

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

Meals on the "Altmark"

NOW I'll tell you about the meals on board the "Altmark." We had breakfast at 7 o'clock—that is, bread and margarine. Dinner, at half-past eleven, consisted of the same with half a pint of soup. Tea was at five, of bread, margarine and German sausage, and, oh, what sausage! The "Graf Spee" food was something like that, but a little better. We would get a cup of coffee nearly every day and cocoa on Sunday. We got half a pint of water a day for drinking, and 1½ pints of condenser water for washing ourselves and our clothing. Smoking was forbidden, although we managed it now and again. I remember when our supply was running out that twenty of us had a puff each at the last cigarette. One or two chaps tried drying tea leaves for tobacco. At first we were allowed on deck for three-quarters of an hour a day, but this was reduced later to twenty minutes every other day. We spent five days on the "Graf Spee" and 11½ weeks on the "Altmark." Some of the other prisoners had been on her for 16½ weeks.—(From an interview with New Zealanders who were prisoners in the "Altmark").



Universities Were Trades Unions

THE remarkable thing about mediæval universities is that they were set up and devoted for the education, not of the nobles or the middle classes, but for the poor. If you care to look up the statutes

The Strength of Japan

"I don't think anyone (except, of course, their own correspondents, who aren't unduly modest!) has given full credit to the military achievements of the Japanese Army in China," said James Bertram in one of his broadcast talks on China. "Their staff work has generally been excellent, and some of their advances—considering the nature of the country—brilliant. One must give the Japanese army credit for efficiency, though I don't think it's up to Western standard. My own impression is that their navy is a good deal more efficient still. And it's about time somebody blew up the old myth that the Japanese can't fly."

of the Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, for example, you will find that the object of the pious benefactors was to provide for paupers—that is to say, the poor. Far from being homes for the idle sons of the aristocracy, the aristocrats gave them a wide berth and generally affected a lofty contempt for learning. Indeed, the word "university" itself in the Middle Ages was sufficient to keep the nobles away, for it was simply the mediæval word (universities) for a trade union! Indeed, the reason why to this day, at Oxford and Cambridge, you have to wait seven years before you may assume the title of Master of Arts, is that seven years was the time required for an apprentice to serve before he became a master craftsman. — (H. G. Miller, Librarian at Victoria University College, in 2YA's Winter Course Series, May 20).

Mr. Whympers on the Screen

THE history of Whympers' attempts on the Matterhorn is well known from his book, which is one of our mountaineering classics, and the story has been lately produced as a film, "The Challenge," a fine pictorial effort which departs from the truth in an attempt to improve on Whympers' story—as if any improvement were possible. The film distorts the facts, and most unjustly passes on to a large public the false suggestion that Whympers was suspected of causing the accident.—(From a talk by A. P. Harper, marking the centennial of Edward Whympers' birth).

"Harmless Lunatics"

EVEN to-day when any fatality occurs on one mountain, there are plenty of people ready to condemn the sport and call for safeguards, whereas dozens of fatalities in other fields of sport pass without any such criticism or protest. Those who go in for climbing are often looked upon as more or less harmless lunatics. We have to put up with good-natured chaff and rather superior toleration from those saner men who indulge in other sports. The very people who ridicule mountaineering by asking what is the good of carrying swags over snow and ice, would resent being asked what sense there was in thirty men chasing a piece of inflated leather round a paddock. You can ridicule any game by analysing it.—(From a talk by A. P. Harper, "Edward Whympers, A Mountaineering Centennial").



Getting to China

IT isn't easy to give any general impression of China in a few minutes. The first thing one has to suggest, of course, is its size. And the unforgettable way to appreciate the full extent of the land-mass of Asia, is—or rather was—to get in a train at Calais or Flushing, and travel east. You couldn't do it so easily now, of course; but that was how I first went out to China four years ago. Two days and nights will get you to Moscow; and another day brings you almost to the Urals, and clear of Europe. But it takes you a full week from there to reach the Manchurian border, over the interminable steppe and forest of Siberia. And if you went straight on from there by train (as I did later on, before the war broke up China's main trunk railways), it would be two more days to Peking, two days to Hankow, and another two days to Canton. Granted that neither Russian nor Chinese trains were ever world-beaters for speed, you can get a rough idea of the relative distances. Three days across Europe at its widest; a week across Russia-in-Asia; and nearly six days to push down through Manchuria and China Proper to the southern coast just opposite Hong Kong.—(James Bertram in an NBS talk on China).



Shaving on the "Altmark"

Tins were very useful things at times on board. We were glad to get a spare old fruit tin, as we were given one of these for drinking out of. It was the only thing we had to hold our soup in, and after that to put our coffee in. The same old tin would be used for our shaving water. We managed to shave now and then, with big intervals in between shaves. As a matter of fact we only had four razors amongst our team. We didn't want to be called Nitty Whiskers, after the German Captain. However, a shave helped to pass the time. You see, it would take about three hours to heat the water for a shave. On this ship they used a new type of electric light bulb, in which the bulb was screwed into the holder. We would unscrew this and put water in and screw it up again and turn on the juice, and in time it would warm up.—(From an interview with three New Zealanders who were prisoners on the Altmark).

Tulips in Holland

YOU would see great areas planted with nothing but pale pink tulips, the next field all yellow, another red, or bronze or mauve. These stately flowers, growing in close rows, like soldiers on parade, were an unforgettable sight. The land where they are grown is flat, like, shall we say, the Manawatu, or the Canterbury plains, very green and fertile with canals dividing it. The Dutch use water transport a great deal, and barges sometimes with sails move slowly along between green fields with cattle grazing, or between the gay tulip fields. It's an extraordinary sight to see these boats with their sails spread moving along across the landscape. Often you don't see the actual canal, and it appears as if they were sailing over the very land itself.—(From "Shoes and Ships and Sealing-Wax," by Nelle Scanlan.)



Tulips in England

THEY have a special way of planting the tulips at Hampton Court. First there is a bed of some small, low, thickly-flowering plant providing a solid carpet of colour, and the tulips are grown at intervals, about six or eight inches apart, through this. You will see a bed of blue forget-me-nots, with pale pink tulips growing through it, or a bed of some small pale yellow flowers, with bronze tulips, and a carpet of pale lavender will be the setting for those deep purple ones, the colour of grapes. It is certainly a most effective way to grow tulips. England now supplies most of her own tulip bulbs, though there is still more trade done with Dutch growers.—(From "Shoes and Ships and Sealing-Wax," by Nelle Scanlan.)

A Mathematician Did It

FEW of you, for example, think of the University when you switch on your radio. If you were suddenly asked to write down what picture the word radio called up in your mind, you would probably write down "a shop full of radio sets," or "an electrician fiddling about with wires" or some such thing. Not one in a thousand would say, "a University" or "a Professor." You don't connect radio with the University—much less do you connect radio with pure mathematics. Yet it is a fact that radio is one of the University's gifts to mankind—and that without the researches of a Cambridge Professor named Clerk Maxwell, it would be impossible for you to listen to this talk this evening or to the daily broadcasts of news from the other end of the world. Clearly, although unsuspected, the connection between the most abstruse University studies and daily life may be very real.—(H. G. Miller, Librarian at Victoria University College in 2YA's Winter Course Series, May 20.)