

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

A Bath in Bangkok

ON disembarking, I went to what I was told was the best hotel of the town, a fine long two-storied European building with lovely lawns leading right down to the river. Inside, it was roomy, the fans were whirling, the cool darkness was comforting. It was too late and too hot to go anywhere that morning, so I decided to have a much needed bath as bathing facilities on board had been rather scanty.

I hurried to the bathroom attached to my room. It was large, at least 15 feet square, and monumentally in the centre was a large bath complete with shower, and a dozen gleaming taps. I turned the taps on with glee. Nothing happened! I tried again. Still nothing. I rang my bell, no one came. I rang again—still no one. Finally I sallied out of my room and at the end of the passage found my room boy. I told him I wanted a bath, a hot bath. "Wait two minutes, Missie, and I will go get it." I went back, slipped off my things and lay down in my kimono. Twenty minutes passed, half-an-hour, still nothing. I tried my bell again. No answer. Off I went again to find the boy. "Just coming, Missie." He seemed pained that I should be so unreasonable as to want to wash in that heat. Suddenly I heard the familiar "Hey-ho" of coolies carrying burdens, and into my room burst a stream of bare-footed coolies, each one with a bamboo pole on his shoulder on each end of which was hung a wooden pail of boiling water. Six coolies came in, the boy heading the procession, and with much noise and talk and clatter the steaming bath was filled; and when once I had my room to myself again I had the only hot bath I had the courage to ask for in that town!—("A Week-end in Bangkok," Barbara J. Collins, 2YA, November 5.)

Parson on Horse-back

I REMEMBER one trip I made some years ago to a coastal district of a parish. We went up by launch for some hours—spent a night in a country (very country) hotel en route—on again the next morning to our destination. Then a spot of visiting, and a day's sea fishing (very good) and then a long trip in a buggy—the back full of fish, which we distributed on the journey of about 20 miles, during which we crossed the river-bed about 30 times. This was a Sunday—and we had a service in the afternoon in a sheep station house, to which folk had come in from all over the district on horseback, and so back to our temporary home. The next day I got on a horse

(something I hadn't done for years) and began the ride back. How it rained, and how wet I got. How the horse slid down tracks on to the beach—with me clinging on for dear life. However, I landed at a house where they were total strangers—and had no claim on my services as they didn't belong to our Church. The good people insisted on my staying till the storm cleared, and dried my clothes and fed me. Then we found the launch had missed its timetable because the owner had seen a whale and had collected his pals to go and have a stab at it—so on I stayed for a day or two—till the launch did come. When it arrived it only took me a few miles, and dropped me again for a night. I borrowed another horse, and went on to a schoolhouse for hospitality.

On again the next day—and the sea was rough—and, after all that, we were anchored for an hour and a-half outside the river bar waiting for the tide to rise. All a great experience—and very good for the country parson.—("The Parson in Town and Country," 1YA, November 6.)

Flag Waving

WHEN it comes to flags, I imagine that many of our people were not too sure about the New Zealand flag some years ago. When the present King and Queen visited New Zealand as Duke and Duchess of York, at one very tiny settlement the school children were lined up along the road, each with a flag to wave. And most of the flags were either the stars and stripes of America, or the rising sun of Japan. Apparently there had been such a big demand for the Union Jack and the New Zealand flag in the larger towns, that the stock had run out. And when the local authorities of this remote place wanted flags, they had to take what they could get. I'm sure the children had no idea they were waving foreign flags. Some of the men in authority were very disturbed, but the King was extremely amused at the incident.—("Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax," Nelle Scanlan, 2YA, October 7.)



More About Writing

A: A boy should be taught to write in such a way that whatever he takes up in life he will be able to express himself clearly. Very few young people comparatively will want to write for publication, but everybody has to write reports or letters or something.

Did Dickens Exaggerate?

IN this series of talks I am trying to show how the English character—the soul of England—is reflected in English books. Now the witness of Dickens is still sometimes challenged on the ground that his characters are not real people but caricatures. No such people as Sam Weller and Mr. Turveydrop and Mr. Pardiggle and Mr. Dick and the rest of them, ever existed. On this matter Mr. Chesterton, in his admirable study of Dickens, seems to have said almost the last word: "If we begin again to behold the English people, it will be in the full vindication of Dickens. It will be proved that he is hardly a caricaturist; that he is really something very like a realist. Those comic monstrosities which the critics found incredible will be found in the immense majority of the citizens of this country. For the exaggerated notion of the exaggeration of Dickens is very largely due to our mixing only with one social class, whose conventions are very strict and to whose conventions we are accustomed. In cabmen, in cobblers, in charwomen, individuality is often pushed to the verge of insanity. . . . Democracy is really composed of Dickens characters."—("The Soul of England," Professor Sinclair, Canterbury College, 3YA, October 15.)

B: That's just it. Everybody has to, and there would be a great saving of time and trouble—to say nothing of added pleasure—if people could write clearly and briefly. It comes into every calling, and into everybody's life. You're an engineer or an architect and you've got to write a memorandum. You're a secretary and you've got to write a circular. You can do these things well or badly, and if you do them badly you may cause trouble. There's one calling that is in everybody's mind to-day—soldiering. Now isn't it most important that a soldier who has to draft recommendations and orders should be able to write clearly and to the point?

A: I should say it was vital. An obscure order might lose a battle, and a lost battle might mean a lost war.

B: Exactly. Here is an interesting fact. In the London Book of English Prose, a modern collection, there is a section devoted to naval and military orders. You will find there the operation orders written by Wellington for one of his battles in the Peninsular war. It is put there as a model of clarity and directness. But you will also find there the operation orders for Allenby's great break through to Palestine in 1918, and these orders are signed by—who do you think? An officer named Wavell.

A: What, our General Wavell of to-day?

B: Yes, the same Wavell. You know, I suppose, that he is a writer of distinction. I should say he is all the better soldier because he can write well.

A: And probably he's all the better writer for being a soldier. If I had my way nobody would be given a degree of any kind—science or arts—who couldn't write his own language decently.—("Can People Be Taught to Write?" Professor Gordon, Victoria University College, 2YA, November 3.)

Talking of Boots!

WHENEVER I think of boots, this story comes to mind. A certain regiment in the last war had been resting behind the line for a week or two. Just before they were due to go back to the trenches again an issue of new boots was made to all ranks. Then came the order for the regiment to march to a certain village some 19 miles away. Away they trudged over the pavé road and arrived at their destination footsore and weary. As the men were about to take off their heavy equipment and find somewhere to sleep for the night, a motor cyclist appeared on the scene and dashed up to the Commanding Officer and handed him a message. When the Colonel had digested its contents he blew his whistle and called on every-



one to stand fast. As he was explaining to all ranks that someone had blundered and that they had come to the wrong village, it started to pour with rain. Nothing daunted, he told his men that he was going to give them the alternative of spending the night where they were, sleeping under their waterproof sheets in the open, or of marching back whence they came. He personally favoured the latter method. He then called on all those who were not prepared to footslog back another 19 miles to take one pace to the rear. In response to his command every man barring one took one pace to the rear. The Colonel grew visibly pale and went up to the lonely soldier and congratulated him and added: "I am proud to think that I have at least one man in my regiment who is prepared to face the ordeal." He then shook the man by the hand and as an afterthought said: "And so you really think that you can march back those 19 miles?" The man looked at him and replied, "What! Me do 19 miles in these new boots? Why I'm that blinking tired I couldn't even take that one pace to the rear."—"Just Boots," by Major F. H. Lampen, 2YA, November 6.)