

VOICES FROM THE PAST

WHAT do we know about the people of the past? Very little, really. We know that Socrates is reputed to have been very ugly, that William II. had red hair, that Demosthenes practised speaking with pebbles in his mouth. We have enough portraits to guess what Queen Elizabeth looked like, and to wonder wherein lay the charm of Mary Stuart. But about the voices of most historical characters, we know almost nothing. Actors, orators, poets and statesmen have until comparatively recently been remembered only by



FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE
Her voice recalls a great work

(continued from previous page)

"Please, one of my rats got lost. May I have another?"

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BILL and his white rats became popular among children and not so popular among the parents of the neighbourhood. But it looked as though the neighbourhood could absorb large numbers of rats and as though Bill could cope with the demand. Mum insisted that rats must go in pairs. But even so it began to get the family down.

"Next time I'll give away the two big mothers," said Mum, "and I'll just keep the small one that is an odd one." Strange to say, even Bill agreed. The strain of rat disposal and cage-cleaning was telling on him too. Mrs. E. got Euphemia and Mrs. F. got Eurydice. Dad was relieved, too. Another week would have seen another clutch, and now he looked forward to temporary peace. When the only remaining ratlet disappeared no one even seemed to mind very much. But the real triumph in what Mum had done came about a week later. Mrs. E. was the first to ring.

"You know that white rat you gave to Don last week?" she said. "Well, it's just had *twelve* young ones! What do you think we can do with them?" Mum consoled, but not without an inner glow. It was not till Mrs. F. rang that she knew just what she had escaped.

"I told Ronny he was only to get one single rat last week and you gave him a mother, and now, what do you think? It has just had *fifteen* young! Whatever shall we do?"

No one in the house has suggested rats again, though things may be working up towards another kitten. Mrs. E. and Mrs. F. are still a little cold towards Mum, but no doubt time heals wounds as effectively as it disposes of surplus rats.

"And anyway," said Mum, "it just shows how good our diet was."

their writings and by the reports of others. It will not be so in the future: the camera and the recording-machine will attend to that. Coming generations will be able to hear as well as see people long since dead.

To a limited extent, of course, we can already do that. When Edison, in 1878, received his first patent for his phonograph, he is reported to have said, "It will henceforth be possible to preserve for posterity the voices as well as the words of our Washingtons, our Lincolns, and our Gladstones, and for them to be heard by generations yet unborn." Recently a discovery of peculiar interest was made at Edison's laboratory at Menlo Park. Carefully stowed away in an old dusty case were records of the voices of a large number of famous men and women made during their lifetimes. Some of them, such as Theodore Roosevelt, Disraeli, Florence Nightingale, W. E. Gladstone, and Edison himself were recorded on old-style wax cylinder records. They were discovered by Robert Vincent, now 39 years old, who as a boy 25 years ago learnt to record by doing odd jobs round the Edison laboratories.

This collection is the basis of the new ZB programme *Voices of Yesterday*. Each programme is built round anecdotes of some famous person and the climax of the broadcast is the actual voice of



GUGLIELMO MARCONI
Talks about wireless

the celebrity. You may hear Kenneth Landfrey, a trumpeter in the Light Brigade, sounding again in 1890 the charge as he sounded it at Balacava in 1864. You may hear the words of Florence Nightingale at 70, shrill, wavering, and full of emotion, as she says: "When I am no longer a memory—just a name—I hope my voice brings to history the great work of my life."

Other voices we may remember ourselves—Peary relating his experiences at the North Pole, Conan Doyle telling of the original creating of Sherlock Holmes, Marconi telling about wireless, Enrico Caruso singing in 1897, or Ellen Terry playing her part as Portia. These are just a few of the many famous people whose voices may now be heard again.

This programme is on the air from 12B at 6 p.m. on Mondays and it will be heard from other stations in due course.

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