

A HOUSE IN TWO DAYS

Prefabrication In The 'Fifties

IN February of this year, *The Listener* printed an article with photographs showing how a prefabricated house could be constructed in nine hours. And in August we reprinted an article from an American magazine, headed "Press a Button and Get a House." These portable dwellings that are springing up like mushrooms in America and New Zealand are the outcome of an emergency, and though an emergency of the particular kind and magnitude that has made them necessary at present has not been known before, yet the same solution has been found in the past for abnormal conditions.

There is in the Alexander Turnbull Library, in the pages of the *Wellington Independent* for August, 1853, an article headed "Portable Metallic Houses for Australia." It was reprinted from the *Edinburgh Courier*, and starts with a description of the discomfort of gold-seekers in Australia, who were being mulcted to the tune of £150 a year for small cottages, or £600 a year for five-roomed houses; or more often, they were living in tents with their wives and children, and some latecomers were even wandering homeless. We reprint a few passages from the article, not with the idea of advertising a Scotsman's invention to exasperated house-hunters of 1943, but to show how it anticipated very crudely, its modern equivalent:

"It is gratifying to turn from the contemplation of such hardships and discomforts to the invention—now in the hands of our enterprising townsman, Mr. Middlemas

—of portable zinc houses, which in a great measure are likely to meet the evil. In no other existing establishment of general out-fits has the idea ever been entertained—or at least it has never been carried into execution—of making provision for their emigrant upon his arrival in the colony. This invention, however, from the nature of the material and from the simplicity of erection and removal, is well adapted for that object, and is already in great demand.

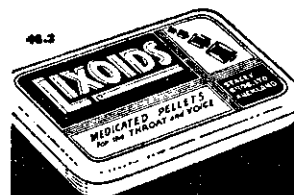
Taste and Elegance

"The emigrant who designs to enter upon business may select one capable of forming an elegant showroom or store, with a dwelling house attached. The dimensions of one we saw in construction were 21ft. long by 15ft. in breadth. The external design is neat, though when the ornaments are placed upon the roof its claim to taste and elegance will be more apparent. The house is formed of zinc plates, fixed on timber frames—each being three feet broad by eight feet in height. The different parts of the erection are connected in the interior by means of rods and screws; and being placed on sleepers, it is fixed by bolts to the ground, and is amply secure.

The interior is divided into three compartments, consisting of a shop or store in front, with space for an elegant plate glass window and two rooms behind to serve as a dwelling house . . . both being ventilated, well lighted and having certainly an air of comfort. . . .

"The facility of construction is one of the chief characteristics of the invention, while the gables being to the street, the saving of frontage, which is somewhat exorbitant in the colony, is considerable. Instead of losing time in seeking for premises for business or residence, the emigrant, by the employment of two men for a couple of days, is able to reconstruct the house and shop in any quarter that he may select. The whole does not exceed two tons in weight, and is easily packed in two boxes, the wood of which being grooved, forms the flooring of the portable premises in the colony."

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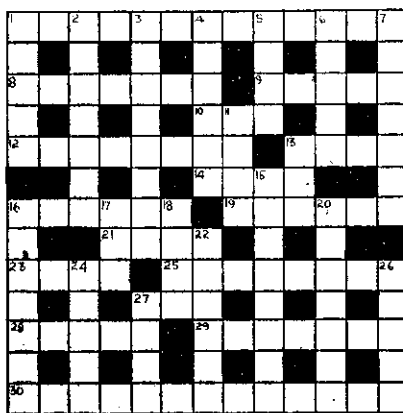
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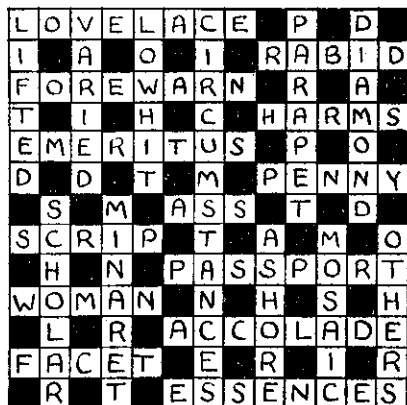
Clues Across

- Take it or leave it (7, 6).
- A new lease of life for tyres.
- "All flesh is —" (See Vol. 9, No. 217, P. 11).
- According to G.M. (see Vol. 9, No. 219, P. 7), you could give this in 32 different ways.
- Dave's gal is saved.
- "Motley's the only —."
- The god of Love turns his back—evidently he's peeved.
- With a crust, I am uncouth.
- Small part of itself.
- Race for a measure of land.
- Ron and I, show our mettle, as it were.
- Unguent.
- Pat is to the point here.
- Ablar in a way, but still a bit dim.
- He is followed by a giant who is upset.
- Defeated by the climate?

Clues Down

- With a slight adjustment, these instruments are made sharp.
- Last bet (anag.).
- Oat price (anag.).
- Slides, in a way.
- Colossal.
- I'm over age.
- Set real (anag.).
- Six down of deity.
- "Oh what a tangled — we weave, When first we practise to deceive." (Scott).
- A rotter's furnished with a beak.
- Colourful 27 down seen in the sky.
- Found in evidence on the beach in summer.
- Craw.
- You do this to make mint sauce (3, 4).
- This or that, as Flanagan might say.
- Letter found in some gaols.
- Attach to the end (3, 2).
- See 16 down.

(Answer to No. 161)



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