

Afterthoughts on Food

by "SUNDOWNER"

I DON'T often get further in the *Journal of Agriculture* than the beginning of the women's section, but cookery and gardening were so cunningly mixed in the January issue that I was into meals for seasonal workers before I pulled myself up. It was a brief look forward that carried me a long way

back. The cooking and managing marathon of my youth was feeding threshing-mill gangs for one, two, three or four weeks according to the weather, and I can hardly keep myself believing still that it actually happened as it did. My own part was only transport and distribution, plus a boy's greedy share in consumption; but when I think what my mother and sisters went through, and the mothers and sisters of all my contemporaries, I don't know what shames me most—the task of itself, or the cheerfulness with which it was done. Families in those days were seldom less than half a dozen—in my own case it was a baker's dozen. The mill-hands were another dozen, the stacks from a mile to three miles away, and the access nothing that would today be called a road. But all these people were fed five times a day, three times on hot meals, and at the morning and afternoon breaks on home-baked bread, fresh-made scones, and home-made plain, but appetising, cake. Conditions, of course, fluctuated from farm to farm, and they could be rough; but they were not rough in general, and if they were it was the roughness the farmers themselves endured in their own homes. Supplies went sometimes on a sledge, sometimes in a basket held on the bare back of a horse, but they usually arrived hot, with plates, pannikins, knives, spoons and forks, and I can't remember many accidents on the way or unpremeditated mixtures. One fact I do remember is a threshing season that rain stretched out to six weeks—a calamity and a trial for everybody, since payment (with one exception) was by the hour worked, and the rate, I think, about a shilling.

I have seen quartermasters feeding armies, chefs catering for hotel guests, and stewards organising the eating on ships—all with humiliating efficiency. But in those cases there is a system to fall back on that is continuous and the development of very many years. The farmers' wives I am thinking about had to improvise, to spring into action at short notice, to count the cost, to let nobody but themselves go hungry or wait, and forget about rewards and fairies. Even when we allow for big families—a mother and perhaps two or three half-grown daughters—it was efficiency at a level that no one today would ever think of demanding or have any chance of getting.

WHEN people tell me of things they said and did at three, four, or five, I decide that they are consciously or unconsciously deceiving themselves. For most of us those early years are a blank, or if not a blank a thick mist in which, though we may see something, we see nothing clearly and accurately. I would not dare to repeat some of the things I think happened to me during my first

five years unless all my elders and contemporaries were dead. But here are some remarks made to me, or to others in my presence, by a four-year-old girl during the last three weeks:

"Go away, Grand-dad. We are talking about God and the world and that."

* * *

"Drink up your milk."

"I am waiting for the cream to rise."

* * *

"Why don't you say 'Excuse me'?"

"Why should I?"

"You were rude."

"No, I wasn't."

"Will I tell you what you did?"

"Yes, tell me."

"You rattled your tummy."

* * *

"I am unhappy. Why don't you do something about it?"

* * *

"What are you screaming about?"

"I was afraid of Tip."

"A big girl like you! You know Tip won't hurt you."

"I knew he was hungry. I thought he might eat my leg."

* * *

"Well, have you finished your theological discussions?"

"What does that mean?"

"Your talks about God."

"God doesn't interest me today."

* * *

FOR nearly 20 minutes a speckled owl has been sitting on a post a few yards away from my window wondering whether to go to bed—it is 9.30 a.m. and bright sunlight—or add another course to his breakfast. Through my binoculars he looks half asleep, but he turns his head warily at intervals, and I don't think the

FEBRUARY 10 sparrows who are watching him will take any real risks with him. They seem however to be taking what would be a risk at night. At first only two seemed to be aware of him. Now there are five ranged on the wire about ten feet away from his post, chattering and edging a little closer, but not flying over or round him as I once saw native birds flying round a morepork. This, I think, is the German owl, which sees better by day than the morepork, and probably does some of its hunting by day. I don't remember having heard a morepork in pine trees, but I hear this introduced bird nearly every night, and now and again in late morning or early afternoon. I wish the backbirds would gather to greet him, but they are too busy eating our apples and tomatoes, on which they started this year before the first colour appeared.

I HAD this note today from a doctor who digs into history:

I understand that you find it difficult to teach Elsie the meaning of "Whoa!" I suppose there are always rare teachers of cows and also cows of rare unteachableness. Anyway, things were not always as they are

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 29, 1952.



TRADE ENQUIRIES:

AUCKLAND, N.Z.: J. R. Hallam Ltd., P.O. Box 1988.

My Shoe-shop says—

TRU-WITE

is Best!

It's concentrated! High density economical covering power and brilliant whiteness imparts freshness from the shop newness to months-old shoes. Won't crack! Won't rub off! Formulated by a Leather Chemist! Acclaimed by Footwear Manufacturers!



SOLD BY
GROCERS,
SHOE STORES

HILTON'S **TRU-WITE**

THE PERFECT CLEANER FOR WHITE LEATHER AND CANVAS

Factory Representative: R. E. STRACHAN LTD., Auckland.