

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

Street Scene in Hong Kong

HONG KONG is easy to live in and hard to forget. My memories of it will always be largely of Chinese things and people; of wealth and poverty, beauty and squalor, life, gaiety and wretchedness; of half-naked children, bright and healthy, sprawling across the pavements, and at night destitute refugees sleeping on the same pavements, wrapped inadequately in shabby rags of bedding. It is a city where people live out on the street, and shops spread out on to the pavement. I remember an old man being fitted for his coffin in a shop in Hong Kong; lying down in it and wriggling his shoulders uncomfortably, as though saying that he wouldn't have room to breathe in it. Wonderful manual dexterity is taken for granted amongst the



Chinese. You may see a pear-seller in the street pick up a pear from his tray with the point of a knife, toss it in the air and catch it again between two knives, and then peel it by spinning it between them. Children stood round my feet as I watched him, the peel sliding curling down over his thin brown wrists; peeled and clean the pear is tossed in the air again, and caught on the point of a knife, untouched by hand. I remember the ivory-carvers patiently drilling those globes that in time show nine globes one within the other, and all free to move. I remember the way life crowds out on the pavements, where cobblers squat under a square of canvas, a board on a nail over their head telling their name; where tinkers and china repairers work on the pavement, or chair coolies play a kind of domino game with little cards, the happiest and the poorest working men I know.—(*"Hong Kong."* A National Service talk prepared by Rev. David Rosenthal. 2YA, December 23.)

Ask Susan

NO one, I'm sure, was more thankful to see the metal on the road than our horses. No more heavy pulls in mid-winter. No more cold waits at the corner till the car turned up. Less work all round and more peace. I'm always sorry that our old draught mare, Susan, didn't live to see that day. I'm sure she'd have managed to celebrate it somehow, for, if ever a horse was sick of cars, it was Susan. I don't blame her either. She knew all about them and her lower lip used to droop a little more after each pull. She'd had many experiences with cars and they had given her a deep scorn for motorists. There was the man whose horn went wrong while she was pulling him out—it needed nerves as strong as Susan's to stand that ceaseless blast just behind her. Then there was a little episode for which I was responsible. Susan was towing our car around the paddock after its winter rest, to induce it to start, when it *did* start—and rather too suddenly. We were going down hill and everything happened at once and I was too paralysed to put the brake on quickly. Susan ended up very nearly sitting on the bonnet like an outsize mascot.—(*"Our Animal Friends: Horses to the Rescue,"* by Mrs. Mary Scott, 3YA, December 26.)

Just an Error

TALKING of the blackout reminds me of an old story of the last war. Two New Zealand soldiers had arrived in London from France on a few days' leave. They decided to stick together during this period and they kept their pact for the first 24 hours. Then one of them decided to look up some distant connection of the family. The other fellow kept him

company all the time. When they found the house they also found a very pretty daughter of the house there too. Eventually one of them arranged to take her to the theatre that night—and by so doing the pact was broken. The poor lonely soldier then decided that the best thing he could do would be to find a girl for himself. He took up a strong position at a street corner in the very dim light, and watched the couples go by. At long last out of the corner of his eye he saw a lonely skirt pass by in the crowd. He hesitated and then decided to follow. He kept the short skirt (as worn in those days) steadily in view. After walking about a mile and a-half he saw the figure suddenly stop just outside a small shop, from the window of which there came a small gleam of light. Here was his chance! He took his courage in both hands and approached the figure. As he came alongside the window the figure turned round and faced him. It was not till then that he discovered that for the last mile and a half he had been following a slim recruit belonging to that famous kilted regiment—the London Scottish!—(*"Just Blackouts,"* by Major F. H. Lampen, 2YA, January 1.)

His Place in History

ONE of the greatest names in the history of nineteenth century eating was that of Alexis Soyer, an eminent Victorian, never mentioned in history books, or immortalised in examination papers. Even soldiers do not know his name, though he did more for the army than dozens of generals. Alexis Soyer reformed the food of the British Army some ninety years ago, after pioneering work with Florence Nightingale in the Crimea—and he was also a famous French chef, at a well-known men's club, who helped to popularise the French style of cooking in nineteenth century London. At that time outside the world of fashionable London, with its banquets and its balls, hundreds and



thousands of men and women were barely getting enough to eat. Soyer resigned his position at the Reform Club, because, said he, "through the stone walls of that edifice I could not gain the slightest knowledge of cottage life." The terrible Irish potato famine gave him an opportunity to put his philanthropic ideas into practice, and just when peasants were dying by hundreds, he went over to Ireland, and personally superintended schemes to alleviate some of the distress and want. He had public soup kitchens built. The whole plan of feeding thousands of people with an absolute minimum of delay was the product of his brain, and the experience was to stand him in good stead when he went to the Crimea.—(*"A Man in the Kitchen: The Career of a Famous Chef."* Prepared by Dorothy Neal. 2YA, December 31.)

"Russia in Flux"

THE first thing I wish to say about one of the most interesting books I have read for many a day, a book by John Maynard called *Russia in Flux*, is that it has a very inadequate title; and perhaps a very misleading title. The second is that its author states that his study "aims at presenting a clue of social and political history, along with a glimpse of the currents of thought in the Russia of the Tsars" and the result is one of the most competent and revealing studies of social life and mental developments that I have come across. The third is that the author, Sir John Maynard, is by no means a young man. He was born in 1865 and has seen long service as an Administrator in India. He is a member of the Fabian Society and, as far as I

From Then To Now

ON the 25th of January, 1841, a small party of marines drank, at the Queen's expense, her health on the newly-acquired island of Hong Kong. The next day the island was formally occupied and the flag ran up; but scarcely anyone was pleased. Queen Victoria and Lord Palmerston were annoyed, although later the Queen passed it off as a joke. For the title to the island was doubtful, and the troublesome negotiations of the so-called "opium war" were imperilled, so that trade through Canton would be difficult. Hong Kong was, so most people believed, unlikely ever to supplant Canton as a base for British trade. However, in spite of the gloomy forebodings of the merchants in Canton, the island was retained and its cession ratified by the Treaty of Nanking the following year. Since then it has grown to be a colony including 360 square miles on the mainland; it has a total population almost equal to that of New Zealand. It includes two cities, with modern eight and ten-story buildings, housing air-conditioned offices, hotels and shops; it has tramways, motor buses, railways and excellent tarred and concrete roads.—(*"Hong Kong."* A National Service Talk prepared by the Rev. David Rosenthal, who recently came to New Zealand from the Far East. 2YA, December 23.)

know has published no other books. I can only regret that he has not done so because he has an extraordinary gift for terse expression and condensation as well as a manner of writing which makes his book a pleasure to read.—(*Book review, by Winston Rhodes, 3YA, November 25.*)

Time and Train Wait . . .

IT was at one of the underground stations, when waiting to board a train, that I suddenly realised the subtle difference between Australia and New Zealand, for there the whole tempo and rhythm of life is stepped up and there is much more hurry and bustle than there is here. It was at a very busy period, when the people were hurrying home after their day's work, and there were many hundreds—nay, thousands—waiting for their trains. The particular one which I wished to catch arrived and I stood back waiting until most of the crowd had boarded, before stepping forward. Alas, to my disappointment, I found there is no waiting, only a strict schedule to be kept, for the train whizzed past me and away, leaving me standing on the platform. This incident, though small in itself, with many others, made me feel the difference between life in New Zealand and life in Australia.—(*"Life in Australia and New Zealand—Some Comparisons,"* by Helen Zahara, 2YA, December 29.)

Fire In The Forest

SINCE the outbreak of war, a new menace to the safety of the forest has been created by the use of producer gas as a substitute for petrol. Observation and experience have proved this. Many gas producers send out sparks and cinders which will readily set fire to dry grass, tussock, and bracken, but the main danger is from the careless dumping of live embers and ash from the producer furnace. Motorists know that this is necessary every two or three hours on a long run, and they are earnestly asked to dump refuse only in a safe place—near a stream for preference—where the ashes should be thoroughly drenched with water or smothered with sand or loose earth.—(*"The New Zealand State Forest Service: Prevent Forest Fires."* 2YA, December 18.)

