

COFFEE BAR

by Ruth Alley

I ONCE worked in a coffee bar. It was in the King's Road, Chelsea. The décor could have been a group of Athenian prefabs., or the rough sketches for the sets of *Troilus and Cressida*—only it wasn't quite what the producer had in mind. There were several large palm trees with ferocious lizards having trouble in the lower branches. The lighting consisted of candles in Chianti bottles and a few Chinese lanterns hung at inconvenient angles.

The customers included art students who were determined to look like art students. They carried round copies of *The Outsider* as a sort of badge of some Angry Young Men's Club to which they all subscribed. They were all very poor—but their poverty bore no relation to the bundle of old coats and rags I once saw huddled against the area railings, grateful for the smell of good hot food, knowing that the taste of it would be beyond him. There would be mention of "last year when we were in Spain . . ." their shoes were sound, and their clothing warm. They would demand to know the cheapest thing on the menu—as if they hadn't had it yesterday and the day before.

"Spaghetti Bolognese—large 3/6, small 2/6."

"But yesterday we were allowed to have half a small portion with a lot of sauce for a shilling, and two portions of French bread with butter for ninepence!"

"That was yesterday."

Then there were the debts. and their escorts. Three Rosemarys and three Jeremys.

"Jeremy, I think this is awfully amusing. . . Do you serve English tea?"

"No, only Russian."

No self-respecting coffee bar ever serves tea with milk. You make a brew out of two tea leaves and plenty of hot water, garnish it with lemon

and serve it in a long glass. International crises never affect it. It would always be Russian tea, nothing would galvanise it into Buda-Pesth Fizz.

"Jeremy, we must have some of that . . . or have you any fruit cake?"

"Only the gâteau—2/6."

Cake is fruit cake, sultana cake, plum cake. But "gâteau" is an exhausted, anaemic imitation of those luscious cream sponges—chocolate, coffee, lemon—that any decent New Zealand woman could make in her sleep. It is very hard to assess the age of a coffee-bar gâteau. They are often quite elderly.

There was a sad, dirty girl who used to sit brooding in a corner. She wore the traditional duffle coat, black sweater, tight blue grubby jeans.

"What would you like?"

She pushed her dingy hair away from her "doe" eyes.

"What have you got that is quite, quite simple?"

"Bacon and eggs—3/6," I said briskly.

"It would have to be very, very simple."

"That's as simple as you'll get, I'm afraid. . ."

She drifted out.

There was nothing simple about the yelling, jostling mob of Teddy boys and girls.



"Candles in Chianti bottles and a few Chinese lanterns"



"Four whites, two chocolates, five hamburgers and a piece of that cake, miss."

"Six whites, two small blacks, four chocolates, and a glass of cold milk."

They would all charge past the counter, find the darkest corner of the room, blow out the candles, pull the cat's tail, and empty the sugar bowl on the floor. Each coffee bar had its own method of dealing with Teddy boys. Some banned them, but you really need a "bouncer" if you are going to do that, and the English don't run to "bouncers." We served them, got the money from them as soon as they were served, and waited until they started a good brawl amongst themselves. Then it was my

job to dial 999. In five minutes the place was full of policemen. For a while it would be anybody's fight. Shrieks, yells, cracked shins. Once the ring-leaders were thrown out, it would all simmer down again. The police would have a cup of coffee ("Real milk, ducks!") and the staff would compare the fight with last Saturday's. Sometimes a Teddy boy is charged and taken to court. The fine might be £10. You hear plenty of theories about Teddy boys, but no answers.

After the pubs closed at 10.0 p.m. there would be the usual rush of "Large black coffee, please, miss." Then at about 11.0 p.m. the Friends of the Coffee Bar would come in. I don't know who they were. They were not my friends. Every coffee bar has its own little collection of "Friends." They may come in several times a day. They know all the staff and they have special privileges, such as a cup of tea with real milk and white sugar, not the Demerara which is always served in a coffee bar. We had a small bar at the end of the counter, fitted with half a dozen high stools, and there the "Friends" would settle down to argue and philosophise until we closed. I had my own names for them. There was the Toast of Motspur Park, a reactionary old Tory, by gad, he'd have used the "gunboat" at Suez and no mistake. He was "something in the City," but used to abandon the bowler and the brief case at night for something more "Bohemian." Then there was the "Poor Man's Jack Hawkins." They said he'd been coming in week in and week out, but he had always "just got back from Rangoon." "Moth and Peaseblossom" used to saunter in together. Two immaculate young men, assistants in a very well-known London hairdressing saloon. Always together, always alone. Then there was Gloria. She used to wear a superbly cut black dinner gown. Over it she always wore a blue and white striped butcher's apron.

It's quite a place, a coffee bar. Quite a place.

(Solution to No. 840)

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S	E	T	T	L	E	T	R	N	
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Clues Across

1. Draws back to find the lawn (5).
4. He may have been bonnie, but he makes the cleaner tell an untruth (7).
8. A slight hitch which nevertheless yields most per cent (11).
9. You might find him in the cathedral tower, but probably not during the service (4).
10. These ran and got all mixed up, but the result is definitely encouraging (8).
12. As a whole, rather distant, but when broken up, piscine (6).
14. It is frequently weighed, but this doesn't reveal its weight! (6).

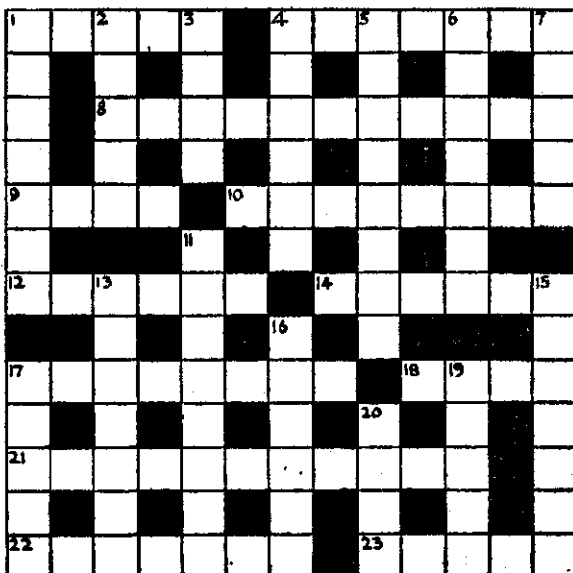
"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

17. An arrangement of 18 across and 20 down resulting in bird-noises (8).
18. "Fame is the — that the clear spirit doth raise" (Milton) (4).
21. With the piano, Mum and Ned raise a scene of confusion and din (11).
22. Tide's in! (anag.) (7).
23. So she waters the garden (5).
16. If Ron's Par wears these, his Ma probably wears the trousers (6).
17. This island is in the Tropic of Capricorn, although it's in the Northern Hemisphere (5).
19. Useful footwear for a motorist? (5).
20. "And passing — with forty pounds a year" (Goldsmith) (4).

Clues Down

1. Such a singer could provide us with 16 down and nothing more (7).
2. Turncoats at a famous race-meeting (5).
3. He may come from Aden, but his native land is farther North (4).
4. Care is needed to produce it, and care is taken to avoid it! (6).
5. Neat girl undergoing a change (8).
6. The lamb goes for a walk (7).
7. Slackens (5).
11. Re-unites (anag.) (8).
13. Pretended feeding? (7).
15. Rose-red arrangement in church (7).

No. 841 (Constructed by R.W.H.)



What is Truth?

IS the world supported by an elephant that is in turn supported by a tortoise? Some human beings once believed that it was, and if we take the word "world" to mean the universe, such a statement of belief would be difficult to refute, though one might ponder on the size of tortoise required, and what it was that supported him.

The methods we possess to determine the truth or falsity of statements are considered by Professor G. E. Hughes and J. M. Hinton in an introduction to *In Search of Truth*, a series of talks in which the question of the attainment of absolute truth is discussed by various speakers.

"Perhaps we might begin by saying what sort of thing we think it is, that can correctly be said to be true or false," Professor Hughes says in opening the discussion. "I think we both agree that it is statements, or as some people prefer to say, propositions, that are true or false. Not facts; a statement is true if it corresponds to the facts . . . but the facts themselves are neither true nor false, they just are."

The truths of science, history and poetry, are considered in the other talks of this series; science by Professor H. G. Forder, history by Dr. Francis West, and poetry by James K. Baxter. *In Search of Truth* begins from 2YC at 8.0 p.m., Monday, March 23, and later from other YC stations.

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 22, 1957.