

# DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

## Thirst in the Desert

AT first grey light of an early summer's day, Dick and I took out the compass, set course south and shouldered a bag of kit—a billycan, tea, sugar, a little flask of brandy and a revolver. We had baked some scones on the fire ashes and put in the last of a piece of boiled salt beef, just enough for a snack at middle day to keep us going till nightfall at Soakage Creek. We had boiled out a gallon oil tin and filled it from the car supply. It had had old oil, but three boilings seemed to have cleaned it. We started with light hearts and lively feet. But in two hours the plain began to take toll. The black soil was a mass of paddy-melon holes, gaping drought cracks which crumbled and opened up much larger than they seemed. The wretched grass tufts fought with our feet; stones aided and abetted them. A ploughed field would have been heaven.

The sun rose and growled. Mirages danced and mocked. And our mountain mark wobbled about in the heat haze a few miles on our left. It became a freak hot day. We were as hard as nails, but it made its mark. Towards noon a line of timber showed up across the way we were heading. Funny, I thought, they said open plain all the way to Soakage Creek. Anyway, directions were clear and we carried on south.

By noon we were both darned thirsty and ready for food. We sat down under the first tree we reached, lit a fire and got ready to boil up. But Dick was too dry to wait for tea. He put the tin to his mouth, drank—and spluttered. He spat the water out. Concisely and vigorously he told me it was fouled with old engine oil. I tried it also and agreed vehemently. We strained it through a shirt and tried several other dodges, but it was no good. Oiled it was and oiled it stayed. It developed a horrible grimy scum when boiled. So we didn't eat, being too thirsty.—(*"Thirst in the Desert,"* by Michael Terry, F.R.G.S., F.R.E.S., 4YA, December 21.)

## The Old Coachdrivers

THERE was for many years a police camp across the Waimakariri River opposite the Bealey Hotel. The site was afterwards reduced to a tin hut on which some wag chalked the name "Klondike" about the time of the Alaskan gold rush. This name for some reason remained, and the place now known as Klondyke near the junction of the Bealey and Waimakariri Rivers is the site of the old police camp over 50 years ago.



The old coachdrivers were wonderfully skilful in the way they handled their teams of five horses—three leaders and two wheelers. On one occasion my father was the only passenger from the West Coast. There had been floods in the Otira and just before the zigzag they found that the staging had been swept away in one place leaving a gap of some 6 or 8 feet. It was getting dark and of course the coach had to get through if possible. My father and Knox, the driver, went down the river and found some of the damaged staging. They managed to carry back one of the baulks of timber. This was put across the outside of the gap, and Knox mounted the box seat and put the horses down into the gap and up again the other side with the outer wheels on the six-inch timber and the inner wheels on the two feet bench hewn out of the rocks.—(*"Recollections of the Old Coast Road,"* by Mr. A. P. Harper, 3YA, December 27.)

## Learn a Useful Craft

A FEW days ago I watched a man I know screwing off an old door handle, making fresh holes for the screws of the new handle and then screwing the

whole thing into place. He worked with an ease and precision that was delightful to watch and revived in me the wish, never very far distant, that the money that had been wasted on me in my youth in a vain attempt to make me an even tolerable performer on the piano, an instrument for which I had no aptitude at all, had been spent instead on having me taught some useful craft such as cabinet making, bookbinding, spinning or weaving, anything in fact that would have taught me to use my hands with accuracy and precision in creating something useful and beautiful. Of course I can put in screws, I can even drive in nails without hammering my thumb my mistake, so can my husband, but we are both more or less bush carpenters and lack the ease and confidence we would have had if we had learnt something about it in our youth.—(*Talk by "Margaret,"* 2YA, December 23.)

## The Meals Got Mixed

AS the troopship was nearing England, the topic of talk among the junior officers was what we hoped to have to eat for our first meal on arriving home. My choice was very simple—pea soup, cottage pie (as made in Cornwall) and apple and blackberry tart and cream. The ship was expected to call at Plymouth only a short distance from the little Cornish village in which we lived, but at the



last minute instructions were received to proceed to London Docks. This required a complete change of plans for my parents and relations. They managed to get up to London just in time to meet me. Imagine my surprise on stepping off the ship to find my brother and his wife also on the wharf. They had only arrived from India by a passenger boat an hour before me. His wife's relations helped to swell the reception committee. London was crowded out for King Edward VII's coronation, and accommodation was hard to get. We dispensed to our various billets, with instructions to forgather after we had had our meal. So far so good, except for my first meal in England. It consisted of oyster soup, which I had never tasted before, and naturally didn't have, then came roast ptarmigan, which I knew was a very much prized game bird—but alas it was too game for me, and finally apple and cranberry tart. This looked all right, but the cranberries were so tart that they refused to be sweetened. Altogether, an unfortunate meal. When we all "rendezvoused" later on, my brother was much annoyed about his first meal also. Here he'd been looking forward to ptarmigan, oyster soup, etcetra, and all he got was pea soup, cottage pie and blackberry tart. Our tastes in food had not been forgotten, but we had mixed up our hotels. This was put right shortly afterwards and everyone was well satisfied.—(*"Just Welcomes,"* by Major Lampen, 3YA, December 26.)

## Making the Nightingales Sing

BEATRICE HARRISON, besides being a fine cellist, is also quite a personality. She has given recitals nearly all over the world, in most of the great capitals of Europe, and the two Americas. She was well-known in many of the courts of Europe before the last war, when there were still kings and courts, and in her home near Oxley, in Kent, she has a rich collection of gifts bestowed on her during these visits. The countryside of Kent is a favourite haunt of the nightingale, and Beatrice Harrison was convinced that the music of her 'cello attracted the birds. So she began experimenting. When she played very softly and sweetly and gently, the birds seemed to draw nearer, and sing to her accompaniment. At

## Ambassador and Interpreter

When Lord Lothian became Ambassador to the United States only 16 months ago he took up a particularly difficult position. The British Ambassador in Washington differs from every other British representative in foreign countries in that he is an envoy, not only to the Government of the country, but to the people. The reason for this is that the people of the United States are closely connected with Britain by race, by language, and political and general culture. The British Ambassador is therefore expected to be an interpreter of British institutions and British culture, to the American people. The very demands which are made upon the British Ambassador to interest himself in American life expose him to serious risks. He must be very discreet about many matters, and if he makes a mistake the results are apt to be serious. Lord Lothian took up his position shortly before this war began and it fell to him to act in such a way that he would secure for Britain the greatest possible American assistance in the shortest possible time. What has happened in America shows clearly enough that he was successful.—(*A Tribute to Lord Lothian,* 2YA December 13.)

first, many people were sceptical; they thought it was just a stunt. But she persevered and invited many musicians down to her country home to hear for themselves. Finally she convinced them. When it was first suggested that records be made of these nightingale concerts, insuperable difficulties appeared. But Beatrice Harrison is nothing if not determined. She had complete faith in the possibility of making these records, and broadcasting them to the world, once the initial technical difficulties were overcome. These were many. The nightingale, I believe, sings during the day as well as the night, but it is only during the silence of the night that its song is heard distinctly. And in the very early morning, before dawn, it seemed at its best.—(*Nelle Scanlan, "Ships and Shoes and Sealing-Wax,"* 2YA, December 10.)

## Sportsmen Quote the Classics

SIDNEY: I suppose there's no end to the odds and ends of Greek history and legend that crop up in our speech?

Henry: No end to them. It's always struck me as curious that the word "Trojan" should persist the way it does. You frequently find football writers saying that such and such a player worked like a Trojan. It goes back to a war of thousands of years ago—the Siege of Troy. A good word, too, for the Trojans were stout fellows.

Sidney: I say you noticed that Trojan is generally applied to Rugby forwards, and not to backs?

Henry: Yes. Curious, isn't it? I suppose it's the influence of the scrum, which suggests the old hand-to-hand fighting. I suppose you've noticed that in football backs are romantic but forwards are not?

David: By the way, "When Greek meets Greek then comes the tug-o-war." Where does that come from?

Henry: Misquoted. It comes from a play called "Alexander the Great," written by Nathaniel Lee. The correct version is "When Greeks joined Greeks, then was the tug-of-war."

David: Here, I've just remembered something about your Tarentum or Tarento. That's where we get our tarantelle from, the name of the dance.

Sidney: How do you make that out?

David: Well, "tarantelle" comes from "Taran-tula," the name of a poisonous spider, and "tarantula" is derived from "Taranto." They went into wild dancing to work off the effects of the poison, and called the dance a "tarantelle."—(*"Who Wrote That?"* 2YA, December 15.)