

"DID YOU HEAR THE NEWS?"

IT was a Monday morning, and the tram filled up pretty quickly with housewives and their baskets. They usually stay home to wash if the weather is "anything like." But to-day it wasn't. The rain had stopped, but it was still blustery and unpleasant, and there was no guarantee that it would not begin raining again at any moment. On other mornings when we go to town we sit and look at each other in dignified silence. An occasional smile at a child is the only gleam to indicate that we are all humans, all of one sex and mostly mothers, all with a thousand thoughts and habits and ideas in common.

Mrs. Yellowmackintosh broke the normal placidity. She leant across to the woman opposite, plump, satin-bloused. "Did you hear the news flash at 9.45 this morning?" she asked, with the air of a midwife about to deliver the baby.

"I never listen to the news," replied Mrs. Satinblouse. "I'm busy until I have to go out. It waits all right till my husband gets home at night. He tells me all the special bits while I do the darn-ing."

"Ah, but this was a special news flash," said Mrs. Yellowmackintosh. "Mussolini's resigned—gone."

She leant back again with a contented air. She had delivered her baby, launched her battleship, and could watch the effect in a more comfortable position. Little exclamations came like the popping of chestnuts from a fire.

"Well—"

"Who'd have thought it just now?"

"I didn't think he'd last much longer."

"Wish it was Hitler."

"That's all right. Hitler'll be the next to go. It won't be so long now."

"It's all very well to blame Hitler and Mussolini for the war," said Mrs. Satinblouse. "There's a lot more in it than that. There is something wrong with the way we live and have lived. It's the system needs changing. It's no good the war ending if we haven't learnt that. We'll have another war in 20 years unless we can arrange things differently and live together in peace."

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Fascism and imposed it on a nation weakened by war and frightened by social unrest.

"His thugs spread terror, his henchmen grabbed Italy's financial and economic power, and through the organised murder in 1924 of Giacomo Matteotti, the one dangerous leader of his opposition, boosted himself to a modern tyrant's throne."

"For the Italians' romantic love of their homeland and their nostalgia for past glories, he espoused the cult of Romanism. He fancied himself a new Julius Caesar, was courted by the world's big shots, loved to be called leonine and at the same time 'father of his people.' He helped Adolph Hitler to power, was mastered by his pupil. Trapped by his own illusions of grandeur, he led his people into war in an unholy alliance with Germany and Japan. By 1943 he had lost his Empire, and Allied bombs and bayonets threatened to chase him into the sea."

"Let's get this war over first," said Mrs. Yellowmackintosh. "I think this is the beginning of the end. Maybe in a year now we will have peace."

* * *

IN the corner a woman dressed in black gave a wry little smile. A husband? Two boys overseas? Would they come back if there was still a year to go? A year of air raids, of commando landings, of parachute troops, of submarine sinkings. A year of 12 months; 52 weeks of advances, reverses, landings, ships sinking; 365 nights when young pilots, gunners, observers might be shot down; and 365 days of daylight raids.

"Did you have any boys come back last week?" asked a small voice next to her. "Two of my boys came back, and very happy they were, too. They were none the worse, just toughened and brown. It doesn't seem so bad they're going off again now that we've had an eye-ful of them. One had never seen his baby—a fine little boy of three—and he was pleased with him, I can tell you."

"No," replied Mrs. Black. And then, "I'm glad yours got back safely..."

* * *

INVASION: Ten 11, 12 youngsters, scrambling, pushing on to the tram, full of life and spirits. Off to woodwork. This is good, a change from sums and writing and dictation. A tram ride, freedom, a chance to spend a penny or so on toffee bars — if that shop still has them. Mary said there were toffee bars there on Saturday morning. This was

Monday early. There should be some. Gee, look, there's Ronny. Gee, he can run! Down he goes, down by the Rigi. He'll race the tram round the long bend, and then there's a cut by the Gardens. He nearly raced us last week. Gee! Bert's not far behind, but he's not a patch on Ronny.

* * *

MRS. Yellowmackintosh leant forward and touched the arm of a young hopeful near her. Standard Six boys should hear the news.

"Did you hear the news, sonny? Mussolini has resigned—gone."

Sonny looked embarrassed at the adult intrusion into his own world, but after all, Mussolini was important, almost as important as Hitler. Gee, did you hear that? Musso gone. Heard that, George? Hitler's turn next.

"Whistle while you work
Mussolini made a shirt
Hitler wore it
Churchill tore it
Whistle while you work."

Look, look, there goes Ronny. He's raced us! Gee, he's a pert runner! There goes Bert. Finished your shelves? I'm going to start a model car. Teacher said I could to-day. . . . And next year I'm going to make a big model aeroplane. When my Dad comes back he'll show me just how. . . . And when I go to Tech. . . .

Chatter, chatter.

* * *

BUT it wasn't only the boys. Mrs.

Satinblouse was talking social change to her neighbour. Mrs. Black was hearing about the returned boys. A university student got in. Had she heard that Mussolini had resigned? No, she hadn't. This will change my essay, she thought. "The Origins of Fascism in Italy." The beginning and the end—not that we could yet see the end. But this is the rounding off of Mussolini's career, the end of personal ambition, of opportunism. If he had stuck to his Socialism? Would he have made a new Italy? Or was Fascism an inevitability beyond Mussolini's control?

"Here, race you to the corner, George. Hi, wait on, I'm coming. Let's get there before Ronny. Bet you Ronny's there first. You get out front and I'll get out back. Right. . . ."

* * *

"THEY'RE noisy kids. Good thing when they get out."

"Oh, I don't know, they're cheerful and my word, they're full of life."

"They are the ones that count for the future."

A bright-eyed youngster looked back from the door. His chin was up. He was alert for the jump off. He was life. He was energy. "What does the future matter to me?" he seemed to say. "It's the present that counts, and I am the present and the future."

Were those tears in the eyes of the woman in black over there? Perhaps she remembered that it was not so long since her boys ran off, like this—muddy, cheerful and irrepressible. Mussolini was gone, anyway, and perhaps before it was too late for these boys, Hitler would go, too.

Grow Your Own

TO encourage vegetable growing in the home gardens of Auckland and Wellington in the coming spring, a "Dig for Victory" campaign has been inaugurated, and talks by experts are now being given from Stations 1YA and 2YA, 1ZB and 2ZB at 7.0 p.m. each Thursday. Not every talk is actually delivered by its author, but the authors have been chosen to supply authoritative information on the problems of the vegetable gardener at the times when they are likely to present themselves. Ben Roberts, M.P., opened the campaign on July 15, and two experts (Dr. L. I. Grange and T. W. M. Ashby), have already supplied talks on soil classification and compost. Further talks will continue until early in December, some topical, some general, and November 11 will be "Question Night."

The talks scheduled for August are as follow:

August 5: G. A. Aggett, Vice-Regal gardener: "Garden Environs, Shade, Drainage, Shelter, etc.," and "The Adaptability of Soils to Various Vegetables."

August 12: I. D. Elliott (Dept. of Agriculture): "Fertilisers."

August 19: W. C. Hyde (Dept. of Agriculture): "Varieties and Quantities of Seed Required to Maintain Continuous Supply."

August 26: D. K. Pritchard (Dept. of Agriculture): "Methods of Sowing and Transplanting, Introducing Crop Rotation."

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