

THE "VICTORY BELLS"

It Takes More Than Emotion To Ring Them

NO broadcast since the war started has brought the NBS more telephone rings and letters of appreciation than the relay of the ringing of the "Victory Bells" in Britain on a recent Sunday. Here are some of the facts behind that broadcast—information about the bells themselves, and about the men and women who ring them. We take them largely from talks prepared by the National Broadcasting Service.

PERHAPS to some of us New Zealanders it may have seemed a little strange that quite so much was made of the ringing of the bells in Britain to celebrate the recent victory in North Africa. To us a bell is just a bell to tell the time, to call folks to church or to mark a funeral or a wedding. But in England, once described as "the ringing Isle," bell-making and bell-ringing are among the most ancient and honoured of crafts. It is probably a surprise for most of us to learn that "there are 40,000 bell-ringers in the British Isles and that some 15,000 are skilled change ringers," or that "teams of change ringers are democratic enough to include duke, parson, blacksmith and labourer."

Yet bell-ringing would be nothing without bell-making, and it is in this

skilled craft that the English workmen won the reputation of leading the world. Bells in the Middle Ages were cast by monks in their abbeys or by travelling tinkers who were lucky enough to collect enough copper and tin to cast a bell for a church. Some of the bells heard in the recent broadcast were several hundred years old.

Four Times an Elephant

The great bells like Big Ben come from foundries at Loughborough, Birmingham, Whitechapel and other parts of England. Some of these bells are immensely heavy, Big Ben, cast at the foundry of Messrs Mears of Whitechapel, who have been making bells since 1570, weighs 13 tons 10 cwt. 15 lb.—just about four times the weight of a full-grown elephant. But he—big bells, unlike big ships, are always "he"—is not the heaviest. Great Paul, of St. Paul's Cathedral, weighs 16½ tons; the Bourdon bell, which is now in New York (and which is the biggest bell cast in England), weighs 18½ tons. Large as these may seem, they are dwarfs beside the giant bells of Russia. The great bell of Mos-

cow, which weighs 180 tons, is 19 feet high, and 60 feet round the rim. It was cracked before it was finished and now forms the dome of a chapel. The largest bell in use is also in Moscow and weighs 128 tons.

Famous bells usually have their own names, and we hear of Great Peter of York, Grandison of Exeter, and Great Tom of Oxford. The Wellington Carillon has 49 bells, which would seem an adequate enough number to the uninitiated. New York, always out to break records, ordered the world's biggest carillon from Britain, and a 72-bell carillon, weighing 102 tons, was shipped to Riverside Drive Church, New York.

The art of bell-making has changed very little. Bells are still made from an alloy of copper and tin, poured into a mould from a giant ladle. They still bear the bell-founders' trade signs, the little pattern of crosses and fleurs-de-lys and shields that delighted the tinker of 600 years ago.

In the recent broadcast from England the bells in certain churches and cathedrals could not be fully rung because the bell towers had been damaged by bombing. Instead the bells were chimed; that is to say, instead of the wheel being fully swung, it was swung only the shortest

(Continued on next page)

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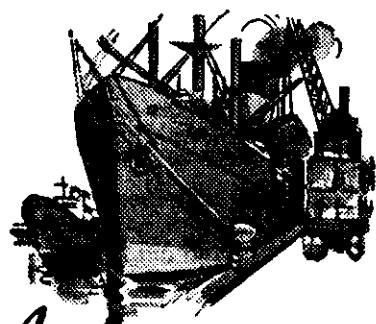
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