

# DID YOU HEAR THIS?

## Extracts From Recent Talks

### London for Beginners

I WONDER if those of you who have been there found, as I did, that at first you were quite unable to respond to London. At first you can not feel anything at all about it. It is as though you lay on some lonely beach and were bowled over by wave after wave of confusing impressions. You look dumbly at St. Paul's or Fleet Street or Buckingham Palace without really seeing them at all. The streets are merely unreal and bewildering, the voice of London so loud that you scarcely hear it. You are bemused and muddle-headed. Some New Zealanders that I have met have become out of temper with London because it did not immediately register a neat impression that they could write down on a post-card and send home. Some of these disgruntled people are young men, who, with a baffled look in their eyes, will tell you angrily that Waipukurau, or Paraparaumu will do them. I remember one such young man who had lost his way at Hyde Park Corner because he had foolishly neglected to notice that Knightsbridge is really a continuation of Piccadilly. The discovery enraged him. "I reckon," he said, "I'll get eowt of this. These people don't know they're alive." But in three months' time he was writing home to explain why he had paid no visits to his country relations. There were still things, he said, that he wanted to see in London. And in six months he was talking of the opportunities there were for New Zealanders in what he now called The Old Town. He had served his bewildering apprenticeship and like Apulius's hero, had eaten rose leaves and was no longer a golden ass. (Ngaio Marsh, "London for Beginners," 3YA, July 18.)

### The Women of Malta

IN the two years of occupation by the French, the Maltese women thought it necessary to protect themselves from the bold glances of the soldiers, and used to throw their outer skirt over their heads. From this habit grew the custom of wearing the faldetta. This is a heavy black silk veil gathered on to a semi-circular piece of whalebone over which it is stretched like a section of an umbrella. It is fastened on the shoulder, the heavy folds of veil being held together in the hand. The faldetta is going out of fashion, partly because it must be worn with an entirely black outfit, and it is hot, heavy and unbecoming. "Besides," as Michael, my guide, said, "it cost £4/10/- . . . It is better to wear only the hair." The majority of the women of Malta don't learn English, their stay at school being too brief. Michael's wife knew none, but he was teaching his three-year-old son. He could already say, "Hullo, Good-bye, and O.K. Dad." Provided that he has a job, the young Maltese has no need to wait if he wishes to marry, as the girl must provide, as part of her dowry, the whole of the furnishing for the home. Although the women make the lovely Maltese lace, it is the men who sell it in the tiny shops, and fine embroidery, too. Oddly enough there is no bright coloured embroidery as in other countries. The love of colour seems to be the characteristic of the boatmen alone, a legacy perhaps from their boasted Phoenician forbears. (Talk on Malta, by Miss Edna Parson, 3YA.)



### King's Horse into Horse-Meat

KING EDWARD, the present King's grandfather, was fortunate enough to win the famous Derby one year; an honour sought by every great racing man in the world. And the name of the horse that won the Derby for King Edward was Minoru. Many people wondered why the King's horse should have this strange, foreign name. I can tell you why. This horse was bred at the Curragh by the owner of

Curragh Lodge and the Japanese garden. Minoru was the name of the famous Japanese gardener he had brought from Japan to lay out his garden, and he paid him the compliment of naming one of his best horses after him. The horse was later bought by King Edward, but it kept its name. This story of Minoru, the King's horse which won the Derby, unfortunately ends on a tragic note. Only the other day I came across a paragraph in an English paper referring to it. I don't know what happened to Minoru immediately after winning the Derby, but it ultimately was sold to Russia. And when it finally died, it was cut up and sold as horse-meat for people to eat. I have mentioned before, in other talks, that horse-meat forms a large part of the menu among the peasants of European countries. It is the most revolting looking stuff, but they aren't so fussy as we are out here. They never complain of the monotony of mutton every day. When they get meat at all, it is usually horse-meat—old horse-meat at that. They don't kill young horses.



### Telling The Quints Apart

Now, how am I to answer this question? "How can you tell the Dionne Quintuplets apart?" Phew! I believe that even those that have a lot to do with them find it some job when the quints are separated. However, when you've got them together it is easier: you see Yvonne is the biggest and Marie is the smallest. That's two picked out. Then Annette is more like Yvonne than the others. That's three. All you have to do now is to pick Cecile: the remaining one must be Emilie. But it's less brain fag just to ask. ("Do You Know Why?" by "Autolycus," 4YA.)

No, it's when they are worn out with work and no further use, that they are killed and eaten. And that was the final indignity that befell Minoru, the horse once owned by an English King, and winner of the greatest race in the world, the Derby. (Nelle Scanlan, "Shoes and Ships and Sealing-Wax.")

### Priestley Opened Windows

THE Yorkshire element in J. B. Priestley is important for this reason: that when he had served in the last war and then taken a degree at Cambridge, he went up to London to make a place for himself in journalism and literature and he brought into the world of London Letters a fresh breeze of Northern character and personality. People outside England are far too prone to judge England by London. It is a mistake that newspaper correspondents make. They take the opinion of England, and people overseas and even people in England itself are too ready to accept plays and stories of London society life as a reflection of English life. They forget that, apart from London, there are large vigorous communities with a life of their own. Now, there are no more vigorous and independent communities in Britain than those of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Mr. Priestley opened a few windows in the literary life of London and a wind came in telling of the life of the people in the provinces. He is a provincial—a young man from



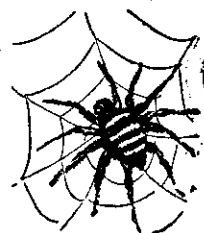
the country come to town to seek his fortune; and that is one reason why he understands the English so well, understands them much better than many of the intellectuals who take their cue from the people they meet in London. He and these intellectuals don't get on very well together—they think that Mr. Priestley is a pretty ordinary writer who is hopelessly middle-class, and he retorts with some very penetrating criticism. In his last book he mentions critics who criticise his work on the strength of having written, so he says, a few short reviews, three poems and half a short story, and refers with a good deal of justification to that "desiccated superciliousness" which as he truly says, is a sure sign of an inferior mind. (NBS appreciation of J. B. Priestley, who broadcasts regularly from the BBC in "Britain Speaks.")

### Character-Building in Plants

ONE important feature is the systematic search for additional wild and semi-wild varieties of such plants as wheat, potato and others, in the particular parts of the world in which these plants originated. It is likely that these additional varieties or strains, although probably poor in yield, will possess some or other desirable character and will also be free from the common diseases. Such a strain then can be combined by hybridisation with a cultivated strain of good yield, with the result that, in some cases at least, offspring will be produced combining the desirable character of the newly discovered wild strain with the good yield of the cultivated strain. This, in other words, would result in bringing new blood into our crop plants. For example, botanical expeditions have succeeded in finding certain strains of the potato in the uplands of South America which are frost-resistant, and it is hoped that this character can be introduced into the cultivated potato. (Dr. J. E. Holloway, Winter Course Talk, "The Improvement of Utility Plants," 4YA, July 16.)

### Soaring Spiders

"ARE spiders air-minded?" Most decidedly spiders are air-minded, if we accept the evidence of certain entomologists, who, while flying over Louisiana in planes equipped with insect traps, captured a large number of soaring spiders, even though spiders are wingless. How does the spider realise his "soaring ambition"? Well, he climbs to the top of a tall reed or stalk of grass. Then, to launch his flight, he pays out a long thread of web material, and when the breeze pulls on this thread, he lets go and soars upwards on the end of the thread. By taking advantage of favourable air currents, he is able to travel in this way for a considerable distance. Some spiders can put an end to the flight at will by winding in the thread. ("Do You Know Why?" by "Autolycus," 4YA.)



### Australian Literature

LIKE New Zealand, Australia is a kind of outpost extended into a part of the world dominated by three great alien civilisations; and it is unlikely, under an interplay of different influences, that our literature will remain unaffected. Of course, that which is truly noblest in literature deals with human nature fundamentally the same, so that the words of the Elizabethan poet will still appeal in no diminished measure to men everywhere. But to an Australian living in a different environment—no less to a New Zealander—the most descriptive writing of scented hawthorns, the most musical description of warbling nightingales, can awaken but a far-off emotion. Whereas the sound of the lyre-bird, the tinkling sound of bell-birds, for us have moving appeal, while the scent of the golden wattle, our national emblem which grows wild, is a delight which the most casual intruder into the Australian bush may experience. So one Australian poet has descriptively written:

"In the Spring when the wattle-gold trembles  
Twixt shadow and shine,  
Each dew-laden air-draught resembles  
A long draught of wine."

(D. M. Campbell, Australian University debater, in talk on "Australian literature," 4YA, July 5.)