

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

Longfellow's Chestnut Tree

DID you know that the spreading chestnut tree under which the village smithy stood once really existed? It was in Brattle Street, in Cambridge, in the American State of Massachusetts. The day Longfellow wrote his famous poem he made an entry in his diary. These are his words: "Wrote a new Psalm of Life. It is 'The Village Blacksmith'". The poet lived quite near the blacksmith's shop and he must have passed it countless times when he went in and out of Boston. In his day Cambridge was not the large suburb of Boston it has since become, but was almost in the country. About 18 years ago an English lady visited Longfellow's old home, while his daughter, Alice Longfellow, was still alive. This stately colonial house was famous before it became the poet's home — it was once the headquarters of Washington. The library had remained practically unchanged since her father's day, with the poet's desk near a window from which could be seen a lovely view over the Charles River. In the library the visitor saw the chair made from the chestnut tree after it was cut down.—(From "Ebor's" Scrapbook, 2YA, March 24).



A Chinese Meets the Haggis

DURING the P.E.N. Conference in Edinburgh, we had quite a round of entertainment. It was at one official banquet that I tasted my first haggis, that Scottish dish which is merely a name to most of us. Sitting next to me was a young Chinese writer, who spoke very little English. With that courtesy, that graciousness which is characteristic of the well-bred Chinese, he accepted every dish that was handed to him, and also the various wines which came with each course. He had quite a circle of these glasses around his plate, but he ate and drank sparingly, a little cautiously, I thought, as if uncertain as to the effects of the various Western foods. He was very interested in the haggis, for we had been told that the haggis — I think they even called it the Royal haggis — would be served with the usual ceremonies. This was the highlight of the feast. The dish of haggis was piped in. The pipers walked in front, with the pipes skirling, and the white-capped chef bore the strange dish on a platter behind and they marched right round the room. Then each guest was served with a portion, and I saw the young Chinese looking very suspiciously at his piece. I don't know what haggis is really made of, but someone told me it was mostly blood and oatmeal. Pig's blood, I think they said, but I'm not quite sure. I regret my ignorance on the subject. Anyway, it's a kind of sausage, rather rich and greasy I found it, and the traditional manner of eating it is to wash it down with neat whisky, so I was told. As this was the most important national dish of the evening, the young Chinese apparently felt that he must eat it, and between tiny bites of haggis he sipped the neat Scotch whisky, and I have never seen a more heroic attempt to conform with the custom of a foreign country.—("Shoes and Ships and Sealing-Wax," by Nelle Scanlan, 2YA, March 25).

Extension of the School System

THE nineteenth century saw the beginning of the systems of primary schools for the children of the working classes. In England the development of these schools was marked by the extreme reluctance

of the State to take responsibility for their control and development. That was left as long as possible in the hands of the churches. Only when such provision proved itself unable to meet the demand for education, did the State enter the field itself. Other countries in Europe were not so reluctant to have State schools, and they developed State primary school systems early in the nineteenth century. But by whatever roads the nations travelled, all of them had fairly complete systems of primary schools by the time the Great War broke out.

The secondary schools, however, were in most cases closed to the majority of children. The years since the Great War have seen the rapid extension of the school system. The primary schools have taken children younger, and have kept them longer. The secondary schools have had their doors forced open to admit masses of children passing out of the primary schools, and thus they have been radically transformed in their nature and purpose.—("Modern Trends in Education," by G. W. Parkyn, M.A., Dip. Ed., Lecturer in Education, University of Otago, 4YA, April 1).

Travellers' Tales

BOOKS about New Zealand by Englishmen are becoming rarer. There was a time when it was fashionable to tour the colonies and write up the experience for publication when safely home again. Impressions so recorded were generally superficial, but they probably had their uses. They could at least serve as an introduction for future travellers, and they perhaps helped to undermine the popular English conception of our country as an island off the Australian coast continually



torn by earthquakes. For us New Zealanders their influence was less profound. Most of them merely tickled our vanity, confirming opinions already strongly held on such subjects as our scenery, the size of our trout, the hospitality of our people, the consumption of tea, and the genius displayed in dealing with the Maori race. They were, in fact, just as misleading, the majority of them, as travellers' impressions usually are. They catalogued natural marvels and at one period, in Seddon's time, made a point of noting our legislation which was considered, at least by the Fabians, to be showing the world a peaceful solution to its industrial problems. With scarcely an exception they gave no idea of how the ordinary New Zealander lived and worked.—(Book talk by John Harris, 4YA, March 5).

Thank Your Stars

HENRY: We talk of our star meaning our destiny, and following our star. Beatrice said she was born under a dancing star—a beautiful description of a very attractive person.

David: Which Beatrice?

Henry: Shakespeare's. *Much Ado About Nothing*. Romeo and Juliet were "star-crossed lovers."

Sidney: I suppose when we say "I thank my stars" we refer to the old belief.

Henry: Yes.

Sidney: But hadn't Shakespeare something to say against believing in the influence of stars.

Henry: Oh yes. Cassius says in *Julius Caesar*:
"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

David: Dear Brutus? Is that where Barrie got the title of his play from?

Henry: It is. It's great fun identifying titles of plays and books. — ("Who Wrote That?" 2YA, April 4).

A Gentleman and his Gentleman

LORD PETER WIMSEY is one of the most delightful of the amateur detectives of fiction. The son of a duke, he hobnobs without effort with all classes of society; since it is only those who feel themselves socially inferior who find any need for snobbishness. He's an unassuming, small-made man, friendly, jolly, often witty, often satirical, but hiding behind an ineffective manner, the analytical brilliance of brain, the dash and personal daring that make him so fine a detective that Scotland Yard is glad to co-opt him in particularly baffling crimes. Lord Peter is served by the perfect "gentleman's gentleman," Bunter, who had been his batman in the War, had saved his life, and had been of great service in helping to restore Lord Peter after the breakdown the war caused in all his faculties and all his interests. Bunter's conversation is delicious. It is of a formality and correctness that would grace a Victorian text book on the Art of Conversation. It is full of polysyllables of startling pedantry, of phrases turned with palpable tact and care. It contrasts most amusingly with Lord Peter's casual, slangy way of expressing himself, so that a conversation between the two of them is a delight—Bunter, heavy, careful, and dull—Lord Peter airy, vivid and gay. Bunter has, among his many talents, one of particular value to Lord Peter—that of being an expert photographer.—("A few minutes with Women Novelists: Dorothy Sayers," by Margaret Johnston, 2YA, March 29).



The School Studied It

H. C. D. SOMERSET is well known for his book "Littledene," in which he surveys the life of a North Canterbury rural district. He has now written a pamphlet called "Child Nutrition in a Rural Community," which has been published by the Council for Educational Research. In it he describes how, during the depression years, his district high school tackled the problem of malnutrition among its children. The question of food is one that interests everybody, and Mr. Somerset has the happy facility of revealing to his readers the living human significance of the subject under discussion. When his school undertook to study the problem of nutrition it embarked on what seems an exciting scientific adventure. Everything was related to the work of the school in a practical way. The testing of children each day for weight and height involved statistical calculation; free milk required pasteurisation, and this was done in the school by the home science students. The school garden was organised not for purposes of nature study but to show the mineral and vitamin contents of different fruits and their nutrition values. Experiments were carried out with rats to show children the effects of white bread and wholemeal. The details and results of all this are described in a way which will interest not only teachers, but parents and others. It is furnished with a list of 41 books for wider reading with a note of the main public libraries in which they can be obtained. It is a matter of interest that the Dunedin Public Library is outstanding in its holdings. Of the 41 titles it has 30, while next in order are Wellington Public Library with 19, and Auckland Public Library with 14.—(Book Talk by John Harris, 4YA, March 5).