural scientist.

As for the diatribe of "Via Veritas Vita," I cannot enter into a discussion of the merits and demerits of general practitioners versus specialists within the medical field. No reference to this was made in my original letter, and I cannot see that it has any possible bearing on the subject.

NO FALSE COLOURS (Auckland).

## FOREIGN MATTER

Sir,—May I thank "M.K.J." for his helpful and courteous reply to my letter on the use of the phrase *poète maudit*? He agrees with me on the general use of foreign phrases, and I with him. A certain amount of difference of opinion in detail is bound to arise. Some phrases do "save circumlocution," and I gather from my reading that numbers of English phrases have passed into French. I would plead, however, for the substitution of translations wherever practicable as, for example, "staircase wit" instead of *esprit d'escalier*, and a sparing use of relatively rare expressions. Today I came upon *poète maudit* (in an English weekly) only, I think, for the second time. I suggest that if a phrase like this is used, a translation might be inserted in brackets. If "M.K.J." had done this, there would have been three letters less for *Listener* space, but perhaps our little discussion has been worth it.

SMOOTH PASSAGE (Wellington).

Sir,—Surely "Smooth Passage," writing in your issue of June 5, can have little ground for objecting to a reviewer's use of the term *poète maudit* at the present day, seeing that Verlaine published his book of studies called *Les Poètes Maudits* as long ago as 1884. Like *parnassiens*, *symbolistes* and *surrealistes* the term has a reasonably clear connotation in literary discussion; and like those terms it has acquired an international value which would make attempts at translation merely pedantic, as well as unnecessary.

RIMBAUDISTE (Wellington).

## WIVES AND SHEEP

Sir,—Why should "Broad Mind" get "all het up" about my letter? Does he (or she) think I am silly enough to suppose that husbands scornful of culture are confined to the country? Of course you will find them in the cities. Your correspondent might have inferred my realisation of this from my reference to fishing. Men who fish all day and talk fishing all evening are not farmers. I would remind him that this discussion started from something that "Sundowner" wrote about a farmer's wife dissatisfied on this score. I don't think I have ever read a Steele Rudd story. I was born and partly brought up on a New Zealand farm, and I think I know a fair amount about the life. If anyone tells me that farming is the best life I won't contradict him. But surely it is

agreed that farm life, like that of the city, has its drawbacks, and that one of these is the relative lack of outside company. The work of the Institutes and so on, of which I know something and which I have been glad to publicise, reduces this handicap, but does not do away with it.

WIDER HORIZONS

(Wellington).

## BROADCASTS TO SCHOOLS

Sir,—One would expect special care to be taken over the preparation of a broadcast to schools. I happened to hear such a broadcast on June 8, and heard the name of Peer (Gynt) pronounced "pier"—as if he was a member of the British House of Lords, or perhaps one of the paladins of Charlemagne. (You will agree that he lacked qualification for either position.) A little later somebody called Thule "Thool." Then Sir Edmund Hillary was mentioned without his prefix, although his knighthood had been announced by the same station the day before. Possibly the last error was because the programme had been "canned" two days or more earlier, but the indication was that it had not; it was announced as coming "from the studios of 2YA." (This, come to think of it, is an equivocal statement. Do the ethics of broadcasting require any distinction in announcing to be made between broadcasts transmitted from a voice or instrument present in the transmitting station, and those transmitted from discs or tapes previously prepared? Or is any such question thought to arise only when considerations of copyright apply?) If the programme was recorded the third lapse is explained, but the opportunity for monitoring afforded by pre-recording makes the first and second the more reprehensible.

AGED LISTENER (Paekakariki).

(There was a Norwegian programme in the schools' broadcast on June 5, not June 8; throughout, Peer or Per was pronounced Pare, not Pier. The word did not recur in the programme broadcast on June 8, when Thule was indeed mispronounced Thool. Special care is taken, yes; and for the lapses that will occur in spite of it there is only the excuse pleaded in Johnson's Preface to his Dictionary.—Ed.)

## SOLO PIPING BROADCASTS

Sir,—May I congratulate the Broadcasting Service on the recent series of programmes from Invercargill by Pipe-Major Allan MacGee. We have been starved of solo piping broadcasts for a long time, and I am sure many listeners will appreciate the change. I see Dunedin is to follow the lead with a programme with W. J. Milne.

It will be a great pity if advantage is not taken of the settling in New Zealand of Pipe-Major Angus Macaulay now of Whangarei, one of Scotland's leading exponents of pipe music. Perhaps Christchurch and Wellington will also follow the lead from the south, and give us the same enjoyable music with less interference from static and from Australia.

MAC (Wellington).

## UNIVERSAL AUNTS

Sir,—Universal Aunts is a company of women who have an office at the corner of Knightsbridge and (if I remember correctly) Brompton Street. They are all educated and capable women (some of them titled), and one I know well is a first-class engineer. To the office, calls come from all parts of England for various jobs to be done; match-

ing a piece of silk, meeting a child at a railway station, driving a car from the place of purchase to the new owner's home because she is not used to the new model, helping to cook and serve at a special afternoon or evening, taking a child twice weekly from his home in Kent, to London for treatment, or an elderly gentleman to and from his club every afternoon because he is much too vague to be entrusted to taxis—and so on.

On the other side of the ledgers, so to speak, the Universal Aunts have a list of (mostly) women who, having had no special training, are not qualified for a special job, yet need a little extra money. The Aunts put them in touch with prospective employers for a small fee. They are all delightful women with an easy efficiency which makes would-be employers and would-be employees feel confident and happy. And they certainly do settle many problems for the folks who are unable to attend to shopping etc.

JEANNE BIDDULPH

(Auckland).

Sir,—"Universal Aunts, Ltd.," was a firm which operated in London before the war. It comprised three or four enterprising women who could send to you a cook for that special dinner party, or someone to do the flowers; someone to shampoo the dog or exercise it; provide a dance partner of either sex; shop for country people; book a table at a nightclub or do almost anything under the sun that didn't actually come under the heading of a trade or profession. Their most valuable service was providing escorts for school children, at the beginning and end of term, who had to cross London from one station to another. If necessary they would send a reliable escort with a girl who was going to school on the Continent, or collect her when she came home. For this and other services the client paid all expenses involved, plus the fee suitable for the work done.

ENGLISHWOMAN (Dunedin).

(Several other correspondents have kindly supplied similar information.—Ed.)

## WILLIAM PEMBER REEVES

Sir,—I am engaged in writing a biography of William Pember Reeves. I would be very grateful if any reader who has letters, documents, or particulars of any incidents or anecdotes concerning Reeves would be so kind as to communicate with me. All documents will be carefully used and returned.

KEITH SINCLAIR

(Auckland University College).

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

A.M.G. (Dunedin).—Passing on to Aunt Daisy.

E. M. Young (Onehunga).—Many thanks. Will pass it on.

Rugby Follower (Wyndham).—Very carefully considered.

Constant Listener (Rangitane).—Letters should be signed, even when pen-names are used.

Mrs. J.A.W. (Oamaru).—Sorry: there is not enough space to give those programmes in detail.

C. A. Mackersay (Havelock North).—Interesting, but away from the point of the discussion.

Daylight (Whangamata).—Not related to programmes or to material already published in *The Listener*.

Ata Anita (Hamilton).—The process of instruction and correction is continuous. Listeners help when they draw attention to specific errors.