

IMPRESSIONS OF THE FAR EAST

—a talk given from 2YA recently by Mr. Will Lawson, the much-travelled New Zealand poet and writer, who, during the past few years, has been resident in Sydney. At the present time he is touring New Zealand on holiday, and is delivering from the YA stations a series of talks on his travels.

TO the people of New Zealand and Australia the term, "The Far East," is a misnomer, for these picturesque and exceedingly busy places are closer to us than any other distinct world centre. What is known as the Far East is, in fact, more likely to materially influence the destinies of New Zealand and Australia than any other portion of the globe.

I do not intend, however, to discuss these matters to-night. It is of the picturesque, human, social and domestic side of the East that I will speak, endeavouring to convey to you the impressions received in a four months' visit to the Philippines and Hong-Kong.

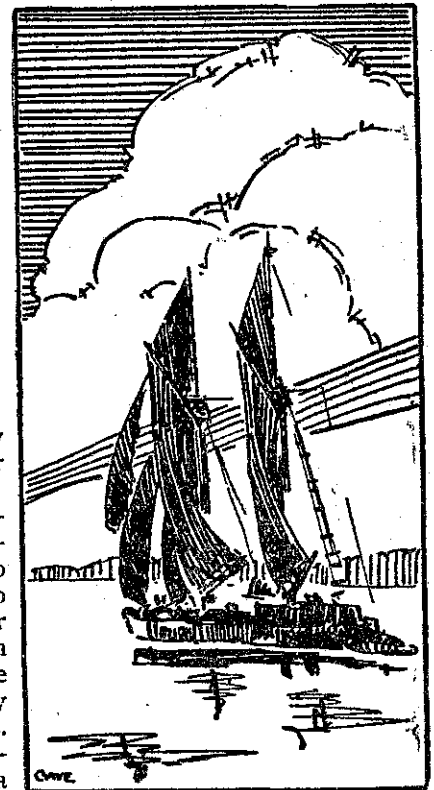
The New Zealander who has not yet visited Australia, has the added interest of the cities of Sydney and Brisbane, and the north Queensland ports of Townsville and Cairns, which are called at *en route*, and opportunities offered for short trips inland. It must be remembered that the steamer is ten days on the Australian coast, on her way from Sydney to Thursday Island, and this never fails to impress strangers with the great size of Australia and also its emptiness.

From Townsville the voyage lies inside the Great Barrier Reef, which is a vast coral growth, stretching for more than 1000 miles along the coast at varying distances from the shore. This coral barrier against the storms of the Pacific ensures a smooth passage which continues all the way to Manila, for, after leaving Thursday Island, at the north end of Cape York, the way goes among islands over glass seas. Though the Great Barrier Reef is so large, little can be actually seen of it except palm-studded atolls, such as Low Island, where scientists have established a base to study the marine life of the reef; but beyond Cairns, from time to time, the steamer people will see luggers manned by dark-skinned men, who are dressed in gaudy-coloured shirts or sarongs. They are fishing for Beche-de-mer or trochus shell.

Thursday Island is one of the Prince of Wales group. Toward dawn on the third morning after leaving Cairns, the winding approach to the great pearling centre is reached. A Malay quarter-master is placed in the "chains," that little gallery on the deck overhanging the sea, from which he can heave the lead. With this guide to assist the navigation, the liner steams into the port and ties up at the wharf at Kennedy Town, the only settlement on the island. T.I., as it is called, is the social and commercial centre for all of Torres Straits and the Gulf of Carpentaria. New Guinea is only 100 miles away, the Murray Islands and Yam Island, with its quaint king and his queens, and many other places can be reached by cutter, places where one sees life as nowhere else in the world, and there is sport for the hunter on the mainland ten miles away. The Torres Straits natives are different from the Aus-

tralian black and the New Guinea native, though so near to both.

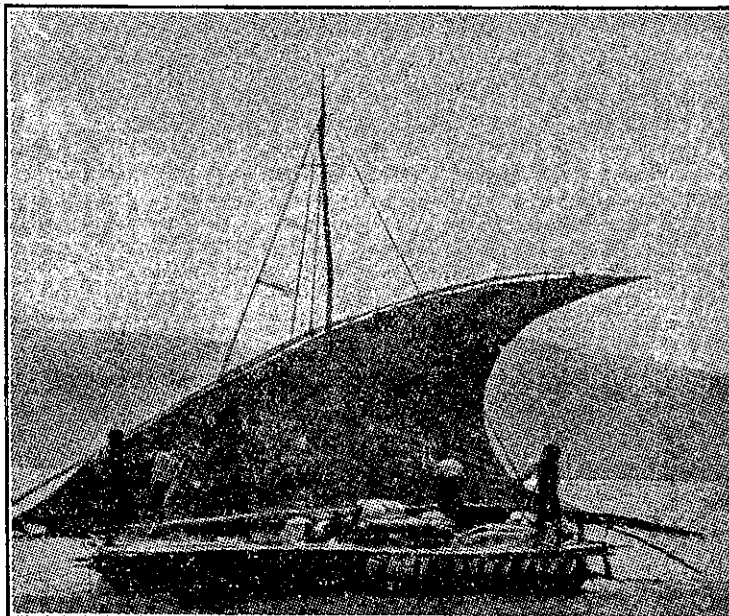
Thursday Island is outside the White Australia agreement—which means that no language tests are applied to Japanese, Malays, Javanese or other Eastern people who wish to live there. This is done because the pearling industry demands such men as divers. Though the industry has decreased greatly, there is still a big fleet of pearlers with headquarters at T.I. Among the native crews, there are two distinct factions, the "swimmers" who dive without a diving dress and the "divers" who use the dress and do the deep diving. While the swimmers fear the sharks, the divers fear only the giant gropers—similar to the New Zealand hapuka—which haunt the recesses of the reefs, and while really harmless have a ferocious appearance. With puffed-out gills and gaping jaws they terrify the men, who signal for a quick haul-up.



WHEN Thursday Island fades astern, and the hills dip into the sea, there remains only the white lighthouse on Booby Island, 20 miles off-shore, to show where Australia is. When that goes, too, the liner is steaming on the Arafura Sea, bound for Manila, six days away. On this run no land belonging to Britain will be seen, for the Dutch East Indies on the one hand the Philippines on the other, constitute the main areas of land. At one time England possessed the East Indies, but they were handed back to Holland in exchange for Ceylon, where the East India Company had extensive interests.

Early on the third day out, a solitary cone of rock, rising in the sea ahead, attracts the eye. This is Mano or Bird Island, on which dwell immense numbers of sea fowl. As the liner skirts past the island the whistle is blown, and the birds rise in clouds, circling and screaming.

Through Minipa Strait into the Banda Sea, thence to the Serang Sea and Molucca Passage, all among green islands, the course leads to Basilan Strait, between Santa Cruz and Coco. The latter, a small island, lies on the right, with high green ridges all cultivated, coconut palms streaming down to golden beaches and natives in the nude running about in their excitement at seeing the steamer. These people are Moros who (Concluded on page 2.)



A "lakatoi," or native boat, consisting of two or three canoes lashed together. In these the natives of New Guinea travel up the Gulf of Papua on trading expeditions.