

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

That Fool Sharp

RICHARD SHARP was not much of a success in England. He studied medicine but was a failure in this respect, so he decided to seek fresh pastures overseas. New Zealand was the country selected and in 1927 Sharp landed in New Zealand possessor of little money and little business ability. He tried several jobs, chiefly in the farming line, but discovered that there was much to learn and it was not all honey. Sharp criticises many things; the railways, the treatment of the English new chum, the farmers themselves, the Maoris and many other things. He tried his hand at canvassing with drapery, hoping for a quick fortune, but the outfit was destroyed by fire—so that was that. Back to the farm—4.30 a.m. until 7.30 each evening—a life of drudgery with no eight-hour day. Sharp then tried canvassing from door to door with a coloured portrait. You know the type of thing, but the psychology of salesmanship in this connection is really amusing, but being a fool, it did not work with Sharp. So, back to the farm, this time with a German family in the Hauraki Plains, but this soon ended, and we next find him as an attendant in a mental hospital, an initiation ceremony thrown in, and many exciting incidents with patients. In 1934 Sharp worked a passage to England and settled down in a Yorkshire village.—(Review by E. J. Bell of "That Fool Sharp," 3YA, March 4.)



Winifred Holtby

I HAVE been trying to think of any writer of recent years round whom such a cult has grown as has sprung up around the author of "South Riding"—Winifred Holtby. Around T. E. Lawrence, yes; but that is due less to his writings than to his brilliant and almost fantastic campaign among the Arabs. Around James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence—yes, they were most decidedly the centres of cults; but the circle of their readers and admirers was greatly enlarged—I don't say composed—by people for whom any banned book has an irresistible attraction, and they were pioneers in certain aspects of literature. Now Winifred Holtby was in a sense ordinary. She initiated nothing new in literary forms or literary style; she was no strange, aloof being; her virtues were such as many people possess. She only stands out through being on a slightly grander scale than most of us—a little more vigorous, more determined, more idealistic, warmer-hearted, with a better brain and a greater genius for friendship.—("A Few Minutes with Women Novelists: Winifred Holtby," Margaret Johnston, 2YA, March 15.)

It Is No Catalogue

NOTHING would have been easier than to make a sort of catalogue history of New Zealand literature and art. It's the sort of thing that has been done, in another field, in some of the local centennial histories. You go through the records, you collect all the mayors and borough councillors, the county chairmen and county councillors, from the year dot, and you write a little bit about each; you note all the openings of all the roads, bridges, dairy-factories, post-offices, and railway stations in the district, and who it was that owned the first motor-car; and you have a great bag bursting full of names, big-wigs and nobodies, and the plunder of minute-books and the local paper; but somehow the story of the life and growth and change of the district is not there. Mr. McCormick might have followed this course in writing the history of New Zealand literature and art. He could have made

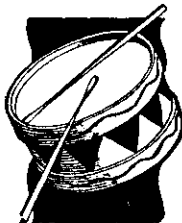
R.A.F. Stories

WE are used to the now familiar phrases in the newspapers "all our aircraft returned" or perhaps "from all these operations two of our machines failed to return." but in "Fighter Squadrons" we have the stories of many of these exploits, amazing stories of these wizards of the air who risk life and limb daily in the R.A.F. Cobber Kain has passed on; he will never know the result of this war, but his fame as an ace has undoubtedly inspired those pilots who have followed. To-day many of the young men training for the R.A.F. have for instructors several of these young heroes who won their D.F.C. ribbons in battle in those early days in France. I wish I had the time to tell you some of these amazing stories. Noel Monks criticises the censorship severely, for time and again his stories were cut out and although witnessing some of these air fights he and other journalists were prevented from making their stories public. In this book he has produced them so that we all may read of England's air heroes.—(Book review by E. J. Bell, 3YA, March 4.)

a catalogue of names and works, brought in somehow all the writers and artists who have worked in New Zealand, all those who have left us, New Zealanders born, to work overseas and give us some pride in their achievement; I think he would have done this well. It would have been a well-compiled catalogue; we should have had from him neat biographical sketches and wise critical comments. But there would have been no continuity . . . no development . . . no connection of the stream of prose, poetry and paint with the stream of our national history.—(J. H. E. Schröder in a discussion of E. H. McCormick's "Art and Letters in New Zealand," 3YA, February 18.)

Toy Symphony

HAYDN once said "A mischievous fit comes over one sometimes that is perfectly beyond control." It was in such a mood that he went to a country fair and bought all the toy instruments that he could lay hands on. Back in the summer house where he worked at Esterhaz, these toy instruments so fascinated him that he jotted down a theme, scored it for rattle, drum and the rest—and finished up by writing the "Toy Symphony." It was first performed by his own orchestra before the Prince's household as a joke. It is scored for two violins, double bass and piano, with toy trumpet, drum, rattle, triangle, quail, cuckoo and nightingale, or bird warbler. When Haydn first played it before his royal master, the audience laughed—so did the players. No wonder that the most experienced musicians in Haydn's band could not keep time for laughing. Yet the symphony is written with enough musical skill to save it becoming a silly farce. Last year a number of famous musicians gave a performance of Haydn's Toy Symphony at the National Gallery in London. They started in deadly earnest, then those who were playing the wind instruments got out of breath; they began to laugh. So did the audience. It all happened just the same as it did 152 years before at Esterhaz. The toy trumpets were played by Eileen Joyce, Kathleen Long and Cyril Smith, three



of our best pianists. The cuckoos were played by two more great pianists—this time Myra Hess and Irene Scharrer. Yet another great pianist—Benno Moiseiwitsch, played the triangle, and he gave it such a whang that he dropped his stick. The pianists were very much to the fore in this performance, perhaps it was because Myra Hess organised it.—("From Ebor's Scrapbook," 2YA, March 10.)

If We Met A Comet

THE question of whence the comets came, however, does not attain such importance in the public mind as where they are likely to go. We all know that comets can come very close to the earth, and some of us wonder what might be our fate if we actually collided with one. Astronomical knowledge has robbed these transient visitors of the role they played in the darker ages as portents of wars and pestilences, famines and the deaths of princes, but in the memories of most of us articles have been published with illustrations even more terrible than the vivid word-pictures they contained of the fate of humanity enveloped in the deadly exhalations of the tail or encountering the mass of the comet in head-on collision. The astronomer's answer is that there is little to fear. We know that the matter in the head of a comet may amount to many thousands of tons, but it is distributed among many millions of tiny pellets. Even if the worst happened and we collided head-on with a swarm of cometary fragments the result, although spectacular, would not be cataclysmic. There would be a magnificent display of shooting stars—nothing more. For hours, as the earth ploughed through the scattered fragments in the head of the comet, the sky would be filled with flying streaks of light, as it has been on many notable occasions in the past. The earth's atmosphere, however, would absorb the shock. The frictional resistance it would provide to the passage of the meteors would result in more than 90 per cent. of them being burned into dust many miles above our heads. Those few larger or more durable bodies which succeeded in penetrating completely through the atmosphere would strike the earth as meteorites, but it is comforting to reflect that, although hundreds of meteorites fall every year, there is no authentic record of a human life having been lost through such a cause.—("Comets in Their Courses," by R. A. McIntosh, F.R.A.S., 1YA, March 10.)



Food In A Can

I REMEMBER an American visitor to New Zealand saying once, "Yes, I'd like to come to lunch, but don't take any trouble. Just give me something out of a can." I fancy the city-dwelling Americans have brought this business of "something out of a can" to a fine art, and we in New Zealand have followed the fashion easily and been glad of it too. But now we've got to stop and think about this question of "Food in a can." We've had plenty of it, asparagus and peas and spaghetti and fish and fruit and jam, quite a lot of it from other countries—from America and Australia and Africa, from England and Norway and France and so on. You don't need to be told that we can't get this now—not from overseas. Money as well as shipping is wanting for these convenient luxuries. A certain amount of it, chiefly fruit and vegetables, is put into tins in this country, plenty of this you may say for our own home needs. But this again, is needed elsewhere. As much as we can get away is urgently needed for our men serving abroad, and any that can possibly be spared is sent to eke out supplies in the homeland and to supply their men and our allies serving in the Middle and Far East. In the Netherlands East Indies, as we hear, they are piling up reserves of food so that at the first possible moment they may rush it off to their home country. We can do the same here if housewives will co-operate and by their own contriving see that families here do not go short of essential foods.—("The Housewife and the War," by Mrs. Alan Mulgan, 2YA, March 14.)