

DID YOU HEAR THIS?

Extracts From Recent Talks

Black Swans at Okarito

THE Okarito Lagoon used to be the home of large numbers of black swans. Whether they were originally imported or found their way over from the East I don't know. But it is interesting to record how the birds changed their habits to suit local conditions. Three or four pairs took up their residence on the lagoon and unaccustomed to the rapid rise of the level from floods in the spring, they built their nests too close to the water, and for two or three seasons, they were flooded out and lost their eggs—after about three years, they changed their method, and instead of building nests further from the water, they got over the difficulty of floods by making huge heaps of rushes and dry sticks, which floated when the floods came, and allowed the birds to remain on the eggs until the nests again settled on dry ground when the flood water had subsided. This may not be the only case of swans having floating nests, but my old mate, Charlie Douglas, who was a keen naturalist, actually observed the whole proceeding, from the birds' first appearance until they adopted the new method of overcoming the danger of floods.—(*"Where Time Stood Still: Recollections of Old Westland."* A. P. Harper, 3YA, February 2).



Poet Who Could Not Sing

DID you know that Sir Walter Scott as a boy was always in hot water with his singing master. The master, a man called Alexander Campbell, taught all the Scott boys, but Robert Scott was the only one of the family who could sing. The master got it into his head that young Walter was just stubborn, and made no allowance for his bad musical ear. Walter's father was musical, and played the 'cello at concerts. Mr. Campbell, the singing teacher, had a bad temper, and used to thrash the boys when their singing was too bad to be borne. You can just imagine the noise and rumpus all this would make. One of Scott's neighbours was Lady Cumming, and the uproar got so bad that she sent to ask that all the boys be not thrashed at one and the same time. Lady Cumming did not doubt that the punishment was deserved, but the noise was too dreadful. We have it from Sir Walter Scott that it was only by long practice that he was able to acquire the power of telling one melody from another. He loved to

hear his daughter sing old Scottish folk songs, but it was the words more than the music that moved him. — (*"Junior Encyclopaedia of the Air,"* by "Ebor." 2YA, January 26.)

Old Inns and Taverns

YES, these old inns are to be found dotted over every part of England. It doesn't much matter where you go you will surely find that the inn of yesterday has its sign out to-day. A great number of these are linked up with some famous or infamous historical person, or event, closely associated with the district. Go to the Rose and Crown Inn in the Essex village of Hempstead, for instance, and let mine host tell you the story of Dick Turpin, who was born there. He will show you with pride the hole in the ceiling where Dick Turpin was in the habit of listening to travellers relating their stories of recent highway robberies. As a result of this eavesdropping, Dick Turpin shaped his rather doubtful career. Near the stream a short distance away, the landlord will show you where Dick had his cockpit. The site is now marked by a circle of trees. Then there is another old inn at Hadley, which



boasts of the Royal Arms presented by Queen Elizabeth as a token of her visit to Worcester. One of the chief attractions of this inn is its 400-year-old bowling green. Not being a bowler, I cannot say whether the rules of the game to-day conform to those of 400 years ago. Among the many rules of the game to be seen at this inn, I have chosen this one as being rather unusual: "A bowler using profane language, shall be dragged over the green on the seat of his breeches and pay a fine of two shillings for the benefit of the poor of the parish." Perhaps some modern bowler might enlighten me on the point.—(*"Just Ye Olde Inns and Taverns."* Major F. H. Lampen, 2YA, January 22).

Good, Clean Fun

FORTY years ago was the heyday of the "straight" musical comedy, like *The Geisha*, *Floradora*, *The Messenger Boy* and the rest of them. At a performance of *The Country Girl*, the star comedian, I remember, was George Lauri, and as a strong-minded female he made an impassioned appeal to his fellow-women to revolt against the tyranny of man, the enemy. Across the years, when many more improving homilies have become a total loss, floats that speech, miraculously preserved: "Strike for freedom, my sisters, and when you strike, have something in your hand, if it's only the fender. What does a man marry a woman for? Why, to sew on his buttons! And what I say to you, my sisters, is this: 'Don't sew on his buttons! Let him go without buttons, and then down will come his dignity and independence.'" Not very subtle, I suppose. But cheerful, clean vulgarity is a better tonic than cynical suggestiveness. Like Kipling's three-decker novel, it had the merit of "taking tired people to the Islands of the Blest."—(*"Plays and Players Long Ago."* Miss Cecil Hull, 1YA, January 26).

Japan Unmasked

YOU have seen Hallett Abend, American newspaperman, quoted since the war with Japan started. Here is his last pre-war book about an area which he had studied for many years as one of the shrewdest of the Far Eastern correspondents: *Japan Unmasked*. This book is an intensely valuable commentary upon Japan's aims and limitations in the Pacific war, and upon the countries—mainly island territories—which are now in jeopardy. Not all of the author's predictions have proved sound—some of them are grimly and ironically contradicted

by very recent events. He declares, for example, that Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, is one of the few naval bases in the world the value of which has not been sharply reduced by air war. He found Hawaii, when he was last there only a few months ago—well, eight or nine months, I think it would have been—preparing hurriedly but systematically for any eventuality, "ready to fight anybody or everybody at the earliest possible date." This conclusion has scarcely been borne out, at least as to readiness; but Mr. Abend's reasoned and factual evaluation of the importance of Hawaii in a Pacific war can stand.—(*Book talk by John Moffett.* 4YA, January 23).

Dickens and America

IN remembering Dickens to-day, let us remember his connexion with America. When Dickens paid his first visit to the United States, in 1842—a hundred years ago—a dinner was given in his honour in Boston. In acknowledging the hospitality accorded him, Dickens concluded his remarks with these words: "Gentlemen, I thank you with feelings of gratitude, such as are not often awakened and can never be expressed. As I understand it to be the pleasant custom here to finish with a toast, I would beg to give you 'America and England—may they never have any division but the Atlantic between them.' And now for a parting word from America to-night—it is the hope and prayer of all of us here that far from being arrayed one against the other, we may stand together to preserve our two lands that we have learned to love so well, and join forces against any aggressor nation or nations that would challenge our peace and well being." Now, after a lapse of 100 years, we see that Britain and America—as Dickens hoped and prayed for, are joined to combat the forces of evil that are arrayed against themselves and the small nations.—(*"Charles Dickens,"* E. C. Harvie, vice-president of the Wellington Dickens Fellowship, 2YA, February 7.)

Electricity is Easier

THE Australian blacks don't use fire sticks to start the blaze every time they want to get warm, or grill some game they have speared. Oh, no. They are the cunningest folk I have seen in carrying fire on the day's march. Try this and see how you get on. Pick up a stick about two feet long and as thick as your wrist, and just nicely charred by fire at its end. Then try to carry that on a 20-mile walk, and keep it smouldering. Then when it burns close to your fingers, put it down, start a fire, and prepare another fire-stick. That is what these nomads do, and that is what you would have to do if you were a wife out there. Yes, and carry the piccaninny on your shoulders and the household goods in a piece of bark on your head. That's the job of the lubra or aboriginal's wife. So take it from me, you white fellow lubras have a pretty soft time in this country, even if you think you are unfairly treated sometimes.—(*"Fire in the Australian Desert."* Michael Terry, 1YA, February 2).

The Real Kate Greenaway

KATE GREENAWAY, you know, was a real person. I used to talk about Kate Greenaway clothes, the little frilly frocks and old-fashioned boys' suits, without ever thinking or knowing about the woman who created them. She was born about the middle of last century, and lived to become one of the most famous illustrators of Victorian children's books. As an artist, she was especially fortunate, because her delightful pictures were well printed. Many an artist's work has been ruined by poor reproduction—but Kate was luckier. Edmund Evans, who printed her work, was a pioneer in colour-printing, not only a shrewd man of business, but a man with an appreciation of the beautiful, and himself a clever water-colour artist. Kate was really a homely person, and loved homely things, all the sounds of the Victorian streets, the barrel-organ and the muffin-bell, bands and the sound of church bells. Flowers, too, were a joy to her, and she once wrote that "she struck up a friendship with flowers" at an early age.—(*"Letters to Children."* Dorothy Neal, 2YA, January 26.)



Women Must Work

VOICE: What do you do with your time Nancy?

NANCY: Oh, I help about the house in the morning, go walks in the afternoon, listen in in the evening, and practise the violin.

VOICE: How old are you?

NANCY: Eighteen. I've just left school, and I wanted to get a job in London, but Mummy didn't want me to go into lodgings, so here I am.

VOICE: Do you enjoy it?

NANCY: Oh, yes, there's plenty to do, and I don't need to work—luckily.

VOICE: Everybody who can work, needs to work this year . . . And I can tell you why you must leave your kitchen, your shop, your lake-land hotel, or your country walk. For the Fuhrer once said to Goering, "Build me the mightiest air force the world has ever known," and it was built.—(Dialogue from "Women Hit Back" BBC feature, 2YA, February 2.)