

THIS IS SWEDEN

WHEN Trevor Williams left the Talks Division of the NZBS to go overseas, he travelled with a tape-recorder, determined to record some of the life and sounds of the countries he should see on his travels. *Power under the Sea*, a series of three programmes recorded in Sweden on the transmission of electric-power by submarine cable, was broadcast about a year ago, and will be remembered by listeners. Now he has recorded another series of illustrated talks on Sweden and this new series is to start from 2YA and 4YA on Monday, February 11.

Mr. Williams concentrated on the daily life of Sweden and of Stockholm, the capital. He adds to the details of living and the sounds that accompany Swedish life, an emphasis on the order and design behind it. He found that modern Sweden is organised and planned to an almost alarming extent. When the Social Democrats in 1932 produced a plan to combat unemployment, they began the state enterprises which, with various co-operative societies, now manage many of the nation's resources. Today, Sweden is possibly more socialised than any other non-Communist country. Taxes are very high and Mr. Williams heard many complaints from workers who would like to spend more money themselves. But in return for this compulsory saving, the Swedish worker gets almost free medical care in magnificent hospitals, his wife has free maternity care, and his child receives an allowance from birth, free schooling, text-books, hot mid-day meals, and holiday travel. The able university student can get a loan, and so can young couples who wish to furnish a home. Old people have pensions and State flats—all rents are State-controlled and there are rebates for children. Once there were special council houses for poor people with large families, but this discrimination between the income groups seemed undemocratic, and no one wanted to be thought too poor to support himself.

This respect for individual feelings comes into family life, where the old automatically live in flats of their own, rather than with their children, and the young commonly find their own living quarters as soon as they start work.

Mr. Williams found some housing shortage still, and saw the plans of new suburbs, and in general the houses themselves, were very well designed. Although most people would like houses of their own, shortage of labour and materials has forced a concentration on flats in the towns. These flats are rarely of more than four or five rooms, as are most of the houses. Consequently, Swedish architects and industrial designers have devised furniture which needs a minimum of space and upkeep. For instance, Trevor Williams admired the efficient and attractive ovenware which, like many other articles, has a second function, in this case as table-ware. Here use, as well as the materials used, were considered by the artist-designers in their production of beautiful and simple articles. Because winters in Sweden are often a long series of cold grey and white days, furnishings need to be light and



N.P.S. photograph

TREVOR WILLIAMS

gay. The pale Swedish timbers are left their natural colours, and textiles and rugs, tableware and ornaments are usually most decorative as well as thoroughly practical.

The artist-designer and artist-craftsman play an important part in Swedish industry, helping to produce articles that are welcomed all over the world for the excellence of their design. Industries in Sweden tend to be small and localised, and all are powered by the plentiful hydro-electricity. The exceptions—in size—are the vast timber and paper mills, and the steel foundries. In the country the small cottage industries have been well organised; trained designers help to produce the woven and carved handicrafts of the country, and their sale is organised through co-operative organisations. Here are made dolls and carved ornaments, peasant embroideries, the intricate straw decorations which are widely used at festivals, and lovely woven materials.

Trevor Williams was most impressed by the high standing of the arts in Sweden. The theatre is popular and often sponsored by the local councils; Swedish films are marked by excellent acting and beautiful photography; and a prominent feature of many public buildings, including schools, is a group of statuary used as a focal point of the design. The influence of the artist is found in the general high level of Swedish taste. This is one of the impressive aspects of Sweden—that in the midst of great natural beauty men have built so well.

Swedish food delighted Mr. Williams, especially the *smorgasbord*, although shortages have led to laws curtailing the number of dishes served in restaurants. Liquor sales too are very strictly controlled, with rationing for the very potent local spirits. But these restrictions have not spoiled the traditional Swedish hospitality. Night life, even in the cities, is very limited, and most of the entertaining is in the home. Most Swedish people speak excellent English, and they welcomed Mr. Williams, guiding him with great good humour through the intricacies of their social courtesy. The formality of Swedish social gatherings is apt to bewilder a newcomer, but through all the rules he found a genuine warmth and friendliness. Everywhere he went, he was welcomed as a friend and intro-

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LEFT, top: Maypole dancing on the midsummer holiday celebrated almost all over central and southern Sweden
BELOW: Examples of graceful pottery by Swedish artist-designers

