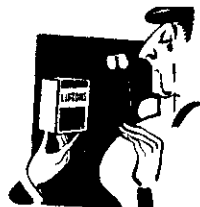


DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

New York Society

WE are accustomed to say that in America "money talks," but no amount of money would buy an entrance into the society in which Edith Wharton was born in 1862—a society composed of families that had been settled in the New England states for over 200 years. Most of these families lived in or near New York, and spent their summers at Newport, that famous resort on the Atlantic Coast.



It was here that summer after summer Sir Thomas Lipton raced his yacht for the America's Cup, but he was never accepted by Newport society, because his wealth, great though it was, was gained through trade. Naturally many of Edith Wharton's characters belong to that wealthy leisured class she knew so well. You saw them in the film "The Old Maid." You meet them in

"The House of Mirth," a novel she published in 1905. In "The Custom of the Country" she portrays, in a woman named Undine Spragg, a social climber. And in "The Age of Innocence," which appeared in 1920, she consciously tried to reproduce the New York society which she had known in her girlhood, and which, particularly since the war, had passed away for ever. The people of this social set were sophisticated, moving in mannered ease, people of taste, people who restrained their emotions and never made scenes; and such are the characters of many of Edith Wharton's books and short stories.—(From "A Few Minutes with Women Novelists": "Edith Wharton," by Margaret Johnston. 2YA, January 25.)

The Order of Merit

IN the New Year Honours this year, 1941, Gilbert Murray was awarded the Order of Merit. Gilbert Murray, who is now entitled to write the letters O.M. after his name, is famous as a Greek scholar and translator, and is one of the leading British champions of the League of Nations. The Order of Merit was founded by King Edward VII. in 1902, "as a special distinction for eminent men and women." The first admissions to the order included Lord Roberts and Lord Wolseley on the military side, and on the civil, Lord Kelvin, the famous scientist; Lord Lister, who revolutionised surgery by making it aseptic; W. H. Lecky, the historian; John Morley, historian and statesman; and G. F. Watts, the artist. It will be seen that King Edward set a very high standard, and this has been maintained. Subsequent admissions to the Order of Merit include Thomas Hardy, novelist and poet; John Galsworthy, novelist and playwright; John Masefield, the present Poet Laureate; Sir James Barrie, playwright and novelist; Sir Edward Elgar and Dr. Vaughan Williams, composers; Sir James Fraser, author of "The Golden Bough"; Sir Charles Parsons, inventor of the turbine engine for ships; among scientists; Sir J. J. Thomson, physicist, and his pupil, Lord Rutherford of Nelson; two famous astronomers, Sir James Jeans, and Sir Arthur Eddington; among statesmen, Lord Balfour and Mr. Lloyd George; among military members, Lord Jellicoe, Lord Beatty, and Lord Baden-Powell. There has been one woman member, Florence Nightingale. It will be seen that New Zealand has had one member in this very select order—Lord Rutherford.—("Gilbert Murray and the Order of Merit," 2YA, January 19.)

Drury Lane Pantomime

THERE was always one of the big shows at Drury Lane at Christmas, "Humpty Dumpty," "Cinderella,"

An Austen Character

IF you know Jane Austen's *Emma* (and all good children know Jane Austen's *Emma*), you know the delightful plot of *Emma's* match-making, which turns on the carefully kept secret of Jane Fairfax's engagement to Mr. Frank Churchill. What Miss Naomi Royde-Smith does in her new novel "*Jane Fairfax*," is to start the story of Jane Fairfax years sooner and carry it on until it links up with *Emma*. This sort of thing is justified only by complete success. Any clumsiness, any failure to match the characters, to keep the picture of the period in exact focus, must be worse than disappointing; it will be infuriating. Well, I am as jealous of Jane Austen's rights in her own property as anyone could be, and I think that Miss Royde-Smith has done them no wrong at all, but honoured them in this charming and faithful piece of work. Any lover of Jane Austen will be happy in it—wriggling with pleasure, I hope, at new and life-like touches in the portrait of the odious Mrs. Elton, the most perfect of gentle vulgarities in the wide world of fiction. I never had enough of this delicious, repulsive creature, and I bless Miss Royde-Smith for giving me more of her—and that is true indeed of all the rest.—(Book Review from 3YA Christchurch, January 7.)

"Jack and the Beanstalk," and all the rest of them, one year after another, sticking very close to tradition, but every season infusing new life into the old story. Tradition demanded that the Dame should be played by a man, one of the famous comedians; the principal boy was always played by a girl, a tall, statuesque, well-proportioned girl in tights. She had to have a good figure. And there was always the good fairy in some shape. All the big spectacular shows were put on at Drury Lane, because its huge stage made any display, any illusion possible. With some of these big melodramatic spectacles, with ship-wrecks, train smashes, earthquakes and horse-races, you



must have a very large stage to present them effectively, and convincingly. Otherwise, you see too much of the machinery that works it. I remember, many years ago, seeing a play called "The Whip," a racing drama, staged in a small New Zealand theatre on a small stage. They used live horses all right, but they were firmly harnessed and held down, and though they kept on galloping the boards beneath their feet moved, so that they remained in view, until the winner, by an adjustment of the machinery drew ahead. If they hadn't been clamped to the stage, about two strides would have taken them from one side to the other.—("Shoes and Ships and Sealing-Wax" by Nelle Scanlan. 2YA, January 14.)

Remembering Hawaiki

ANYTHING pertaining to those Polynesian voyages of discovery is as much of interest to the Maori people to-day as it was centuries ago. At night the people still sit about and talk of the great voyagers of the past who left that land of Hawaiki for the far south, for the land we now know as New Zealand. On returning from the island of Raiatea in the Society Islands, some years ago, I brought back to Waikato a piece of stone. Geologically, it was of no interest. But the fact that it came from Tatu-

tapuatea, the most famous marae in all Polynesia, was an event of much sentimental interest to them. For days the old people spoke of Rangiatea—as this island is still called in legend and song. The stone is now kept in the carved house called Mahinarangi at Ngaruawahia. I could not have brought the Waikato people a gift that they would have valued more. Now, Raiatea is a little more than 100 miles from Tahiti. At one time it was known as Hawai'i—or as the Maoris say, Hawaiki. Of course, it was only one of many Hawaikis. But it was a very important one. For from this centre of Polynesian culture various groups went off to people other lands, taking with them a basic language, a common religion, and as Professor Peter H. Buck says, "a common cultural background of myth and religion." Many of my Maori friends had never heard of the island of Raiatea, but they all know Rangiatea. It is one and the same place.—("Re-tracing the Canoe Tracks to Tahiti" by Eric Ramsden, 4YA, January 29.)

Bats Are Not Blind

WE tend to think that a mammal is a land animal but strangely enough none of the native mammals of New Zealand is really a land animal. For instance, the two types of native bats are flying animals, and the seal spends most of its life in the water, and the whale spends the whole of its life in the water. Bats are very peculiar creatures. They look like something that Heath Robinson had rigged up—rather like a mouse using an umbrella



for wings. In England the common species of bat is called the flitter-mouse. Actually the bats are very closely related to the hedgehogs and other insect eating animals, but they are adapted for flight. New Zealand bats live on insects. The female bat has a single offspring—should we call it a batlet?—at a birth, and she carries the baby about with her in the air

and probably suckles it there as well. Sounds a bit acrobatic doesn't it. Bats find their food at night and sleep during the day upside down, hanging on to some object with their claws. A bat is blind when it is first born and it is commonly thought that the adults are blind as well. We say "blind as a bat" don't we? But the sense of sight is quite well developed and in addition to this the senses of smell and taste are present to a remarkable degree. They seem to possess some sixth sense as well as a sense of direction.—(From "Our Natural Heritage and What We Are Doing With It," by "Belinda," 2YA, January 20.)

Saved By the Truth

THE want of news never troubled Basil Woon, the author of "Eyes West," whenever he had a newspaper job. If there was none, he made some up. "Basil" said Charley Blood, the news editor for the *Kansas Times*, "can you tell me how it is that, in the two months you've been on the staff more Chinese potentates, English lords and European notabilities have passed through Kansas City than in the 10 years before you came." "Well," said Woon, modestly, "it must be because I'm a good reporter . . . I find 'em." Once he edited the one and only paper in Key West in Cuba. Apart from local news, he depended on a bare-bone summary of world news telegraphed to him every night by a man on the mainland. When this man got drunk, which was often, and often for long, Woon's imagination was his only source for news. There came a time when he drew on it for the startling announcement that Theodore Roosevelt's exploring expedition in the Brazilian jungle had been lost, and a rescue party sent out. He beat up this sensational fancy for three days. When his mainland friend recovered from his bout the first telegram he sent to Woon reported that grave concern was felt in New York over the Roosevelt expedition, which appeared to have "vanished in the wilderness." I can't help feeling that truth behaves very badly by her humble and devoted servants when she rushes in to support an audacious liar like that!—(Book Review from 3YA, Christchurch, January 7.)