

Life Among the Japanese at Featherston

THESE studies of Japanese prisoners of war at Featherston were drawn for *The Listener* by McNamara. The notes which follow are based on observations made by one of the prison guards.

TO a European a crowd of Japanese prisoners-of-war is, at first sight, just a mass of men whose features are disturbingly alike. But each man has his own special characteristics. One man is a first-rate gardener who loves flowers and everything beautiful that comes out of the ground. He takes the greatest care of his gardening implements and a deep pride in his work.

ANOTHER prisoner is a qualified architect and an unusually good artist with water-colours. Still another has gained a wide knowledge of English through the text-books. He writes it as well as he speaks it and was given a job as a clerk in one of the offices.

THE more intelligent among these prisoners are very anxious to learn English. It is a curious thing that there are no swear words or expletives, as we know them, in their language. But one word can mean many different things.

THERE are adepts among the prisoners at fashioning something from nothing. Japanese prisoners discard nothing that can be of any possible use. In the early days of the camp their ingenuity was strained to the utmost. They created costumes for their ceremonial plays from very much discarded rags and odds and ends of all sorts.

THE Japanese are not fond of boots. When compelled to wear them, they discard the laces and rest their heels on the soft leather at the back, in a squatting position. They prefer the *geta*—a wooden sole and a piece of cloth.

SOME have taken up wood carving enthusiastically. They use blocks of firewood. One man became an expert in making wooden elephants. Another has barber's shop tendencies and cuts hair Western style.

FROM old jam tins, teapots, and coloured cellophane some build such toys as model aeroplanes. Months of patient endeavour go into the making of a Mah Jong set.

HARD physical exercise and outdoor games are favoured by one section, while another prefers the Japanese style of poker. The prisoners do not box, but wrestle in the ju-jitsu manner. Baseball is the favourite outdoor game. On our New Year's Day, which is one of their festival days, they play children's games and hold three-legged and spoon races. Their ping-pong games are hard fought and there are some players of a high standard among them.

