

The Observation Post

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1942.

This Concerns You !

The New Year is approaching fast. Before we realise it we will be dating our letters 1943. It is generally known throughout the unit that early next year we will be called upon to work really hard with no slacking. After all the nice things that have been said about our efforts of 1942, we must put our shoulders to the wheel and push ourselves harder than ever in order to maintain the high standard set by our traditions.

We must think quickly and accurately. After our decision is made "there must be no regrets." We must stick to our guns, co-operate one with another and also with the higher command. We must be prepared to stake ourselves to the efficiency of our equipment. Every minute must be used to the full on ensuring that all is ready for use at a "moments" notice.

Only after the job in hand is complete in every detail are we entitled to a spell. All our leisure moments, however, must be used for learning something constructive. As this is an all-in war, we must consequently never let up until the job is finished, and then, and only then, will we have earned "our Captain's 'Well Done!'"

Infant Prodiges

(By "THE GADFLY.")

Christmas is the one great season of the year that is given over to making children especially happy, and it would be safe to say that there is not one parent who has not made some effort, in anticipation of the coming festival to provide at least one gift that will bring a happy light into the eyes of the little ones.

The shouts of delight as the Christmas stocking is emptied, and each new treasure brought to light, the pattering of hurrying little feet as the new toy, ball, or doll is taken, to be admired by "Daddie" or "Mum," is, to the parent, as heart-warming an experience as any throughout the year. There is nothing so touches the depths of parental affection as the sight of their children, joyously happy.

MISERABLE MITES.

But the purpose of this article is not to recall or recount the happy, care-free, joyous antics of delighted children. Its object is to deal with that most pathetic of all human beings, the child prodigy. It was Robert Blatchford, the noted editor of the London Clarion, who once remarked he felt constrained to weep when he saw or was told of the astounding performances of any child prodigy, for he could not remain unmindful of the many happy things and the cheering experiences, which were the birthright of a child, of which they had been robbed.

If there are any of our readers holding the same opinion, and likely to be so moved, it would be as well for them to refrain from reading further, for, if Blatchford be right, there is enough, and more to make them weep.

STUDYING GREEK AT THREE.

In 1809, a little tot of a boy, just over three years of age, may have been seen toddling with his father in the streets of London. Those who may have passed the couple would have noticed that the child was in earnest conversation with the parent, and they may have put the two down as foreigners, for the child was certainly not speaking English. Had the passer-by himself received a classical education in his youth he would have been astounded, for this little fellow, not yet four years old, was conversing fluently in Greek!

He was John Stuart Mill, and he would be undergoing his daily tuition at the hands of his father.

Speaking Greek at three years! Nor was that all, for he was already a great reader, and had studied many historical works. By the age of seven he had digested Plato in the original, while two years earlier he had had a lengthy discourse with Lady Spencer on the comparative merits of Marlborough and Wellington as generals.

HISTORICAL AUTHOR AT SIX.

A History of Rome, which critics described as "an extraordinary production" was written when Mills was six and a half, and at eight he was teaching Latin to a smaller pupil, and expounding Caesar's Commentaries and the works of Cornelius Nepos. In the same year, just to fill in spare time he mastered geometry and algebra, and six months later took up conic sections and spheres.

He toyed with Newton's mathematics, performing all the problems without the book and most of them without any help from it.

When he was eight, he had read Thucydides, Anacreon, Sophocles, Euripides, Demosthenes, Aeschines, and Cicero, while at nine years he had mastered the Odyssey, Theocritus, Pindar, Aeschines, and Livy. The next year, he passed on to the more difficult classical authors, universal history and English literature, including Shakespeare, Dryden, and Scott, and as a side line studied chemistry and physics.

In his eleventh year, Mill composed a scholarly history of Roman government based on original sources, and in it he discussed abstruse points of international law, vindicating the agrarian legislation and the principles of the Roman democratic party. He also began a continuation of the Iliad, of which he completed one book.

Mill's tutor was his father, who was

so bent on giving him the most liberal education that, in case such would interfere with his studies, denied him any boy friends, and forbade the indulgence in any holidays whatever. Just think of that! A boy of twelve, who had never had a toy, never played a game, and never had a friend!

READ BEFORE HE COULD SPEAK.

Here is surely a case which would have made Blatchford weep. A baby of twelve months which could point out all the capital letters in the alphabet, and at eighteen months recognised the small ones too, and which at a little over two years was reading a book called "Cobwebs to Catch Flies."

At three years this child could sign his name. He was Francis Galton, who in later life became one of the most eminent of nineteenth century British scientists.

At four years of age he wrote to his sister, who had been his tutor since his birth, the following letter:—

"My Dear Adele: I am four years old and can read any English book. I can say all the Latin substantives and active verbs besides 52 lines of Latin poetry. I can cast up any sum in addition and can multiply by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. I can also say the pence table. I read French a little, and I know the clock."

Wishing to be most exact, and fearing that he may have over-stated his ability in so far as his mastery of the multiplication tables were concerned, he later eliminated the 9 and 11 from the foregoing list.

By the time he was six, Galton was thoroughly familiar with the Iliad and the Odyssey. At that age he was reading the works of the English poets, including Shakespeare, for pleasure, and so remarkable was his memory that after reading a page twice over he could recite it by heart.

LEARNED GREEK AT FATHER'S KNEE.

Jeremy Bentham, who in later life became a great English jurist and philosopher, learned Greek while sitting on his father's knee, and wrote Greek and Latin when only four years of age. He knew his letters before he could talk, and it is told of him that when he was only three, he found his parents' conversation so boring one day while he was out walking with them, that he ran home, and when they returned they found him absorbed in Rapin's History of England.

He had undertaken a study of Voltaire at five years of age and at six his passion for reading was so intense that his parents found it almost impossible to meet his demand for books.

He passed the university examinations at ten, and was, at that age corresponding with equal facility in Latin and Greek as he was in English. He entered Oxford when twelve, and devoted himself to the study of higher mathematics without a tutor.

"LISPED IN NUMBERS"

From his very infancy Alexander Pope was considered a prodigy, and he, himself said that "he lisp'd in numbers, for the number came." He began writing poetry at an earlier age than he could remember, and at twelve had written a play. It was in that year that he wrote his famous "Ode to Solitude," which begins "Happy the man, whose wish and care, a few paternal acres bound."

PRODUCED PLAYS WHEN ONLY SIX.

Goethe's greatness is universal, and he, too was an infant prodigy, for at four and a half years of age he had written plays, besides reading Gottfried's Universal History and Heidegger's Aeterna Philologia.

Even at that tender age, he was intensely interested in religion, and had discarded orthodoxy, and had founded a faith of his own, performing rites which he considered necessary to the direct approach of God.

He had written much poetry when he was eight, and was familiar with the older German poets of the eighteenth century, as well as the classical Latin and Italian poets, while he had also

studied works on Roman antiquities and jurisprudence, books of travel, historical and philosophical treatises, and miscellaneous encyclopedias. Before he was nine, he was composing verses in German, Greek and Latin. He learned French from hearing a French commandant talking, while he was a guest at his father's house.

Thomas Babington Macaulay was another of the amazing children of his time. Even at the age of two he was questioning his mother regarding the doctrine of eternal punishment, while at three he had become an omnivorous reader, and it is said that he could repeat the exact working of anything he read. At four, he paid a visit to Oxford, and made a mental catalogue of the books there which he never forgot. That he was unduly precocious was emphasised, when replying to the anxious inquiry of a servant who had spilled some hot coffee over his little legs, he said: "Thank you, madam, the agony is abated."

At six he had composed a poem in six cantos, and at seven he composed an epic called "Olaus, the Great, or The Conquest of Mona," in imitation of Virgil. Throughout his childhood he despised toys, eschewed games and preferred sedate walks for exercise.

An exposition of Christian theology stood to his credit before he was eight, and with this he stated that he hoped to convert the Hindus to Christianity.

Napoleon's retreat from Moscow was commemorated by him by a "Pindaric Ode" when he was no more than twelve, but at that age he was a "veteran author" for at six he had written a compendium of Universal History.

GAVE A PUBLIC CONCERT AT SEVEN.

Beethoven, the musical genius, gave a public concert when he was a little under seven, for he was quite accomplished at that age, having practised on the piano and violin from his earliest years.

At ten he went on tour to Holland where he played to packed houses. It was at that age that he composed his first original work, this being a funeral cantata in honour of the British ambassador who had just died.

A two-part fugue in D for the organ, a rondo in C for the piano, a song and three sonatas for the piano were composed by him when he was twelve. He was a marvel at sight reading and could play the most difficult scores without hesitation.

MINUET IN HALF AN HOUR.

To learn completely a minuet in half an hour could well be considered a feat for a mature man, and well worth boasting about, but Mozart did so when he was an infant of but four years. At five he had several compositions to his name, and was so fastidious, and critical of his audience, that he refused to play for any but connoisseurs.

Before he was six he had three original works to his credit. These were:

1. A minuet and trio for clavier (Op. 1).
2. A minuet (Op. 2).
3. An allegro (Op. 3).

Other infant prodigies were Voltaire, who disputed learnedly with his tutors at three, Samuel Taylor Coleridge who made a study of the Bible when he was three, and Thomas Chatterton, but in the latter case, there is some conflict of evidence, his sister declaring that he was dull, "not knowing his letters at four years of age."

Technique of Soviet

MEETS COLD FACTS OF WINTER CAMPAIGNING.

What will this Russian winter mean to the Russians? Without being rhetorical, it can be said that the Russian winter needs no objectives; the cold facts are enough.

At from 38 to 41 degrees below zero Centigrade, which will prevail along this winter's fighting front for weeks at a time, men clearing the roads leading up to the front line will have their faces bandaged like doctors in an operating theatre—to save their noses. The thousands of horses that will be pulling sledges—and they are by the thousands behind the Russian lines—will have their sweating coats frozen white, as if covered with sugar (writes Negley Parson).

If you were there you would see Cosack officers get down from their horses and walk painfully along the main roads—to restore the circulation to their feet; you would notice fires burning at the edges of wrecked bridges across rivers and ravines—for this ground is frozen two or three feet deep—and no pile can be driven until the earth has been softened by flame.

You would also see (as I have seen) horses being carted past you on sledges, dead, and sawed into sections.

And—why try to cover this up?—you would know that they would soon be turned into food.

CIVILIANS' SITUATION

But the civilian population of the great, fuel-less cities will probably suffer worse than they have ever suffered before, even more so than during some of the terrible winters of frost and famine following the 1917 revolution.

As to food, the Red Army always has

M & G for the best in Men's Clothing & Footwear

No Matter Where You Are Stationed

• There are always those Little Extras that make for a Soldier's Comfort,

• • • Check up on your Kit and then Visit

Millar & Giorgi's

on your first leave and make sure YOU possess those EXTRA COMFORTS

We Specialise in MEN'S WEAR

MILLAR & GIORGI [P.N.] LTD.

"The Great Outfitters" PALMERSTON NORTH

a tremendous grain reserve—this sometimes amounts to millions of tons; the guerrillas, coming from the villages, will certainly have laid aside provisions stored in the forests and other hiding places for their winter fighting.

But the civilian population will be dependent upon whatever rations can be brought to Moscow and the big industrial cities. It is this body of people, among whom are the workers, who will face the severest privation.

But all these Russians are actually workers, and indications are that there will be probably sufficient essential nourishment to see them through this winter.

At Leningrad now they are cutting down trees of the suburbs, tearing down many of their useless wooden houses (the old-fashioned ones made of whole logs) for this winter's fuel.

THE COLD TECHNIQUE.

The Red Army soldier carries no blankets. His padded and quilted tunic and breeches, his greatcoat, and his felt boots are considered sufficient covering—when backed up by his cold technique.

The first thing the Russians do when they recapture a village is to rush to the wooden houses which are still burning, tear them apart—then make dug-outs about 6ft. deep in the thawed ground.

They cover these with planks, logs, tarpaulins, even pine boughs. Then they set up the small stove which each platoon of the Red Army always carries stick its small smoke stack up through the improvised roof, and in a few minutes some 40 or 50 men have created

a home from home.

Similarly, in the forests—and the guerrillas always do this—they will make quick igloos of snow, cover and line them with pine boughs, also lay a floor thick with pine boughs; and again set up their miraculous little stove.

Pine boughs over their smoke stack breaks the smoke so that it cannot be detected from the air. And Russian soldiers, particularly the men and women guerrillas, can spend a Russian winter this way as comfortably as hibernating bears.

So much for that; but a man shot, say, in the leg, with a wound which he would consider slight elsewhere in the world, runs a definite chance in Russia not only of losing that leg but the other leg and both arms as well. That is, if the first-aid men do not reach him in time.

Now against this winter, which knows neither friend nor foe with its impartial cruelty, the Red Army has long ago been trained in a highly specialised shelter-technique; also its millions of fresh reserves, who are picking up the weapons of their gallant fallen comrades now, were trained last winter in dug-outs, and real trenches behind the Urals, in the bitterest of snows.

The guerrillas, fleeing from their wrecked and burned villages, and now harrying the flanks of the Germans from the depths of the dark forests, have reverted to the traditional Russian cold-technique, with improvisations.

Neurotic: Anbody who thinks you mean it when you ask how he is.

WE LEAD OTHERS FOLLOW
PICCADILLY LOUNGE
FOR THE BEST MEAL IN TOWN.
Upstairs Next Bank of New Zealand.

ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

ORS