

Editorial Notes

Wellington, Friday, April 8, 1932

YOUNG William Wilson was thoroughly fed up. His job was to "mind" a machine in a large motor factory in the black district of Britain. The machine did the work. He simply had to see that no misadventure occurred, no blockage and no stoppage. In effect, he became a human automaton. There was no challenge to his ingenuity, no mental activity, no stimulus. He had to use his eyes and his observation, and rectify anything that went wrong. To some, this would have been a good job. To him, with the ambition that stirred within him, it was a dull, dreary round. His mate felt the same. He also "minded" a machine. Day by day they watched that machine do the work. They had been doing this for some two years, and were becoming very wearied of the monotony, the lack of variety, and the apparent impossibility of rising beyond it.

EACH had ideals of getting out of the rut in which they found themselves. They attended the Central Technical College during two sessions to study mathematics and drawing to fit themselves for promotion, but, exhausted by the dull routine of each day's round, they failed to stand the pace and were compelled to give up. The Principal of the College was interested in them, and suggested they should attend the Evening Institute, where more individual attention might be possible. They did so, making slow but steady progress until, for various reasons, the classes were closed. The following evening these young men met the head of a listening group at an Evening Institute in their town. They pointed out the difficulties that surrounded men in their jobs—"machine-minders" in a machine age. They wanted to know how they could fit themselves for promotion if it ever came. They both felt that they had "rotten" jobs—jobs that any fool could do to satisfy the boss—and both felt that intelligence and ambition were useless in the production shops. They had lost interest and were "fed up" with their work. Arising out of their talk the suggestion was made that they form a discussion group for young production-workers of their class. A series of talks over the B.B.C. stations by Professor Pear on "Making Work Worth While" was then about to begin, and the machine-minder suggested that his group should be

formed round these talks. The difficulties were discussed, and finally he was offered the use of the necessary room and apparatus to start the class.

THE evening of the first talk the two young originators of the scheme arrived an hour beforehand to see that all was in readiness. They provided scribbling pads and pencils for note-taking for the 18 young men who were expected. Copies of books suggested in connection with the course that were available in the city libraries had been obtained for reference and inspection. Fifteen young fellows, all unskilled workers in the motor shops attended. The set was switched on, and at their own request they were left alone in the room. Two and a half hours later they were still there. The talk over the air had stimulated their minds. They had found in it the necessary "meat" on which to bite. They had turned, as suggested, to some of the books at hand, and dipped into them, had propounded ideas, and altogether had had such a "talking-feast" on a solid subject as they had never thought possible. Week by week the talks went on. They were allowed to smoke. They met together round the wireless set to follow every talk. They discussed angles of the subject long after it closed. The whole of the members continued right throughout the series. The depth to which they delved in literature surrounding the subject and the amount of reading they did was surprising. Some of the group asked for additional information respecting vocational guidance, and were put on the road to lift themselves out of the ruts they felt they were in. They were given a stimulus to ambition, but over and above that they were shown that the jobs that they were doing had a purpose, that they were interesting, that they were fulfilling a definite function, and that the apparently unskilled job really was skilled.

THAT experience is typical of the work being done by study circles in Great Britain. For the last three years there has been a marked rise in this field of activity. In 1929 there existed 218 discus-

sion groups in connection with the series of wireless talks. In the spring of 1930 the number grew to 349, followed by a still greater increase in numbers in the succeeding autumn. This development is due to two things: first to an increased interest being taken in wireless as a medium of adult education by local education authorities, universities and voluntary bodies; and, secondly, to the increased scope of the work undertaken at the listening end by the Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education. The central body, which works under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of York, is charged with two duties: First, it organises the matter to go over the air, and secondly it facilitates the development of listening groups and discussion groups at the listening end. To do this it has established, wherever requisite, a number of Area Councils and local committees. By co-operation with public libraries, facilities are provided in many cases for these discussion groups to meet in library premises, where the resources of the library in literature of a suitable character are made available. The work is expanding so rapidly that it will not be long before practically the whole of Britain is covered by Area Councils supervising the formation of discussion groups within its territory. This work has been generously assisted by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees, grants having been made in aid of experiments in certain territories.

HERE in New Zealand the time is ripe for a forward movement in connection with study circles. For some years past the Workers' Educational Association has done valuable work in providing radio speakers on various topics. Several discussion groups, particularly in the Auckland Province, have been formed, with useful results. It was announced last week that arrangements have now been made for the Workers' Educational Association to provide two speakers for each of four YA stations weekly. It is understood that capable and good speakers are to be chosen. We know that the Workers' Educational Association is keen to round

out the broadcast talks by the establishment, wherever possible, of study circles or discussion groups. The headquarters in Auckland of the W.E.A. is prepared at all times to undertake correspondence with those desirous of forming such groups. Provision is made for necessary supplementary matter in the form of books to be read in conjunction with the talks. The "Radio Record" is prepared within its power to do all possible to help this movement, as we appreciate the service that radio can render to its listeners in this direction. We have not in New Zealand those large numbers of industrial workers who are eager for mental stimulus that are a necessary accompaniment of the industrial life in the Old World. We are an agricultural and pastoral community. To the workers in the country, however, radio can be just as useful—if not more so—than it is to those in the humdrum occupations of modern civilisation. The isolation of the country is as potent and in some cases as depressing as the monotonous occupation of the city. Radio can rectify the one as it does the other. In our country areas there has been done in late years a fine work in the establishment of Women's Institutes and branches of the Women's Division of the Farmers' Union. Each of these organisations does much to provide mental stimulus for their country members—necessarily women. The young folk of the country, however, both boys and girls, in their formative years after leaving school can derive a very great deal of benefit from guidance along lines of mental activity. In country halls study circles could advantageously be formed for the prosecution of study along the lines set by radio talks. The step now made, and we hope the publicity given to the idea of study circles, will stimulate the formation of groups throughout the Dominion. Detailed information as to procedure, etc., can be procured from the Director of the Workers' Educational Association, Mr. N. M. Richmond, Auckland.

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