

# "It Seems to Us — —"

THE major trend in amateur radio during the past decade seems to have been toward an increasing maturity. Whether or not that's a desirable thing offers room for considerable debate. Here are the facts:

In 1926 the average age of the licensed amateur membership of A.R.R.L. was about 22 years. In 1928 it was an estimated 23. In 1934 it was perhaps 25. In mid-1937 it was about 27. To-day it is an even 30.

This last figure is disclosed by the latest check-up on the returns from the Perpetual Survey questionnaire, which has for nearly a year been sent to new and renewing members. Broken down into component parts, we find that the Class A licensees have an average age of 31.5, the Class B licensees average 28, Class C are up to 30 again, while the non-amateur members average 27 and the foreign licensed membership peaks at 32.

Parenthetically, the percentages of Class A and Class C members are somewhat disproportionate in terms of national averages, the proportion of Class A members running about a third higher than the national percentage of license issuances while Class C is about 50 per cent less. Class B proportions are about equal. The probable answer to this situation lies in economic factors.

The obvious conclusion from this array of evidence is that the growing complexity and cost of amateur radio is slowly restricting its pursuit to those of broader experience and training and greater financial responsibility. The day of amateur radio as the hobby of "attic experimenters" and "basement" laboratorians, the art of lads of high-school age or younger who dabble with it as a diversion from Meccano or Erector sets or a Gilbert's "boy chemist" kit, is passing. Indeed, it is already past.

Partial evidence of this, added to the rising average age, is the increased *minimum* age. A few years back we had licensed amateurs of 8 and 9 years of age; little Jean Hudson was only nine when she got her ticket in 1933. Lads of 12 or 13 were veterans. To-day all that has changed. The youngest licensed amateur of whom we know is 12, and in all the country there are only a handful under 15.

In the editorial in September 1937 *QST*, K.B.W. pointed out that there existed two peaks in amateur age groups, one denoting the apex of youthful enthusiasm, the other the return to the

air after the young man had established himself in the world. The first peak centered between 17 and 21, the second between 28 and 33. We have become accustomed to referring to these as the 20-30 peaks. But our more recent figures tend to shift those points: the first now runs 19-24, with a maximum at 21. The second covers 29-35, with a maximum at 32. Furthermore, there is now an intermediate peak at 27 that overshadows the one at 21.

So it can be seen that from every vantage point for analysis the pattern moves up the age scale. Obviously, there must be underlying causes for this state of affairs, and it does not do merely to say that amateurs are growing older. The percentage of turn-over in amateur ranks has not lessened appreciably. The average tenure of license on the part of our membership runs between 6 and 7 now, close to what it was in the last check-up. The peak in the years' licensed curve occurs at about 3 years in both cases.

Nor is all of the answer to be found in increasing technical complexity or in the higher cost of station equipment. True, our elaborate receivers and multi-stage transmitters are monstrosities beside the 1-, 2- and 3-stage rigs of a decade ago. But there has been some simplification in recent times; and beyond that, better understanding of circuit behavior reduced to elementary rules of thumb; and above all there is the availability of detailed technical literature on a scale undreamt of a few years back. So far as cost is concerned, the minimum initial cost of an adequate station is lower by half now than it was ten or even five years ago. In 1926 a 100-watt rig with a 210 took most of a couple of weeks' wages for Mr. Average American; now he can run 100 watts to a pair of 6L6's for less than the cost of a suit of clothes. Perhaps the youngsters of to-day are wiser than we were; perhaps they prefer the suit of clothes.

But this is a subject that leads to endless speculation, and this page is not endless. Whatever the causes, the facts are these: Amateur radio is growing older, more mature. It has long been more than just a hobby for the youngsters; it has now gotten well beyond their reach. It is the pursuit of men of affairs, who, stabilized, in their normal vocational activities, have found it the ideal avocation. To-day, more than ever, the character of its adherents lends the institution of amateur radio character, prestige, and responsibility.

—C. B. D.