# It's So Nice Not Knowing You

ACK where we come from the didn't pass quickly enough already). I Good Neighbour policy is in full swing. Teapots remain night and day at action stations on the stove on the inside chance that somebody will drop in. On weekdays there's usually a spare pram with somebody's baby in it being minded on the lawn, and on weekend mornings gardens remain undug and hens unfed while the homebrew circulates with centrifugal force. And you're always asked to parties given by your immediate neighbours, if only (as cynics assert) so that you won't be in a position later on to complain about the noise.

It's different here. When we first came I used to get up early each morning and clean the house and bake a batch of scones with the sinking feeling that somebody would Call. Nobody ever did. At first I was inclined to be a little truculent about it all. What could be wrong with the Adamses? (Such a nice couple, and all those well-brought-upwell, fine, healthy children.) Not my personal appearance surely, with me fully dressed and out of my slippers at ten o'clock in the morning? Not the children, their normal exuberance still tamed by the novelty of their surroundings, and who, thanks to my early start, went round with shining morning faces till quite late in the afternoon? Then the simple truth dawned on me that this was simply a district where propinquity was not recognised as an open sesame to intimacy. I would probably never get to know my neighbours.

ONCE I accepted this I was conscious of a delicious sense of freedom. I enjoyed being able to walk to the telephone box and back without having to stop to pass the time of day (as if it no longer bothered about getting an early start in the morning. After all, nobody was likely to surprise me with a sinkful of dishes, since my own friends appeared only after due warning and many hours of wrestling with the time-table. It would take a qualified statistician to compute how many hours one saves in a year by cleaning the house only when one expects visitors. At any rate, I found myself with plenty of time for sitting idly in the sun supervising the children's mud-pies, for reading light novels, pottering in the garden.

And for studying my neighbours, For you mustn't think I'd stopped being interested in neighbours as such. Other people are, of course, always quite fascinating. But previously, having learnt all there was to know about my neighbours in the first few meetings, having sucked the juice out of the orange, I was compelled to sit like Galsworthy's White Monkey with the rind in my hand, too polite to throw it away. Now, thanks to what the land agent had described as our elevated position I was able to have without holding, to receive without giving. I had a passport to travel incognito, incommunicado, through the strange byways of another's habitat.

OF course, it can't last, I tell myself. as I watch with the avid eve of the playgoer some little domestic drama being enacted in the Jones's garden below. Sometimes I have a sneaking feeling that I should be keeping my eyes on my own work, but after all I decide, as I throw away the potato I've been peeling for the last five minutes, it isn't as if I owed them any loyalty -after all, I don't even know the woman!

Not that I have any actual objection to knowing them. The Joneses are, I

can state from secondhand knowledge, very nice people. They seldom raise their voices to one another and when they do it's only to say something like "Dinner's ready, dear!" She's a much better housekeeper than I am, and I don't mind admitting it since I shall not be called upon to compete. And their garden is streets ahead of ours, and so it ought to be, considering the amount of time they spend in it under our supervision.

"Old Tom's carrots are well up." I call from kitchen vantagepoint to my husband, who has his feet up in the living-room (we can afford to be disrespectful-after all, it isn't as if we knew the people),

them, and he's planted out a whole long row of cabbages. I think cabbages."

My husband only grunts. And later on when he's doing his stint at the sink he's quite likely to comment on the fact that all the next-door beds are made and Mrs. Jones is doing the flowers. "Very artistic," he will say admiringly. And he does envy Jones the little frames his wife hangs his socks on. "Guess he never has to wear his socks with the heel under the instep."

YES, the Joneses live a much more civilised life than we do, and we often feel a bit wistful about the fact

7. North Island town swallows a pier.

10. A mixed drink in the midst of work

13. Be in this and you're in harmony.

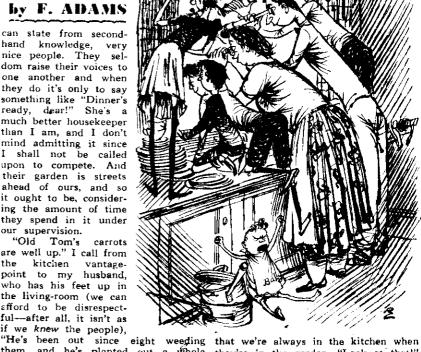
15. When open it's not for anyone in

causes a disturbance.

14. Weaken with devil tune.

particular.

16. Ill humour.



they're in the garden. "Look at that!" says my husband bitterly of a Sunday afternoon, when we're still doing the dishes and Mr. Jones is dozing in one of those couth deck-chairs with a footrest and a paper over his face. (Truth or the Sports Edition? Hard to tell at this distance. We get the glasses.)

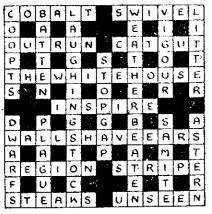
"Well," I say tartly, "they've only got one child and he's at boarding school.

My husband, who thinks boardingschools brutal (and expensive) bends meekly to the sink. Later on, when I'm out in the kitchen again putting on the kettle I shall see Mrs. Jones coming out to join her husband in a little black basic with a single strand of pearls and think virtuously of the number of woman-hours I must save a year by scarcely ever changing out of my dirndl.

IKE us, the Joneses have a fair number of weekend visitors, especially in the summer. There are also one or two round-the-year standbys whom I have difficulty in passing unsaluted in the street because their faces are so familiar There's Mrs. Jones's aunt (or it might be his aunt, they both call her Auntie), who drives a very dashing A40 very dashingly and reads Vogue and the New Yorker. And several nice young people with that sporting unmarried look, whose voices are so im-peccably low-pitched that their conversation (till my lip reading improves) must be classed as unrewarding. But I must say the Joneses treat their guests rather better than we do. Out rolls the tea-wagon over the smooth sward (Tom mows that lawn at least once a week and sometimes oftener) and the hand-painted shower is whisked aside to reveal the silver tea service and the Spode cups and saucers. I always try to keep our guests on the other side of the living-room. Otherwise they're likely to have their noses glued to the window-pane and be exclaiming "Three kinds of cake!" admiringly while I prod them in the back with my tin tray and offer them a choice between (continued on next page)

## "THE LISTENER"

(Solution to No. 577)



### - Clues Across

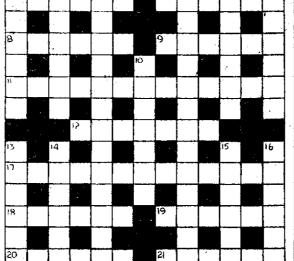
- 1. Confused detire to live.
- 4. Perception and sharpness of wit.
- 8. Parent sheep has nothing for a South American plain.
- 9. Parent helps to catch.
- 11. Tremendous Eva (anag.).
- 12. Appetite to brook.
- \_17. Mate. with large sea-going vessel. being constantly together.

### CROSSWORD

- 18. Obtained from wood-sorrel, beginning with a ruminant, and containing coal.
- 19. Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney and Hastings were the original Ports. No. 578 (Constructed by T.W.C.)
- 20. The Sentimental Bloke's girl was no deer.
- 21. Oblige to live within prescribed limits.

#### Clues Down

- 1. Tear discerned in this cutter.
- 2. Five in shore heard at confession.
- 3. Conclusive, or unreserved, using inverted atoms.
- 5. Second in cones rearranged for patronising manner.
- 6. No, Roma! It's a brownish red.



N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 4, 1952.