

EDUCATION AND HAPPINESS

Sir,—I have listened with much interest to the series *Pursuit of Happiness*, and was impressed by the dictum of the Principal of Westport Technical High School, that happiness could only be found in work. I could not agree more earnestly.

But immediately I am confronted with the problem that is created by our national education system and its determination that every advantage of civilisation shall be acquired by every child with the minimum of effort. I have watched the development of this determination over a long period. I have shared the enthusiasms of Seddon and Savage and Fraser, and I have arrived at the point where everything those idealists aimed at should be in full operation, bearing full production. And what do I find? The question staggers me, and I can only answer it by a parable.

There was once a State Pig Farm, where little pigs were fattened up to become bacon, and the State was very proud of it. However, those who were close to the farm saw that the little pigs were not getting fat enough. They informed the State, and the State sent inspectors and experts to investigate and to advise. As a result, the farm was reconstructed, with every device that could induce wee pigs to become great pigs. But still those piglets languished.

There was a Funny Old Man at the Pig Farm whose job it was to sweep up after the pigs. He worried about the meagreness of his job, about the good food that lay in the troughs, untouched, until he drained it away; about the Awful Waste. One day he had an inspiration. He took it to the Manager, who smiled kindly, but listened.

"Them pigs," babbled the Ancient, "they got everything, but they're still measly. And I know why." He paused and drew a long, brave breath: "They don't take the trouble to eat."

That, Mr. Editor, is what is wrong with our education system. It provides everything—except, the incentive to learn. It keeps great lumpy boys at school, wasting the taxpayers' money and the teachers' abilities, when they should be out at work, coping with the decline of our national economy. It spends millions lavishly (in the fatuous delusion that spending millions is bound to achieve something) on enormous schools, numerous (but piffling) salaries, free train rides, and the repair of wilful destruction.

The struggle that made Seddon and Savage and Fraser into outstanding men has, by their very act, been removed from this generation, who will, thereupon be incapable of producing outstanding men. A generation of drifters, whose cynical disregard of values, social and moral, is responsible for vandalism, waste, and deteriorating production, is rapidly taking the place of the workers who built this country.

D. R. HAY (Upper Hutt).

POETS' CORNER

Sir,—Although I am unable to give "Arejay" the code that will decipher the mass of verbiage the moderns dare to call poetry, I would like to quote Aldous Huxley on this subject, with the earnest hope that some of our so-called poets will read the words: "Obscurity in poetry is by no means always to be avoided. Shakespeare, for example, is one of the most difficult of authors. He often writes obscurely, for the good reason that he often has subtle and uncommon thoughts to put into words. So have some of the poets writing obscurely

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

at the present time. Most, however, have not. Their thoughts and the way they see the world are commonplace; only their syntax is extraordinary. Almost all the contents of the 'advanced' reviews are just 'Mary had a little lamb' translated into Hebrew and written in cipher. Re-Englished and decoded, they astonish the reader by their silliness. Catching the sense at one remove or ten, he is annoyed to find that it is either nonsense or platitude."

ENBEE (Marton).

BROADCASTS TO SCHOOLS

Sir,—In your issue of July 3, "Aged Listener" takes those responsible for broadcasts to schools to task for having mentioned the name of Edmund Hillary without his prefix. Your correspondent is guilty of the offence with which he charges those responsible for the broadcast.

May I direct your correspondent's attention to an announcement which appeared in the *London Times* of January 7, 1949? The announcement was necessitated by the fact that, owing to the illness of the then King, it was obvious that a considerable time would elapse between the announcement of the New Year Honours and their actual conferment by His Majesty. The text of the announcement is as follows:—"All persons awarded orders, decorations and medals may add the appropriate letters to their names immediately after the announcement in the *London Gazette*, e.g.:—Robert Wilson, Esq., K.C.B. Knights Grand Cross and Knights Commanders of Orders of Chivalry and Knights Bachelor do not use the prefix 'Sir' until they have received the accolade from the King. In the case of Knights Grand Cross and Knights Commanders of Orders of Chivalry who are unable to attend to receive the accolade from the King or from someone appointed to confer the honour on His Majesty's behalf (e.g., those resident abroad) a Dispensation Warrant is issued entitling them to assume the prefix 'Sir' until such time as they can receive the accolade from the King."

I am unaware of a Dispensation Warrant having been issued to the gentleman who, by the time this letter appears, will almost certainly be Sir Edmund Hillary. In any event, it would not have been issued within a day of the announcement of the honour conferred on him.

A. G. DAVIS (Auckland).

"CLOCHEMERLE"

Sir,—Your film critic "Jno." writing in the issue of July 3 about the French film *Clochemerle*, quite rightly says that "our tradition is puritan and that is no preparation for French humour at its most basic." But to describe the film as all too often "unnecessarily grubby," as he does, is to judge it in terms of that puritanism at its worst. The spirit of the film's unselfconscious portrayal of human nature in the round seems to me so utterly inconsistent with "grubbiness" that the use of the word and the glimpse of the attitude behind it are themselves shocking.

May I suggest that, although, of course, *Clochemerle* should be treated on its merits as an uproarious farce, there are things we could learn from it—notably the humane and commonsense attitude of the old priest to the problem of the unmarried girl who is going to have a baby. That baby is not going to be found drowned or otherwise dealt

with in any of the drastic ways which reports of court proceedings in our puritan community bring all too often to our reluctant notice.

SHIRLEY SMITH (Wellington).

THE KING'S ENGLISH

Sir,—I do not think Mr. Maxwell Stewart will receive much support—at least from the professions—for his contention that it is incorrect and embarrassing to introduce as "Doctor" the holder of a non-medical doctorate. The title, in fact, seems to be academically inescapable.

However, in the matter of my reference to Dr. Johnson there may perhaps be room for some defence. Mr. Stewart disagrees with this estimate (offered, I admit, facetiously) on the ground that contemporary usage did not define the medical man, and that therefore no confusion could exist. This I do not doubt, but to what does the argument then lead? Are we to assume that the ghostly Doctor—already holding the title—would, in these latter days, be sufficiently public-spirited to throw that title overboard in favour of the *parvenu*? Possible, of course, though scarcely probable with a spectre of such dignity and eminence! Would he not be more likely to deplore all this vulgar usurpation of the title by barbers, apothecaries and leeches.

Finally, if I have erred in my mode of addressing Mr. Stewart my sincere apologies are due, but I believe this is the form of address which he desires.

J. B. HYATT (Wellington).

(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

"LITTLE MURDERESSES"

Sir,—When I heard *Little Murderesses*, or *Who Killed Beth March?* from 3YC I thoroughly enjoyed it. But what induced Mr. Wall to write about the history of the March family from this point of view? Let me whisper it, did he have his tongue in his cheek? Anyway, at the beginning of the "inquiry" I was feeling thoroughly miserable and blue, but before it was halfway through I was chuckling heartily.

L. (Christchurch).

CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS

Sir,—The provocative remarks introducing your recent article on Mr. Congalton's survey are ill-founded and misdirected. One may assume, I hope, that the writer does not favour marked class differences or class prejudices; but his observations may foster both by confusing attitudes towards occupations with class distinctions.

There would be supreme irony in *The Listener* increasing our consciousness of class if class-consciousness is to be deplored; but "class-consciousness" is, of course, a misnomer, being now used almost invariably in a derogatory sense to mean class prejudice. Do our ratings of occupations betray class prejudice and reveal class distinctions in our midst? In a classless society would we rate every occupation on a par? If we think more highly of a skilled professional man than of an unskilled worker, are we guilty of class prejudice? Would the contributor of your article accuse vocational guidance officers of gross class-consciousness in their advice to students on the respective merits of different occupations?

"Social status," about which the investigators are seeking opinions, is an amorphous concept, even more difficult to define than "class." I suppose that

the social status of an occupation would be assessed by most of us in terms of prominence and influence in the community and the respect accorded by one's fellows. But if there are gradations in the social status of different occupations, is this any justification for declaring that class distinctions exist? Do news reporters form a different social class from carpenters? When an occupation implies training and individual achievement, responsibility, and some self-sacrifice for the benefit of the community, it may surely carry a high "social status" without the slightest implication of class distinction or class prejudice.

Anyone who suggests that there is as much social class-consciousness in New Zealand as in older countries must have travelled with eyes closed. What we have is part of a bad tradition, diminishing, I hope, and not an insidious local growth. We can certainly discriminate between occupations without adopting the view that a person's welfare in this world should principally depend on what his father was.

A questionnaire of the type being used could possibly make a good parlour game. But the invitation to place these occupations in order is itself a leading question, a highly suggestive formula, implying that each of them has a distinct place in a hierarchy. There is no justification for any assumption about the relative ease or difficulty experienced by those who attempted to answer. When 88 per cent failed to respond to a postal questionnaire there might even be grounds for suspicion that a few citizens feel they are being asked to attempt the impossible. If they knew that replies would be interpreted as evidence of class-consciousness in New Zealand they would have had ample reason for declining to undertake the forlorn task.

I. D. CAMPBELL (Wellington).

(Our correspondent asks: "If there are gradations in the social status of different occupations, is this any justification for declaring that class distinctions exist?" It certainly is. Gradations in this context are degrees in rank or merit, and are therefore distinctions. And very few people are able to make class distinctions without prejudice.—Ed.)

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Mrs. J.A. (Te Awamutu).—Regret printed copy not available.

C.F. (Wellington).—Objection noted. But are you really able to say why anyone, apart from yourself, buys it?

Dissatisfied (Martinborough).—The last episode showed Bill and Kit finally parted, Bill looking forward to greater happiness with Peggy Douglas, Kit tasting the bitterness of a life's failure.

Mrs. B. Stephenson (Auckland) and Four Score (Dunedin).—Perhaps it is fortunate that there can be no change; for a change to either an earlier or a later placement would make things worse for one of you.

Arthur Alison (Auckland).—Much appreciated.

Inquisitive Listener (Auckland).—Some years ago he made a large number of recordings for an English company, but not many of them are about today. He also took minor parts in sketches with Sandy Powell. He was born in Lancashire.

Ex-Serial Fan (Kaikoura).—The producer not infrequently arranges to meet the sponsor's convenience by terminating the story at this, that, or another stage. The way this one wound up was clearly, if briefly, indicated.

W. Warburton (Runanga).—The frequencies of Australian and New Zealand stations are arranged so as to give the least possible mutual interference; but there are so many stations that interference cannot always be avoided, especially when listeners tune to a station from some distance outside its main service area.

T. E. Holm (Inchbourne).—No: the term goes back to Chaucer and has literary associations which are not affected by official usage.