

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

Man-Made Deserts

NO account of the American deserts would be complete without some reference to the deserts which man himself has created in the region on the inland side of the natural desert. This country affords a timely illustration to New Zealanders, as well as to Americans, as to what can happen to good grazing country if, as a result of human greed and stupidity, an attempt is made to take from the land more than it can naturally give. These newly originating deserts of America have a little greater rainfall than the desert proper, sufficient to support a grass cover which allows a soil to accumulate. In the absence of grass in the desert itself, the soil is blown away by the wind, and the rock constantly is left bare.—(*"The North American Deserts,"* by Dr. F. J. Turner, 4YA, August 12.)



Knowledge as You Drive

AT 2 p.m. any day in a summer a line of automobiles, each representing a party on a camping holiday, forms a queue outside the office of the Park Naturalist in the Grand Canyon of Arizona. This official and his staff see to it that accurate scientific information is available to all interested travellers. At the Grand Canyon the Chief Naturalist was a well-known geologist, and during the summer vacation he was assisted by several highly-qualified scientists from western universities. Well, as I said, at 2 p.m., a queue of cars, perhaps 50 in all, lines up, and sets out for a 30-mile drive along the Canyon rim under the guidance of one of the scientific staff. At intervals the procession stops and everyone gets out to hear a ten-minute to quarter-hour lecturette on some feature of the Canyon.—(*"The Grand Canyon of Arizona,"* Dr. F. J. Turner, 4YA, August 25.)

Polite Request

THIS time the outstandingly successful state in the art of controlling kings was not England but Aragon. Here, for example, is the famous oath of loyalty, as sworn to the king of Aragon by his nobles: "We who separately are as great as you, and who united are more than you; we swear to you that we will obey you, if you respect our liberties; otherwise not." During the same century that John accepted Magna Charta, the Aragonese made their king, Peter the Great, accept what was called the General Privilege, and which circumscribed the powers of the Crown just as Magna Charta did. The great seal of the Union who forced this concession from King Peter showed the king seated on his throne with leading nobles kneeling before him in loyalty; but in the background of the seal was a long row of spears to show what would happen if the king should refuse his subjects' polite request.—(*Professor F. L. W. Wood, "Democracy" series, 2YA, August 11.*)



What the Multitude Said

I WAS living with a very happy and very large family. The little nine-year-old was a real "hard case." He, like many youngsters, picked up all the slang words he heard during the day and would come out with them at most awkward moments. I per-

suaded him to try counting instead of swearing. If at the end of the count he still couldn't control his feelings, then he might say "Bust it." I promised to do the same just to keep him company. My tuition was a great success. This "Bust it" became quite a household word. Then came Easter Sunday when we all went to church. For a youngster he was very well behaved, even more so as he was suffering from a heavy cold. The clergyman would emphasise his point with a dramatic pause. During those silent pauses one could have heard a pin drop, if it hadn't been for the vigorous sniffing of our young friend. The climax came when Pa and Ma both nudged him

Why?

I'm not undervaluing the necessity for frankness in friendship when I say that I find the friend who's always speaking her mind, in season and out of season, rather a tiring person. I remember hearing a person once say, in defence of her tactlessness, "Oh, but I always feel I must speak my mind!" and the icy reply from an older and more experienced person, "Why? Is it a particularly valuable mind?" Harsh, perhaps, but there was a lot of truth in it.—("Between Ourselves," Mary Scott, 2YA, August 13.)

vigorously, at the exact moment when the parson said "And what did the multitude say? Yes! What did the multitude say?" As if the scene had been carefully rehearsed, a piping voice replied in anger, "Oh, bust it!"—(*Major F. H. Lampen, "Just Tense Moments," 2YA, August 14.*)

Check to a King

RIGHT from the first, steps were taken to spread news of the Magna Charta. Copies were sent for safe keeping all over England, just in case John should change his mind and tear up a document which he disliked. Then, within the next few years, the Charter was repeatedly confirmed, soon with the sanction of the Church behind it as well. It was read aloud in both English and French at important assemblies, and fearful threats were issued against anyone who might break it; and in some cases the king sent out a curiously detailed set of instructions to his subjects on how to disobey him if he broke his word. Thus it was brought home to people again and again that Magna Charta was a most important thing; and potential rebels were continually reminded of certain vital facts: that the king, as he himself acknowledged, was below the law, and that he had been forced to recognise this by an armed rising. Of course, rebellion is not necessarily a sign of democratic ideas; indeed, most rebellions in those days and for long afterwards, were purely reactionary outbursts against a progressive monarchy. Yet in much later days, when it was the king rather than the noble who was the most dangerous enemy of freedom, the story of Magna Charta set the precedent for opposition to kings in the name if not in the interest of the community as a whole.—(*Professor F. L. W. Wood, "Democracy" series, 2YA, August 11.*)

Refused Rhodes Scholarship

"A JOURNALIST pure and simple," is how J. B. McGeachy, BBC Commentator, describes himself. He is a Scots-Canadian with the tang of both countries in his voice. If asked what his claims to

fame are, he is apt to reply, "Well, I've never written a book." To make up for that, he has packed into his twenty years of journalism a wide experience of the North American continent. He is of Highland blood, his family belongs to the sept of MacDonalds of Clan Ranald, in the south-west isles of Scotland. He himself was born in Glasgow—where his parents still live—in 1899. In his fourteenth year he left for Canada in the great pre-war flood of emigration. Finally, he won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford—and did not take it up! He is, he believes, the only man who has ever done so; and he sometimes wonders whether, if he had his life to live again, he would make the same choice. To his boyish imagination the lure of journalism overcame even the rare chance of going to Oxford. That lure has held him ever since. It brought him to London immediately after Munich, and it holds him there in the midst of the blitz. To him it is the place where things are happening. But he does long for one thing—light. The nightly black-out is to him, as to many others, the most trying feature of the war; and he finds himself yearning, as he gropes his way to the BBC studio, for the bright lights of the Western Hemisphere.—(*A talk from 2YA.*)



Magna Charta Myth

IT has been rather fashionable lately to despise the Magna Charta and to say that this was a piece of black reaction which quite accidentally became the symbol of liberty and progress. Up to a point this is true enough. Magna Charta said nothing whatever about trial by jury, for example, let alone Parliamentary government. It was the result of a rebellion war, led by barons who were afraid that their class privileges were in danger, its victim, the King, stood for those forces which ultimately produced modern civilisation (whatever that may mean). Nevertheless, Magna Charta was a very valuable document, indeed, quite apart from the nonsense that our ancestors used to believe about it. Suppose it was a conservative document. There were special reasons why it was important for the law of the land to be re-stated just then, and in just the way it was. At that time, feudalism was beginning to break up. However, feudalism had some essential things to contribute to modern democracy, and one of the most vital of them was the theory of the contract between ruler and subject; the theory that the subject had rights of his own, even against the king. There was a great danger that as the feudal system was destroyed the world would lose the good as well as the bad; and it was Magna Charta which made certain that this particular good thing would be handed on.—(*Professor F. L. W. Wood, "Democracy" series, 2YA, August 11.*)

Hot Water

BUT the ones that don't grow up—who remain "fearless and outspoken" at fifty—those are really very exhausting friends. They take such a lot of looking after. You've just pulled them out of an argument with the butcher on the proper way to cut up meat when you have to rescue them from a policeman whom they're telling how to control the traffic properly. They get up into terribly hot water with your children, because they have a rooted idea that young people should be advised and set right and properly brought up. I may say that they are usually people who have no children of their own; if they had—and particularly if they had a daughter or two—they would realise that it's the elders who have to be advised and controlled and generally kept in the straight and narrow path. Meantime, they put the family's back up most terribly and you're between the devil and the deep sea. Oh, nothing is more capable of mixing things up badly than an unbridled desire to speak one's own mind.—(*"Between Ourselves," Mary Scott, 2YA, August 13.*)