

# LIFE BEGAN AT TWENTY-FIVE

**S**UPPOSING you went to bed at the age of fifteen and didn't get up—couldn't get up—to face the outside world again for ten years, so that you didn't grow up in the world but arrived in it already adult. What would that world be like? A series of unusual broadcasts which will start from 3YC next week gives a lively picture—a picture with all the vividness of a first impression of the world as it appeared to a young Christchurch man after just such an experience as that.

*The World Regained* isn't the story of a sick man, even though Dennis McEldowney begins it in a sick bed, to give the contrast which makes it complete. A person bedridden is in fact the centre of his world, he says. There he is in bed, fixed, and stretching from him is his world. It's a small world if he's at home—floor, ceiling, and walls, a door, perhaps a window and (if he's lucky) a view. Through the door the world comes to him and goes from him. What's happening in the view is no part of his physical world if he can't pass through the window to join in.

When he did pass through Mr. McEldowney found the world didn't open to him—it had to be conquered. Some of the early conquests he describes with much humour. One of the first was having a bath in a bath, which, like so many other activities he had slowly, painstakingly to learn from the beginning. But if having a bath was difficult, how much more difficult was running a bath.

"Running a bath is a typical example of the problems the human brain must learn to cope with, but, of course, it's a fairly mild one. It's no very splendid feat to run a bath after all. You never realise the capacity of the human mind for truly intricate remembering and reasoning until you first begin to make a pot of tea . . ."

And from there Mr. McEldowney goes on to "that worldly horror, the formal afternoon tea." But "It isn't all struggle. There are sudden, unexpected delights—like a hole in your sock, when, for years, you haven't worn a sock enough, with friction enough, to wear it through, and there's strolling around getting to know the neighbourhood, plucking leaves and grasses and watching their growth, leaning on fences talking to their owners, going out to post your own letters. . ."

Or take his first impressions—first adult impressions—of the cinema, finding that the picture got in the way of seeing the story. "I was too aware (he says) of seeing not events but a series of pictures of events. . . I found I wasn't now living in what I was seeing as once I'd done, but watching it detached. . . I was finding a difficulty in being deceived that surprised me." After that listeners will get some surprises from Mr. McEldowney's reactions to plays. He comments, too, on some of the things he heard and saw when he went to his first National Orchestra concert; and there is an amusing impression of the Writers' Conference. But what he can't give, and would like to hear from someone else, is a first impression of radio.

"The most important things are people," Mr. McEldowney says in his fourth and last talk. "And when the

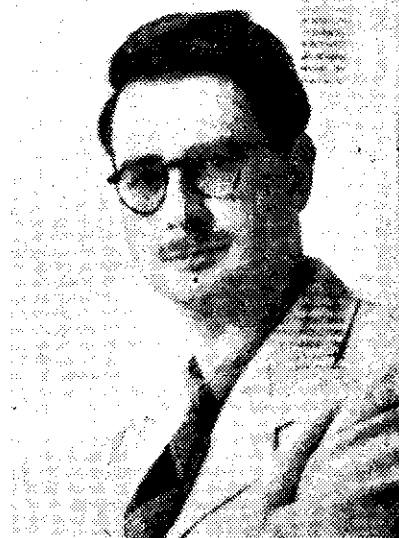
hermit returns to the world, though he sees objects and places from baths to ballet, it's people who control and pervade them all, and people who control and pervade his experience of the world."

There are the people of the crowd out on the streets for some big occasion, the ones he sees on a normal day, hurrying along the pavements with grim and private faces, or packed into a big restaurant "bequeathing to their thousands of digestions whole barrow-loads of beef and potato and creamed carrot and strawberry ices, and covering the agony with talk." In more private places the mass begins to dissolve, talk begins and a new stage in the knowing of people. There's lion-hunting (do you suppose Mr. McEldowney was disillusioned or not?), some shopping, and through his accounts of each new experience run the comments on people and the world of a young man who is no less contemplative because he is no longer an invalid—"in these days . . .

one of the few remaining exponents of the contemplative life."

Dennis McEldowney was born in 1926 with "blue baby" trouble. He went to school intermittently till he was 12, then did correspondence lessons for a time, but by the time he was 15 he was completely bedridden. From the age of about seven he made a hobby of writing, though because of lack of energy his output was never very great. He had most success with letters to editors. At one time he was radio critic for a church paper. When he was 24 he had an operation at Green Lane Hospital, Auckland, to give his lungs an alternative supply of blood through another artery. At the time he was the oldest patient to have this operation in New Zealand. He is now, he says, "gradually achieving a normal life."

*The World Regained* will start from 3YC on Tuesday, May 20, at 7.45 p.m., and will continue for the three following Tuesdays. Later these talks will be broadcast from other National stations.



**DENNIS McELDOWNEY**  
No longer an exponent of the contemplative life

## The Truth About Spiders

**ACCORDING** to Dr. Muffet—father of the hapless Miss Muffet—there is no man, nor any creature, that can compare with a spider, with her skin so soft, smooth, polished and neat, and her fingers long, slender, round, of exact feeling. Many fascinating and some repellent facts about the creature are revealed in *Spiders*, a programme written and produced for the BBC by Nesta Pain—one of the BBC entries for last year's Italia Prize international radio contest. It is to be heard from 3YC at 7.30 p.m. on Saturday, May 24.

In his affairs of the heart, the male spider has to deal with many almost insuperable difficulties, as the approach of a tiny moving body suggests to the female spider dinner rather than an amorous diversion. The methods he adopts to avoid a premature end to his wooing are endless in their variety, ranging from a romantic dance of love to the more practical but equally effective gift of a silken-bound insect. Many listeners will find the description of the mating habits of the spider the most interesting part of this programme, but they will hear also about the ways spiders hunt for food—on foot, by ambush or by ensnaring in webs—and how they solve their family problems and dispose of their enemies.

Dr. W. S. Bristowe, who wrote *The Comity of Spiders*, gave advice on spiders, and the music, specially written by Antony Hopkins, describes an unwary insect blundering into a web and the spider's final attack on her prey, the signal given by the male to the female as he approaches her web, and the dance of love.

### Social Misfits

Nesta Pain has become best known to listeners recently through her programmes on the brain and mind. Another of these, *The Misfit*, is to have its first New Zealand broadcast next week, from 4YC at 9.30 p.m. on Friday, May 23, and from 4YA at 8.5 p.m. on Sunday, May 25. The misfit—the psychopath—Mrs. Pain points out, is out of tune with his race and his age, but he isn't mad. Is there a physical cause

for his condition? Is it mainly inherited? Mrs. Pain discusses these points and the forms the condition takes—from the callous murderer to the man who is a nuisance to his family because he can't keep a job. The psychopath is a problem to medicine because there is, as yet, no effective treatment for him; to the law because he falls into no recognised category (he's not insane, yet a prison sentence teaches him nothing); to society, since he may commit one crime after another simply because he hasn't the means to make sound moral judgments.

"No satisfactory way has yet been devised of dealing with them," Nesta Pain wrote in her *Radio Times* introduction to the feature, "but the first essential is to build up some understanding of this condition and its cause." Scientific advice for *The Misfit* was given by Professor Alexander Kennedy.

The first essential in preparing a scientific programme is intensive reading in a general way, so as to work out a tentative scheme for discussion with scientific advisers, Mrs. Pain said recently, discussing her methods of work.



**TRAPDOOR SPIDER and eggs**

The advisers may suggest modifications, they will advise on sources and sometimes give original case material. The next few weeks are spent reading and collecting material. This must give a clear, comprehensive picture and be suitable for radio. A draft script is prepared for the scientific advisers and later discussed with them in detail. The amended script is also generally sent to the advisers for final vetting, and the programme is rehearsed for probably two days before at last it goes on the air.

### New Zealand Programmes

Listeners with an interest in nature and science will also be well provided for in two new monthly features to be heard on link from YA and YZ stations starting this month. The first of these, *The World of Nature*, will be heard on the third Tuesday each month at 9.15 p.m., starting on May 20. Reg Williams, whose recent *Spotlights on Nature* was a popular series, will be heard regularly in the new feature. His first subject is "Native Frogs of New Zealand," and other talks already planned include "Beautiful Poisoners" (the Portuguese Man of War) and "The Fantastic Seahorse."

*Science Commentary* is the title of the second feature, to be heard on the fourth Tuesday at 9.15 p.m., starting on May 27. This will introduce each month a different speaker, who will discuss some development in his own field. The first will be Professor F. J. Llewellyn, Professor of Chemistry at Auckland University College. Professor Llewellyn will talk about some of the difficulties the chemist faces in dealing with such concepts as quantum theory and wave mechanics.

Science will be the theme also in other talks to be heard from various stations later in the year. One series will be about problems of high-speed flight, another about the agricultural sciences, a third—by Professor L. W. McCaskill—will discuss rural sociology in New Zealand. Listeners will also hear about the sciences that have developed in the present century and something of what science has done to help us in our everyday life. Details of these talks will appear in *The Listener* when broadcasting dates have been arranged.