

# Professor Allen Submerges For "Listener" Readers



PROFESSOR ALLEN explaining to the 2ZB microphone and his spectators how he will smoke under water. A lighted cigarette is at the right-hand end of the glass holder. Our photographs taken during the act, showing the smoke rising and escaping, were unsuccessful because of the disturbance of the water.

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Suddenly he looked up and into my eyes.

"You know, an interesting thing happened to me once," he said. "I was diving near some rocks, and I must have swum into a cave. It was quite dark. Suddenly I saw before me two great red eyes, glowing. Strange, wasn't it? It must have been some monster that was living in there. . . ."

He had begun to talk again of the monsters of the deep. He was gazing into the distance once more, his eyes wrinkled, nearly closed.

"Biologists tell us," he said, "that all things that are above the surface of the waters are represented below—kings, queens, horses, lions, the moonfish, the starfish, the hawkfish, the devil fish—even the godshrimp—sea-urchins, the bridal fish (I have seen that in Lake Taupo), the angel fish. . . ."

Remembering that uncompleted life-story, I asked The Professor how old he is. "Over ten and under a hundred," he said. "Age is nothing to do with it. It's a side issue. Another thing people are always asking me is 'How long can you stay under water, Professor?' I will never tell them, not even Royalty, nor pressmen, nor photographers. No, I learned that from Melba: 'Never tell the world at large any secret of your life.' She said: 'I told them in Italy what was the

highest note I could sing; it was a mistake; when the world knows, they're no longer interested. The novelty must never die. They must always be more interested in you, Professor, than you are in them."

"No, I wouldn't tell my Doctor. My Doctor says 'You're a funny chap, Professor.' But I wouldn't even tell the King!"

## PROFESSOR

ALLEN'S Smoking Underwater against Every Internal and External Pressure is done in this fashion: a cigarette is lighted and placed in a holder fixed in a long decorated glass tube. He fills the tube with smoke, then goes down, draws the smoke, and then blows out the blue bubble. Then he tells them that they've often seen water steam but now they've seen it smoke. The purpose of the glass is to ensure that the public knows it is not being deceived.

"Mind you," he says, "it makes me sick. I'm not a smoker at all, and it's very painful sometimes."

He mixes a lot with scientists to get ideas. From them he has learned that there is a purpose in the slow

movements of the octopus, the eel, the Javanese death crab, and shellfish. They must not move fast, because fast movements would damage their bodies. Moderation and temperance are essential to the Subaquatic Scientist.

"I could never take to drink. It would slow up my breathing, you see. I've led a very clean life. Of course any ordinary swimmer will be a great champion for a time, but then he'll say 'But of course I've taken to drink now. . . . A boxer could go into the ring drunk, but it is not so in swimming. You know, a professor in Dunedin once told me (I always go to the scientific men, I have no truck with the hobbledoys and people on the street corners), he told me it's amazing that I can walk on the floor of the sea. I can, you know. And I once swam a length at Khandallah with my legs tied. . . ."

Somehow we got back to the life-story. The Professor has sung and danced on the stage. He did radio work in Auckland—sang the Quarrelsome Scene from *La Tosca* over Station 1YA. His mother taught him to cook, so he has cooked in different hotels, and private houses, has been valet to different gentlemen, sergeant-at-arms. . . .

But the life-story gave way again when we talked of music. Professor Allen is not fond of men singers.

"A man sings with terrible effort—these Italian tenors. . . (he stood on the chair and gave *O Sole Mio* with much

motion in the arms), but a woman—Galli Curci—is like a bird. (He sang like Galli Curci.) Women are DIVINE. It is like (he paused, and had to search for the phrase), like gold being poured down a diamond path.

"I met Paderewski. He said: 'No woman will ever play the piano like a man.' I asked him why. He said 'There's so much flesh in the breast. Great men pianists, they can get fat, but it's all down here, where it doesn't matter—there have been great men pianists, Frontenay, Darcia, Marango, very fat, but great pianists.' Paderewski is right. I only take notice of great men."

THE Professor carried with him a sheaf of quarto pages held in two bulldog clips. They contain 2,000 questions. The Professor is very proud of them, because he can answer them all. They appear to have been handed up to The Professor on the stage by the groundlings, and have been transcribed just as they were written:

"What can Don Bradman do well besides play cricket? Is nudism a financial investment? What is the difference between an inquest and an autopsy? Does the Pope of Rome go to confession? What does Erin Go Bragh mean? What relation is Queen Victoria to the ex-Kaiser? What does it feel like to be a celebrity, Professor Allen? Are all titles bought? What is the best way to cook dried peas? Do pigeons mate for life? Why do you not marry, Professor Allen? What is the cause of bow-legged people?"

I put one of them to him: "Can a female crab turn into a male?" When a female and male crab are fighting, he explained, the female can turn into a male at will, instantly.

"It's remarkable, isn't it? And there's an electric eel that can sting you without touching at all—an awful sensation. Another extraordinary thing is the giant octopus. He is blind but, do you know, he can take hold with his suckers and draw blood through the sleeve of your coat and no stain will be left."

On the last page of the 2,000 questions was this one: "What does the Professor do in the case of finding it difficult to get the tiny shoes to fit the newborn?" I put it to him.

"Everyone," he said, "makes the same mistake. They try to get them too small. A baby should grow into shoes, not out of them."

THOUGH modesty prohibits my quoting the 55-line ode which I received through the mail (with its marginal aids to the reader, such as "Rhyme here changes" and "Rhyme, go back to start"), I cannot leave my friend Professor Allen without placing it upon record that he sent me a pot of honey (he practically lives on honey, he told me, and also sleeps naked, so that the air shall circulate and stimulate the pores), with an inscription typed on green card which I have interpreted as an injunction to a journalist about to report an interview with a fellow-man. It said: "Harness not the imagination of your neighbour for with honour to him and truth to yourself you cannot be false to no man and much will be your bounty. —Saint-Saens."

—A.A.



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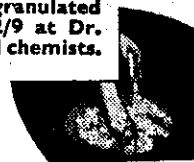
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