

"WALTZING MATILDA"

The Story Of The Song

Listeners who have heard Peter Dawson sing "Waltzing Matilda" on his recent visit, will be interested in this item from the "Radio Times." It was contributed by Dr. Thomas Wood, author of "Cobbers," who has, the "Radio Times" says, "helped to make 'Waltzing Matilda' Australia's Battle Hymn."

"THE Australian troops went into Bardia singing 'Waltzing Matilda.' That's official. Doesn't it make your hair curl?"

It was Hubert Foss speaking on the telephone: a trunk call from London. He and I and "Waltzing Matilda" have been mixed up a good deal together these last eight years. Gradually we have seen this song make friends for itself throughout four continents and the Seven Seas. But promotion to a battle hymn was a step indeed.

My own share in the fame of "Waltzing Matilda" is modest. Here is its outline: I went to Australia in 1930. Almost the last person I saw before I left was Stephen Jack, the actor. He said to me: "There's a song out there you ought to get hold of. I know no more than a line or two, but it is a clinker."

I looked for it, but the problems of trains, transport, dust, and distance got in the way. If you yourself have had to travel in Australia, where the journey of a thousand miles is a commonplace, you will understand. And each day the day's work had to be done. Bits and tags and ends of "Waltzing Matilda" seemed to be scattered all over the continent, but I found neither text nor tune by such deliberate search as I had time for.

Discovered at Last

I came across both by chance. This was at Winton, in Queensland, a town

that stands up from the plain as rocks rise out of the sea. There's heat in Winton, and sand, and glare; but if you want to know what friendliness can be, go there, and meet T. J. Shanahan, of the North Gregory Hotel. He gave me a welcome as warm as the weather, and two words set us on common ground at the start. Those words were "folk songs." There are none in Australia. It was settled too late. The one Australian song, I said, that had the right smack was "Waltzing Matilda." Did he know it?

Did he not. Out of that evening, and perhaps a can of beer, came this tale—all true:

Written on the Spot

Some forty years ago "Banjo" Paterson, Australian poet, was staying with his friend Robert McPherson at Dagworth, a sheep station eighty miles out of the town. They were driving into Winton one day in the buggy when they passed a man carrying his swag. "That's what we call 'Waltzing Matilda' in these parts," said McPherson, and "Banjo" was so struck with the phrase that he wrote the verses right off, basing them on a Dagworth story of a swagman who did indeed kill a jumbuck (sheep) in a billabong (waterhole) and roused McPherson's fury. "Banjo's" sister wrote the tune. They sang it in the North Gregory Hotel that night.

When I got back to England, I published, with permission, "Waltzing Matilda" in a book of mine. Hubert Foss was the publisher. That was in 1934. Since then we have spent some time and energy and goodwill in telling the world that here is a jewel, and helping Australians themselves to see that in "Waltzing Matilda" they have a national anthem worth the name.

BOOK REVIEWS

(Continued from previous page)

his thought and style. The poetry in fact suffers to some extent from the absence of a little flamboyancy. But to compensate for this there is a depth of thought and a spiritual intensity seldom found in modern writing.

Considering this, it is a pity that the publication itself should strike such a sober note. The general get-up is not such as will encourage the casual reader, and though the paper shortage may explain the closeness of the type it fails to account for the frequency of printer's errors. Perhaps the Professor trusted the printer with the proofs and the printer trusted the Professor.

—M.I.

FOR AMATEUR SOLDIERS

DURING the first three Libyan campaigns there was no weapon for which the infantry on either side had a healthier respect than the mortar. This, and the fact that about two out of three civilian males in New Zealand are spare-time soldiers, should ensure a satisfactory sale for *The Three-inch*

Mortar Simplified, Whitcombe and Tombs's Military Manual, No. 15.

Without having the official pamphlet handy for purposes of comparison, it is not possible to say to what extent the publishers have "simplified" the weapon but a careful reading suggests that very little information of material value to the amateur soldier has been omitted. What has been omitted is any reference whatever to sources. If, as it appears, the material was lifted from the corresponding Army text-book, this should be made plain. It is most important that the information given should be completely accurate and that the instruction should not encourage any deviation from accepted Army practice, otherwise such freelance publications may hinder more than they help. There is a right and a wrong procedure, for example, for even such a simple business as the handing of a mortar bomb by one number to another. Some supervision or endorsement by the military authorities of such booklets as this seems necessary; or if that is already taking place, some clear announcement of the fact.

—J.A.



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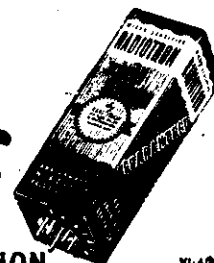
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