

In Westminster Abbey

(Extract from a letter to her Mother by a New Zealand Girl in London)

I SAVED the Abbey for a day when I would be alone—and free. As a preliminary I walked along Victoria Embankment to Big Ben and Westminster Bridge. From there I saw the Houses of Parliament and stood and watched "that mighty heart" which was far from "lying still."

I entered the West Door and just stood and gazed at the lovely Gothic architecture. I wandered in a sort of vacant way towards the High Altar, and from there I stepped back through the pages of history as I walked from chapel to chapel. Facts of history learnt years ago, and stored in forgotten places of my mind suddenly returned to me. Dates, old elusive dates, I remembered. And the long line of Kings and Queens and the pageant of English history all came back. Here was the old shrine of Edward the Confessor, worn and scarred by weary pilgrims; here the tombs of Mary Queen of Scots, and Queen Elizabeth; Henry VII's Chapel with all its fantastic ornamental carvings; the tombs of Royal children, the East Window, the Air Force Window of this war, with its chapel—a very lovely thing. Past, present and future seemed to be one—just a passage of time, a history of wars and struggles, of victories and failures, of heroism and tragedy.

When I came to the tomb of the Unknown Warrior and the chapel of all the millions who died in the Great War, I could take in no more. I stepped out into the sunlight and walked away. Then half-way down the street I remembered the Poets' Corner. I had not looked for it!

I don't think I'm very good at looking at buildings. The atmosphere of a place sweeps me off my feet and I walk as a New Zealander of English stock, a pilgrim to a shrine, not examining the building or noting its features, but lost in the past. Only when you've wandered out into London again and have to recollect where you are, do you remember some of the things you've missed.

St. Paul's did not impress me in the same way. Perhaps it was merely a different mood, perhaps it was because I'm a little less ignorant about Westminster Abbey. St. Paul's was too vast and seemed almost pretentious (God forgive me!) The sightseers clattered and talked and had the same effect on me as a person rustling a paper bag during a symphony. The sightseers in the Abbey walked and whispered, and in some subtle manner showed more respect. Even the Cockney woman who gazed at the High Altar and said, "Eu, ain't it lovely," seemed to understand and revere.

—H.B.S.

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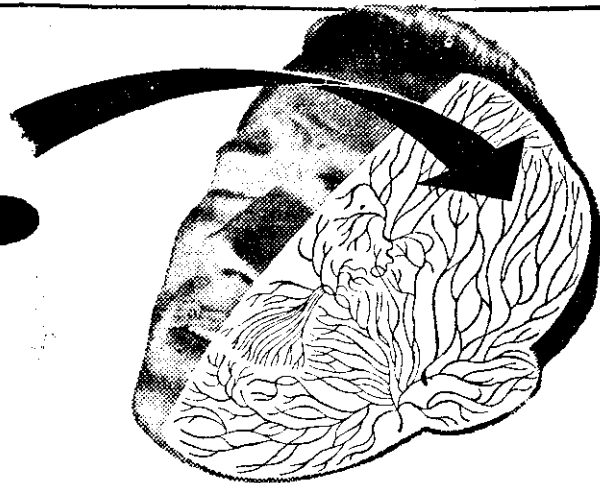
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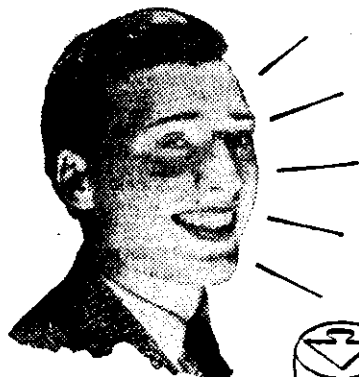
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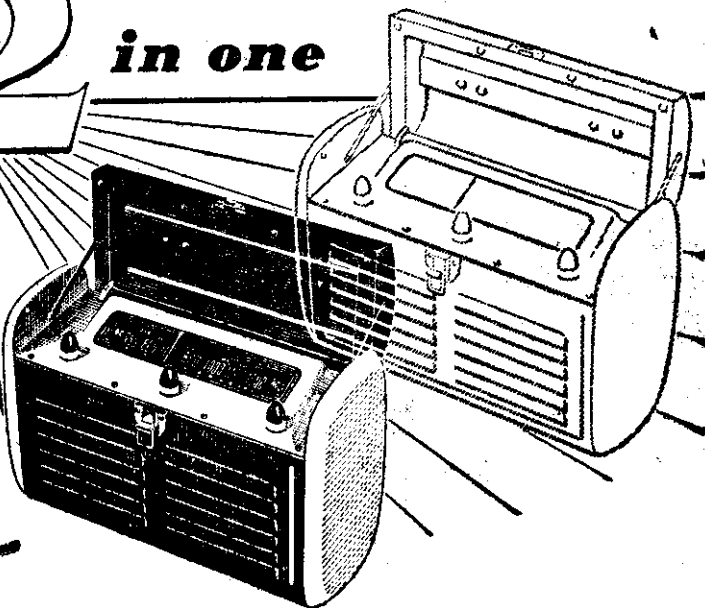
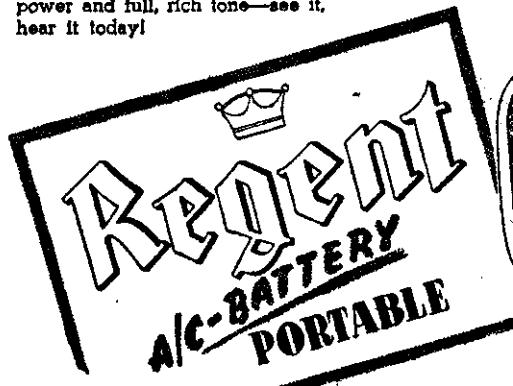
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