

TUNIS IS PLEASANT—If You Have Money

But Not The Place To Bring Up Your Daughter

ARABS, Maltese, French, Jews, Italians, English, Moroccans; cheap fruit and vegetables, but little water; the primus stove versus costly gas or electricity; constant wariness against thieves; smooth sandy beaches; the open market; the bathless apartments and houses; the absence of sky-scrapers; veiled women and the beggars; omnipresent Mohammedanism; the Bey's palace; flowering shrubs; the olive groves and the vineries; marble courtyards; merciless sun — and Carthage. There is a rapid picture of Tunis as it was before the bombers came. What has happened to it during the past few weeks it is impossible yet to say. But this is how it appeared to Mrs. Virginia Chadraba, a New Zealand woman who married in Tunis and lived there for six years, returning to New Zealand in 1939, just before Britain entered the war, with her Czech husband and their flaxen-haired five-year-old daughter.

War was already in the air and preparations were being made; the casually frequent riots, mainly religious in nature, were finished with, and feeling was strong and disturbed all along the coast; this was 1939, before the invasion of

Poland, before the invasion of Czechoslovakia. War was on the way and everyone knew it in Tunis where the French commanded, where the Jews sold in the shops, where the Italians and the Arabs sold in the markets, and the Maltese were the drivers of carriages.

"Tunis spreads as much as Auckland does and approaches it in size," Mrs. Chadraba told us. "It is divided fairly rigidly into national districts — the Medina which is the Arab quarter, the Hara which is the Jewish quarter, the European district, and a pocket in which the Maltese live. My husband worked as an electrician for the tramways which served suburbs four or five miles distant and had as well a system encircling the whole city, the old part as well as the new. But the city as a whole is a rambling, old, hand-worked place, the furthest possible from a modern manufacturing city."

"The curious thing is that the various nationalities stick fairly closely to the same occupations. The Arabs make car-

pets and cloths and shoes, practically all by hand; the Jews have most of the shops—you don't perhaps notice this until it comes to a Jewish holiday and you suddenly find that almost every shop is closed for the day; the French and the English and Dutch and a sprinkling of other Europeans have the professional and administrative work; the Italians are tailors, small farmers, market gardeners; the Maltese drive the carriages; and the Moroccans are the guardians. Some of each nationality, of course, will be found in professions."

"What are guardians? Policemen?"

The Arabs Are Nimble

"Not officially. They are employed by shopkeepers to stay on guard outside the shops all night long. No shop such as a jewel shop would ever be left unguarded. It would certainly be broken into. Believe me, the Arabs are nimble; they will have made big money during the German occupation and now they will be making big money again out of our men. They never miss a chance of making or

taking money; and they are on all sides at once."

In Tunis all the year round there are cheap vegetables, eggs at never more than a penny each, fish, poultry and rabbits, all kinds of fruits, and all kinds of flowers to be bought at the open markets. Fresh cow's milk could be bought by those peculiar English and other foreigners who demanded it.

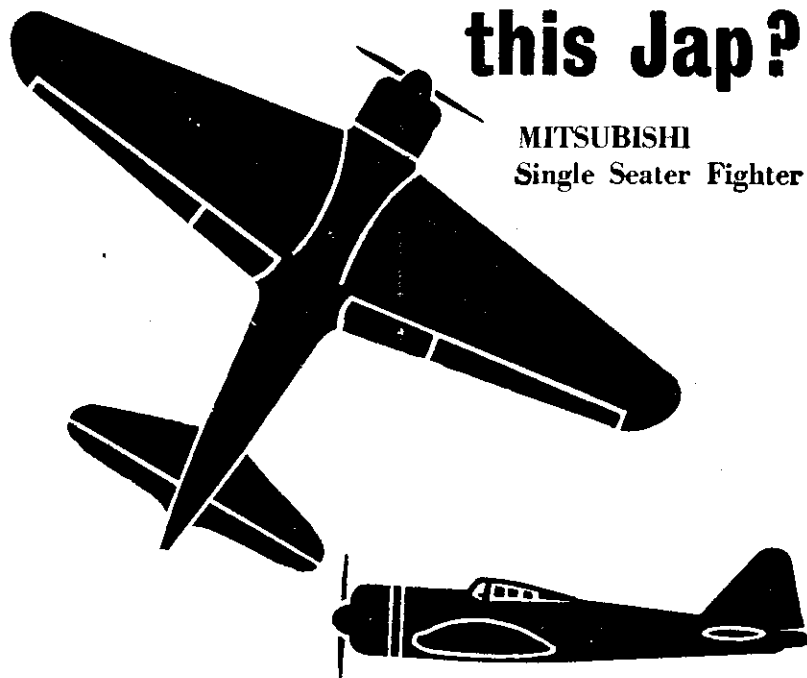
"My little girl was ill and I called in a Maltese doctor; 'What a pity,' he moaned, 'to give such a lovely baby cow's milk to drink.' The Plunket people would be interested and perhaps horrified to hear that only condensed milk was approved of. There was very little butter made locally and what there was was mostly bad when we bought it. So we used imported butter, Danish, French, Dutch and Russian."

"And how were the rents and where did you live?"

"Well, in the Arab quarter, where we lived for a long time, rents were low compared with Auckland rents—30/- a month for an apartment of two rooms and kitchenette and bathroom into which

(Continued on next page)

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