

HALF-HOURS WITH THE W.E.A.

AUCKLAND.

'Smoke More, Read Less, Be Wiser'

Philosopher Hobbes Agrees With Stephen Leacock on Education—
Punch Looks at the Motorist and the Wireless
Talk — "Listening Groups."

"PUNCH" had a joke recently in which a motorist had abandoned his car in the road and was standing miserably in the rain under a tree about 100 yards away. "Are you waiting for somebody?" asks a passing yokel. "Yes I am," says the motorist bitterly. "I've got a wireless set in my car. I've forgotten how to turn it off, and there's a fellow giving a lecture." Well, we all know that feeling, and as a professional lecturer I rather enjoy that kind of joke.

WHAT is the use of these W.E.A. talks of ours anyway? Are they worth all the trouble that goes into them? Perhaps you think they are no trouble to us, and it may surprise you to learn that on the whole it is a good deal easier to prepare oneself for a whole hour's lecture to a visible audience than for 20 minutes over the air to an invisible one (assuming that not all of you are like the motorist in the rain). However that may be, I think the time has come to point out a few of the things that might result if full advantage were taken of these half-hours with which this page is concerned. As a matter of fact I have said the sort of thing I am going to say now more than once before. But my experience is that you have to say things a good many times in this modern world before anyone takes any notice.

FIRST of all, let us forget the word "education" altogether if it makes us feel like motorists waiting in the rain. Talks is a good enough word. "That great philosopher Hobbes," says a writer in the "Listener," "agreed with that great modern humourist Stephen Leacock in praising the talk as the secret of education. The secret of the success of education at Oxford, argued Mr. Leacock, is that the professors smoke at their best pupils. If men smoked more and read less, said Hobbes, they would be much wiser." So I hope all listeners will take this to heart. What it means is that you are missing the real appreciation of a good W.E.A. talk if you don't gather some friends together and "smoke at each other" over a discussion of it.

NOW this is not simply a joke of mine. I am speaking perfectly seriously, and I want to tell you something about what they are doing in England in the way of "smoking at each other" in this sort of way. My information comes mainly from a recently received B.B.C. pamphlet: "Wireless Discussion Groups—what they are and how to run them." I have no intention of urging that we should move along exactly similar lines in New Zealand—our different conditions in many respects make that impossible. But I find in this pamphlet some very valuable hints as to what we might

notice of listeners, encourage in every way the formation of listening groups, and transmit to the B.B.C. all the comments and criticisms they can gather. The efficiency of this organisation gains immensely of course from the fact that the B.B.C. can afford to employ a number of full-time education officers to co-ordinate the work in various regions.

IN this way "personal contact has been established with many thousands of people in all positions and occupations," so that listeners "take a very real share in the educational policy of the B.B.C." Moreover, conferences and summer schools for listening-group leaders have now become a regular thing. "Here it is possible for listeners to meet the broadcaster, and to discuss the talks freely. The speaker comes to a conference, partly to explain what he means to say in his future series of talks, but equally ready to alter his methods if he finds it desirable. This is, indeed, a new thing in the history of education. Never before has there been a sustained effort to bring all the best speakers, all the greatest experts, in almost every branch of knowledge, to the fireside of any and every home. The opportunity is immense, and the speakers have not been slow to take it.

WELL, we cannot exactly bring "all the greatest experts in almost every branch of knowledge" to our firesides. And it may be some time before there are enough listening groups to make conferences and summer schools for group leaders worth while. But isn't it about time we had at least some groups in existence? Two years ago I thought the millennium was beginning to arrive, when two groups actually did arise out of a series given from 1YA—and very effective groups they were, one of them sending in most valuable reports of their discussions. But it was apparently a false dawn, and I have heard of nothing similar since.

I HOPE in a future article to deal more in detail with how groups can be formed and what they can do. Meanwhile, may I suggest that the W.E.A. urgently desires that contact with listeners which has been mentioned as the secret of successful programme building? I have recently had a number of letters in which listeners have made criticisms and offered suggestions which have borne fruit in the talks now being arranged. (For instance, Mr. Archery's forthcoming series on "World Races and the Maori" is a direct result of a listener's suggestion.) This help is much appreciated, but we can do with plenty more from those who are content to enjoy or suffer in silence. Perhaps if that motorist waiting in the rain had written to the B.B.C. it might have profited by his comments!

"World Races and the Maori." New Series of W.E.A. Talks

The Auckland W.E.A. is presenting an interesting series of talks during the next six weeks. Below are details:—

Wednesday, September 13 and three following Wednesdays:—
"World Races and the Maori," by Mr. Gilbert Archey, M.A. (Director Auckland War Memorial Museum).

- (1) The Black Races.
- (2) The Yellow Races.
- (3) The White Races.
- (4) Maori and Polynesian.

Thursday, September 14 and three following Thursdays:—
"Some Twentieth Century Novelists," by Mr. D. W. Faigan, M.A.

- (1) Arnold Bennett.
- (2) John Galsworthy.
- (3) Mary Webb.
- (4) J. B. Priestley.

Wednesday, October 11, and three following Wednesdays:—
"A Great British Composer—Edward Elgar," by Mr. E. Varley Hudson, B.A. (Conductor of Auckland Municipal Choir).

- (1) Elgar's Life.
- (2) Early Music.
- (3) Choral Music and Songs.
- (4) Orchestral Music.

be doing. One of the first outstanding points made is that the talks programme, as it has developed, is almost entirely the result of contact with listeners. It is not imposed from above. As one of the B.B.C. officers put it, "The strength of this movement for education by wireless lies at the circumference, not at the centre."

IT IS not necessary to describe in detail how this contact with listeners is organised. Suffice it to say that there is a gradually growing network of local committees all over the country, which brings the talks to the

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