

UNANSWERED CORRESPONDENCE

I WAS not interested in A. N. Whitehead, in spite of his great reputation, till I heard Bertrand Russell say last night that he was constitutionally incapable of answering letters. I am still not interested in the mathematician and the philosopher, who are both beyond my grasp. But it does interest me that a man of Whitehead's diligence, orderliness, and

SEPTEMBER 10 high principle could not whip himself into acknowledging letters even briefly. If I could believe that he answered no letters at all, I might find myself wondering whether he was completely selfish or slightly deranged. But he seems to have been a man of great kindness and (in all other respects) of unfailing courtesy. He refused to write as teetotallers refuse to drink, and for the same reason: because he was afraid. Answer letters, he felt, and you will have no time to answer the questions research asks, if you are a scientist, or life and experience if you are a philosopher. It was better to be condemned as a boor than damned as a traitor—the traitor that every man is more or less when he does what others ask him to do and not what he plans to do himself.

I have no such lofty reasons for boorishness as Whitehead found for 40 years, but I have lived long enough to know how soon the cup is empty if we give everyone a sip; how easy it is to confuse courtesy with weak compliance; how certainly we lose our way if we let everyone guide us; how bitter it is to look back on the "feeble fabrications"

that could, and should, have been our affirmations.

A CORRESPONDENT wonders why I shed so many tears over animals and so few over human beings; why I am so sloppy over calves and lambs and so indifferent to children; why saleyards and slaughterhouses worry me and boarding-schools leave me unmoved.

I could make two answers. I could say that it is not a fault in a donkey that it does not neigh like a horse or moo like a cow or baa like a sheep. I could also say that things are not always what they seem. If it is sloppy to be fond of calves and lambs, and say so, I am sloppy. If it is indifference to be silent about situations we can't change, I am indifferent to the great boarding-school betrayal. But the most moving sight I know is a toddler's first toddle to school. One of the most depressing sights is the animal we call a boy after a year or two of "shaping" in a boarding-school. I never see the first without thinking that man is the only animal ashamed of his young. I seldom see the second without wondering if there is any other creature but civilised man capable of such disfiguring tortures. The day it goes to school a child begins to be anything you like to call it so long as you don't call it a child any more. Before he leaves boarding-school a boy has learnt to live without natural affection, to be proud of his social, moral and mental mutilations, and to despise originality and independence. But why shed tears of blood over him? It is better to save our tears for the follies of which the world may grow ashamed in our own day

by "SUNDOWNER"

I DON'T want to go on record as a believer in the superior wisdom and kindness of animals. Animals have no wisdom and no kindness in any human sense. Even their instincts, which make them protective to their young at the expense (sometimes, but not often) of their own lives, occasionally go wrong. Carnivorous animals will eat their young if they are disturbed too soon after the upset of bearing. The grass-eaters will desert their young, attack the young of

SEPTEMBER 13 other mothers, push them out into the wet and the cold, and ignore the most piteous appeals for succour. Each of our three pet lambs has a living mother who will not feed her. One has a dislocated hip (fortunately mending) inflicted by a ewe from whom she tried too persistently to steal a drink. I saw the first butt, and the second as the victim sprawled helpless on the ground, and when I went to the rescue the damage was done.

As for the other side of the picture, ewes that steal lambs which do not belong to them, bitches that suckle kittens or rabbits if they lose their pups, mule mares which (so I have read) have been known to steal foals and even secrete milk in their maternal excitement, none of these are acts of devotion or intelligent kindness. They are aberrations of an unreasoning instinct, touching to observe, but on no account to be confused with what would appear to be the same emotions in human beings. We don't restrain, dominate, bully, or oppress our children malevolently. We don't often do it consciously. We knock them

out of their original shape because we suppose in our blasphemy, that we must; that God when he created them did not know as well as we do what was good for them, or for His own inscrutable reasons cast them in a mould which, if we did nothing about it, would leave them hopeless misfits in the world in which He compels them to live. Animals are neither blasphemous nor pious, mentally neither arrogant nor humble, morally neither good nor bad. In themselves—that is, if we left them entirely alone—they would have neither the right to live nor the right to say when or how they should die. But we don't leave them alone. We can't, because they can't leave us alone. We have taken them over, assumed the right to say how many shall live and how many each day shall not live, and the penalty we are paying is this emotion that gets us by the throat when we think we have them by the throat and can do as we like with them.

(To be continued)

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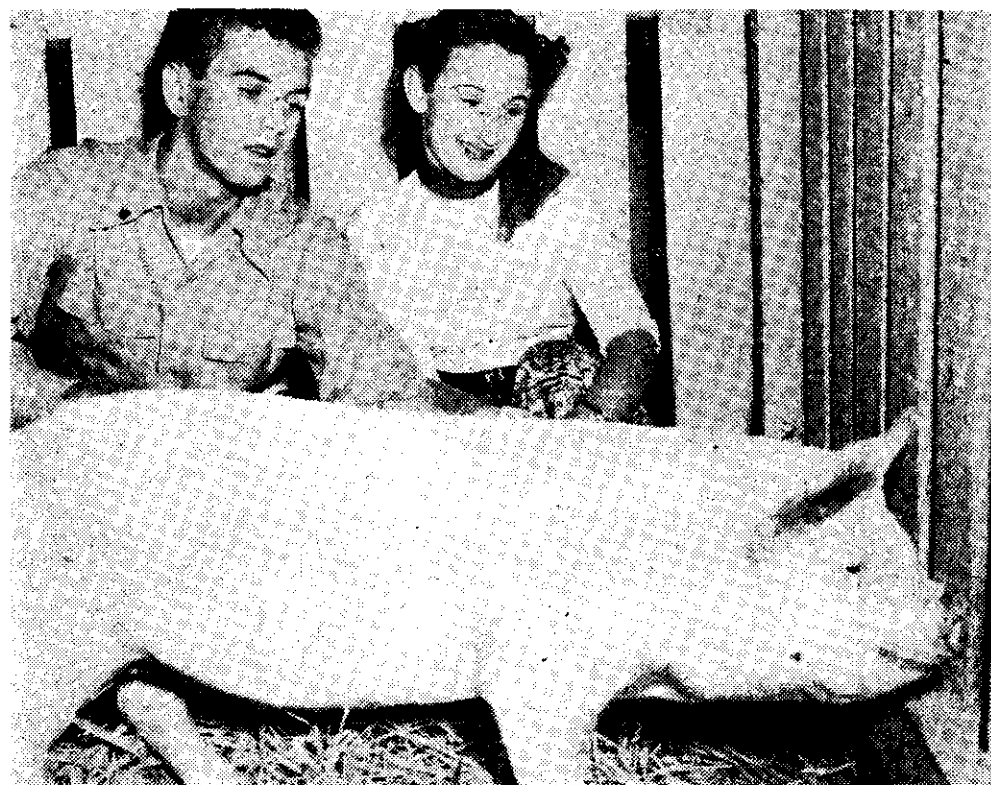
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BORONIA, seen here with Dick and Meg Henderson, is a character young people will get to know as they listen to "The Farm Without a Name," to be heard in the Children's Session from YA and YZ stations, starting from 3YA on Monday, October 5. This new serial, which was first broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, tells how three teen-agers and their aunt took over a farm they had inherited