

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

The Six Bronte Children

IN 1820 the Brontes settled at Haworth, a village near Keighley in Yorkshire. It is very high on the moors, bitterly cold and bleak in winter, and with a tingling freshness in the air even in summer. There were 6 children in the family: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell (the only boy), Emily and Anne. Six children living a simple hardy life in that pure, though often bitter, moorland air. I once spent some weeks in just such a village in Yorkshire, and I remember remarking to a Yorkshire lady what a lot of hale and hearty old folks there were in the place. "Of course," she answered, "there's nothing for them to die of." She wasn't being flippant; she really meant that if one had the constitution to grow up in such a climate one could stand anything. Yet listen to what happened to the Bronte family; and remember that its members were utterly devoted to one another. Mrs. Bronte died soon after coming to Haworth, leaving six little children, the eldest no more than eight. Four years later Maria and Elizabeth died within six weeks of each other. The other four all grew up, but Branwell, Emily and Anne all died within eight months of each other, at ages round about thirty, leaving Charlotte alone with her father, who survived them all. It was consumption, of course, that was chiefly responsible for this appalling death-rate; a family history like this makes us realise how far medicine, particularly preventive medicine, has advanced in the last hundred years.—(Miss Margaret Johnston, "A few minutes with women novelists, No. 6, The Brontes," 2YA, December 12.)

London Pavement Artists

ONCE or twice, an art critic or patron of art, has seen the work of a London pavement artist, been struck by its merit, and taken an interest in him. I remember going to an exhibition of paintings by a pavement artist who had been redeemed from the kerb, and set up in a studio. But after six months, he was back on the pavement again. It paid him better, so he said. There was a young man who had his pitch in Bond Street some years ago. He used to make quick sketches of the London scene—buildings, streets, churches and archways. He drew it quickly, then washed

in the detail with a brush, using Indian ink. They were most effective little pictures, and he sold them for half-a-crown each. He could easily make a pound a day, which is far more than he could earn from a studio. I don't know what became of him; he was there all the summer, then vanished when winter came.

In Regent Street, up past Swan and Edgars, a young girl sat on a camp stool all day, painting gay little postcards, which she sold to passersby for sixpence. She had only one hand, a left hand, and she kept her box of paints on the ground at her feet. People used to stand and watch her work, it was amazing how deft she was with that left hand. They weren't very good paintings, they were just a popular type. But it gave her independence, and she seemed happy.—(Nelle Scanlan, "Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax," 2YA, November 22.)

Napoleon, the Final Chapter

IT was a hundred years ago to-day, on December 15, 1840, that Napoleon was laid in his tomb in the heart of Paris. This was Napoleon's second grave. He was exiled to St. Helena in 1815, after Waterloo, and when he died there in 1821, he was buried on the island. It was natural that the French people should wish Napoleon to be buried in France.

Mr. Shaw Again

I REMEMBER one amusing, and profitable stunt, that Bernard Shaw had a hand in. He was twitting some artists with the fact that they didn't sell their work because they asked too high a price for it. If they sold it cheaply, their reputation suffered, so they held out for big prices, and had most of it left on their hands. A woman painter, who specialised in flower studies, whose husband was a well-known painter, too, accepted Bernard Shaw's challenge to hold a show of her pictures with every one at the same low fixed price. Harriet Cohen, the famous pianist, who had a lovely home, offered her drawing room for the show, and about fifty paintings, flower studies, were hung. Every picture was priced at £5, and every picture was sold. I may say that Bernard Shaw himself was on the mat when the door opened, and got the pick of the bargains.—(Nelle Scanlan, "Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax," 2YA, November 22.)

Napoleon himself had expressly said that he wished to be buried in France. "It is my wish" he said in his will, made three weeks before his death, "that my ashes may repose upon the banks of the Seine, in the midst of the French people whom I have loved so well." In May, 1840, the French Government sent a note to the British Government asking that the remains be given to France, and the reply of the British Government was speedy and most cordial. It deserves to be read in full for its wisdom, especially in the light of after events. It was written by Lord Palmerston. "The British Government hopes that the promptness of its compliance with a very natural desire may be considered in France as a proof of friendliness, and of an earnest wish on this side to blot out the last traces of the national animosities, which, during the life of the Emperor, armed England and France against each other." May we not assume that this gracious message laid the foundation of the Entente Cordiale of sixty years later, which blossomed into an alliance.—"The Tomb of Napoleon: A Centennial Note." A talk prepared by L. D. Austin, 1YA, December 15.)

Sheep and/or Books?

IT was Samuel Butler, author of "Erewhon," who said that the only subject of conversation in N.Z. was sheep. That was a long time ago, back in the 'sixties, and his experience was confined to Canterbury. Half a century later, though, a Frenchman, André Siegfried, made much the same kind of criticism. New Zealanders, he said—and he was a pretty acute observer—were complacently materialistic. They had no interest in things of the mind, were too mentally lazy to be anything but opportunists in action.

Such characteristics were, of course, very largely the natural development of pioneering days. Bread must come before books. Action, immediate and energetic, was needed in order that men should have the food and shelter without which the more refined arts of life can never materialise. But it is still true that the material side of life, from being a means to an end, became very largely an end in itself. Success became judged by the price of wool, the amount of overseas exchange, the victories of All Blacks, the number of telephones and motor cars.

In a society with such standards there could be little room for art and letters. You would not expect it and you did not find it. New Zealand was a rich country and had a great deal of money to spend.

Some of it was spent on the arts, almost none of it on local artists or their development. Writers and artists could not make a living in their own country, though each year there were large imports of the most vulgar and tasteless art from abroad.

To-day this is no longer true. Or perhaps it would be better to say that there are indications of change. During the last year, at any rate, we have as a community devoted a small portion of our time and ability to the arts. To be specific we have published a number of centennial surveys, we have a magnificent atlas partly completed, we have paid one of our countrymen to paint some fine murals for our delight, we have organised and sent on tour through the country an exhibition of N.Z. paintings, and we have established one new art in the making of a Centennial film and some surprisingly good short documentary films. These are all signs that we are ceasing to chase after strange gods and are looking, for cultural satisfaction, to the source which can be most profound and most lasting.—(John Harris in a Book Talk, 4YA, December 4.)

Dairyfarming as a Career

THE main disadvantages of dairy farming are: the effect of adverse weather conditions on production; the difficulty of obtaining skilled labour owing to the attractions in other walks of life; the fluctuations of the overseas markets which govern the price received for farm products; and the long working hours, usually from daylight to dark, in all types of weather.

On the other hand, the advantages which off-set these are that it is a free, healthy life doing a worthwhile job; it provides an income in proportion to the ability and energy of the farmer; it provides a certain amount of relaxation during the slack periods; and opportunities of improving farming knowledge are available by belonging to organisations such as the Young Farmers' Clubs and the Farmers' Union.

The days when anybody could be a farmer have long gone. It is a career that will test the intelligence and business ability of all who enter it, because no other calling embraces such a number of skilled professions within itself. For example, a dairy farmer must have a good grasp of book-keeping, he must have a sound knowledge of all the minor ailments of cattle; he must know something of engineering, markets, stock values, and so on. Truly modern farming provides a career that any energetic ambitious young man should be proud to enter.—(R. G. Dawson of the Rahotu Young Farmers' Club, in "Dairy Farming as a career for a young man," 2YA, December 10.)

Jumble Sales

I ATTENDED my first jumble sale recently and I got quite a lot of fun out of it. It was held on the big veranda of one of the village homes. There, laid out on tables, was the most wonderful collection of bits and pieces imaginable. Odd cups and saucers, plates, seedlings, jam, marmalade, cooking dishes, tumblers, jam jars, cushions, pictures, photo frames, sock suspenders, scarves and a hundred and one different things. It was an amazing collection—the result of a canvass of the 30 small homes that go to make up our small community. What of the customers? Where did they come from? Well, apart from a sprinkling of visitors from nearby villages, the customers were from

the aforesaid 30 homes. The lady in whose house the sale was held gave everybody a cheery welcome and told them that the proceeds were for the Soldiers' Christmas Parcel Fund. The sale thus being declared open, the business of the evening began. I was very much amused at one lady. She was thoroughly enjoying herself. She could find a use for quite a number of things. She had a photo at home without a frame and there was a frame that would just fit it beautifully. Her husband wanted the sock suspenders. She could also find use for a couple of cushions, and so on and so on. I found no difficulty in picking her out, as she was such an enthusiastic buyer.—(Major F. H. Lampen, "Just Jumble Sales," 2YA, December 12.)