

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

Modern Babel

WHEN I was in England last, I spent an hour or two in Hyde Park on a Sunday afternoon. Here were speakers galore giving vent to their feelings. As I passed one of them I heard him advising a few youngsters to blow up the Bank of England, and when I passed him a second time he was talking



to nobody about bootlegging in America. Men and women were holding forth on every conceivable subject. It was a regular Tower of Babel, and I asked a policeman if there were any restrictions imposed on these orators. He smiled and said that there was safety in numbers. He suggested that I should stroll round and listen to bits and pieces from each and everyone

of them and then come back and tell him what they had all been talking about. I tried, but it wasn't long before I sought out this friendly policeman again and told him that my mind was all jumbled up. He smiled again and told me that most of these speakers had no great things to say and if they had they had said them so often that most people never stopped long to listen—also that those who talked the most actually had the least to say.—(*"Just Characteristics,"* Major F. H. Lampen, 2YA, October 9.)

Poetic Diet

A: HERE'S the crux of the matter. You have at school a magnificent opportunity of ruining or establishing a child's literary tastes for ever. Feed him with the wrong stuff and he very rightly gets literary indigestion. Bring him to literature the right way and he's yours for ever. Success lies partly in the approach and partly in the books you give him to read. "Areopagitica" is one of the noblest pieces of English prose, but the first form think it's pretty stuffy. "Paradise Lost" may be our greatest epic but the twelve-year-old would prefer the "Ancient Mariner" or the "Lays of Ancient Rome," or something from Kipling. You can no more force a literary taste than you can force a swing at golf. You can't in effect say to a child: "This poem is good. Professor Saintsbury says it's good. The Cambridge History of English Literature says it's good. Learn it off by heart by Thursday, and if you don't you will write it out three times." If the victim doesn't know the meaning of the poem, if the mode of thought is in advance of his years, all your work is wasted and another poem has been added to the graveyard of murdered verses, and another man will say in adult life: "Poetry's beyond me."

B: Quite so. But there's more in it than that. If we're going to cultivate genuine literary taste, I think we must be a good deal more candid and understanding. We must regard the classics with much less awe, and respect the opinion of pupils if they don't care for these writers. What we should do is to try to get pupils to like something that is good, but not everything that is good.—(*"Can Literary Appreciation Be Taught?"* A discussion with Professor I. A. Gordon, Professor of English, Victoria University College, 2YA, October 13.)

A Man With a Garden

THIS brings me to gardening as a hobby. Golf loses much of its fascination when the sun has sunk to rest and no living person is at hand to hear how you fozzled your drive at the ninth tee, but a man infatuated with his garden has no time for any relaxation except sleeping and eating. The moment he becomes slack, signs of his negligence

become only too apparent. His work is never done. But hope and the promises held out by the most alluring nurseryman's catalogues bear him along. A man with a garden needs only faith and a seed catalogue. The rest of the world is very far away. My friend's husband became interested in tropical fish. He brought home a tank, stocked with the beautifully coloured little things, and the aquatic plants necessary for them. This was placed in a suitable position and duly admired by all who saw it. Then gradually tanks appeared on shelves in unexpected places, until the climax was reached when small breeding tanks were found in his dressing room. Realising that he must have some outlet for his energies his wife suggested turning a small sunny dining-room into an aquarium. At once he exclaimed: "How soon could we get it ready?" Almost immediately the whole flat was re-arranged and at 12 o'clock next day a lorry arrived with timber for shelves—and other necessary equipment. The aquarium finished up as a show place of the house, with the tanks ranging from 4 to 40 gallons automatically heated and lighted.—(*"Hobbies for Husbands,"* by Mrs. Stamp-Taylor, 2YA, October 6.)

"Her Husband Sews . . . !"

IN encouraging her menfolk to have hobbies, I must confess that I think a woman has to be "as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove," for she has to see to it that the quaint and fantastic uses to which men put their spare time must be kept within reasonable limits. When Lord Strickland



was Governor of New South Wales he enjoyed a little bit of carpentry at his holiday home at Moss Vale, but he used to bring it into the drawing-room—trestles, bench and all, and scattered shavings in all directions. On the other hand, Julius Knight, the famous actor, whom many of my middle-aged listeners will remember, liked knitting, and between acts could often be found in his dressing-room, turning the heel of a sock with care and concentration. The spectacle of Marcus Superbus in "The Sign of the Cross," or Napoleon just back from Moscow, amusing himself with knitting is intriguing. Such a nice clean hobby is tapestry. My husband remarked, when asked why he didn't take to canvas and brushes and express his scenes through this quicker and much easier medium: "One can bring one's needlework to the fireside, and I don't like being placed in the spare room with the perpetual smell of turpentine and oil." The word "needlework" brings to mind an amusing incident. I was talking to two men on the golf links one day. One of them said, "Where is your husband these days? He should be on the links getting exercise," and turning to his companion remarked, "You know her husband sews."—(*"Hobbies for Husbands,"* by Mrs. Stamp-Taylor, 2YA, October 6.)

England, the Eternal

I MUST confess that although in England I sought for every trace of Roman building, or bath, or road, going back to the time of Christ, I had no definite thought or knowledge of these marvellous stone remains of antiquity. Mr. Mais has left the ordinary roads of travel to uncover for us many paths hidden by time. We are so accustomed to turn to Egypt and the East for our excavations of places and history that it comes rather as a surprise to know that so much history lies covered in our own islands; for what loyal Britisher does not call these islands "Home." It would take too long to

Liberty Of Thought

I QUOTED last week some flattering remarks of Voltaire on the subject of English freedom. The great Swedish mystic and visionary, Emanuel Swedenborg, as we usually call him, was a contemporary of Voltaire, but he looked out on the world with a very different pair of eyes from those of the French rationalist. In his work entitled "The Last Judgment," Swedenborg writes as follows: "Here I will say something of the noble English nation. The more excellent of the English nation are in the centre of all Christians . . . the reason why they are in the centre is because they have interior intellectual light. This light they derive from the liberty of thinking, and thence of speaking and writing. With others, who are not in such liberty, intellectual light is darkened, because it has no outlet." Great praise, from such a source, is very humbling. We are worthy of it only in so far as we feel ourselves to be unworthy of it. But I have quoted it because it sets us a standard, and because in our literature at least we have not fallen altogether below that standard. For our great English writers at least we may make the claims that they have set their face towards the light, and have not encouraged us to domineer over others, or to find our happiness in doing evil to others.—(*"The Soul of England,"* by Professor Sinclair, 3YA, October 1.)

describe what Mais tells us in this book of the wonderful things to be seen in England from this far distant Stone Age and the Bronze Age which followed it. But all lovers of England, whether born there or not, will enjoy and learn from these early chapters of the book. "So come with me," he says, "for a tour through England and in our search for the very old, I promise you that we will hit upon much that is very strange and much that is very beautiful."—(*Book Review,* by Miss G. M. Glanville, 3YA, September 11.)

Their Majesties Were Interested

LIFE in New Zealand held many surprises for the King and Queen, and they were quick to respond to much that was informal about our ways. In England, for the most part, tea is served on the dining table like any other meal. Or when it is served in the drawing room, a tea-table is set up. I don't know how the Royal Family take tea in private, I am referring to the usual English custom. I think it was at Wairakei that the King and Queen saw their first tea waggon. Tea was served in the lounge of the hotel, and a wagon loaded with cakes and sandwiches was wheeled up to their chairs. The King was very taken with it; I saw him push it back and forward. They found this



way of serving tea in New Zealand quite a novelty. And realising that domestic help was scarce, and in most houses the kitchen and dining-room were on the same floor, often adjoining rooms, connected by a door, they decided it was an admirable idea. And also the fact that in summer so often as tea is taken out of doors, on the porch or veranda or the lawn, here again, the tea wagon took the place of a maid to serve it. It was little things like that which struck them even more, I think, than many of the important sights and scenes which were on the official programme. And that is generally the case. It is the little things in which we differ in our ways of life that strike observant visitors; and these are such ordinary everyday events to us, that we would never dream of suspecting their interest, or mentioning them.—(*"Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax,"* Nelle Scanlan, 2YA, October 10.)