

Personal Profiles - No. 33:

NO MORE ITCHING FEET AS THE CARS GO BY

(By a Staff Reporter.)

BURLY Alfred George ("Gunner") Jenkins suffered from itching feet from the age of 15 onwards but for the last six years he has stayed in one place and just watched cars go by—38,000 of them in fact.

And as genial guardian of the Rahiri Gates, lower entrance to the North Egmont track, he confesses that he is passing through the most contented phase of a 59-year life that has made him a sailor, soldier, bacon company employee, emigrant, farmer, slump-time employment officer, county inspector and a little portly round the waist-line.

He became a bell boy on a ship of the Aberdeen Line and for a year plodded up and down the African coast. He then returned home and tried to settle into his father's driving business. But it did not appeal to him. He was tall and his sea life had filled him out well and these two advantages encouraged him to try the army at the age of 16. He liked the look of the uniforms worn by the Horse Artillery, then one of the army's crack units, and after three months' basic training at Woolwich he became a soldier and went to Ireland to join his battery at 144 day. "Still, beer was only 2d a pint and cigarettes were five a penny."

He stayed in Ireland until the fateful August of 1914 and was rushed to France on the 16th, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, one of the first British fighting units to go to the Continent.

They went into training on the Belgian border and then into Belgium and six days after landing they "met the Hun" at 11.30 on August 22. "We started going backwards then," Gunner Jenkins recalled with a broad smile, and it took some pumping to draw from him by elimination the fact that he was behind the gun that fired the first shell against the Germans in that war.

For the next four years or so there were Mons, Le-Cateau, the Marne, the Aisne, Ypres in 1914 and 1915, Neuve Chapelle, Loos, the Somme, Hill 60, Cambrai, Arras, Amiens and the final advance as machine-guns in a non-stop running war.

Whisper

Having fired the first shot and one of the last, "Gunner" Jenkins then tried a new field—the Shanghai police. "I needed to be six feet in my socks and so many lathes round the chest and the queues of recruits were four deep when I went along," he said. He passed all the preliminary examinations and was given a pass by his family doctor but he then clashed with the specialist, said, "Beg your pardon" when a question was whispered into his left ear and was rejected on the ground of gun deafness.

After that discouragement, he disappeared for a time into a job with the Danish Bacon Company hard by Smithfield Market, emerging in 1926 with two years of marriage to an Irish wife and the first of his six children.

He was still itching to move and this

time the impetus came from the fact that his wife had relations in Te Kauwhata, New Zealand.

Early the next year, the Jenkins family was in New Zealand. They stayed in Auckland for a time. "Then I travelled round a bit, finally decided to go farming and got a job in Inglewood."

He actually had three jobs in the district before the slump came and he was forced to start searching to keep his wife and three children. He was with the unemployed for about a month and then got the position as unemployed organiser for the Inglewood County. This lasted two or three years and he was appointed by the county as their first permanent inspector.

Mr. Jenkins remained as inspector for about 15 years, abandoning his car in favour of a horse when the second war came. Six years ago last month, the job in the little half-stone, half-wood house at the foot of Egmont became available and he took it.

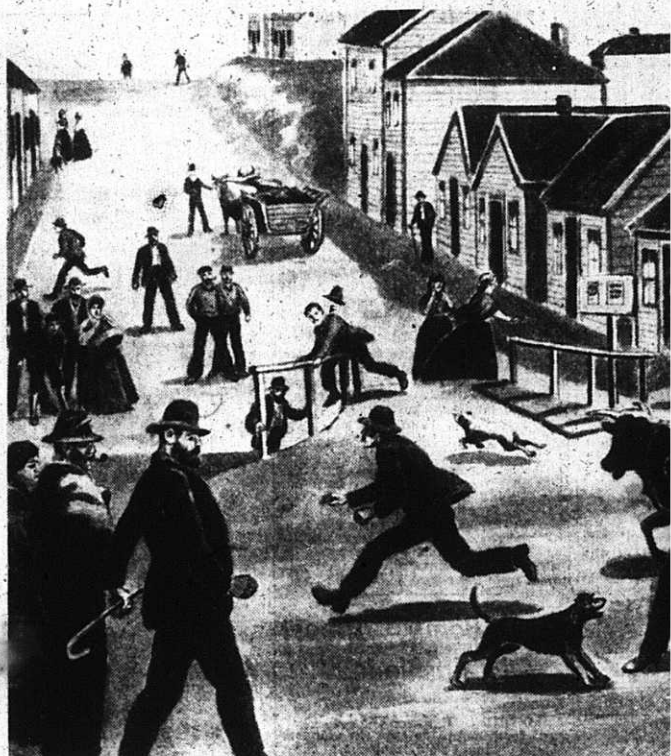
Family

Despite his wanderings and fluctuations of fortune, Mr. Jenkins has raised a sporting-minded, healthy and impressively built family of three sons and three daughters. Two daughters are married, to a coalminer at Bennieydale and a stock agent at Gisborne, and the other is a Wren at Auckland. One son is a farmer at Matamata, another a blacksmith and general engineer at Morrinsville and the third is a dairy factory worker, contemplating marriage and living at home.

Having been impressed by the itchiness of his feet, I wondered how the quiet of Rahiri Gates appealed to him. Sitting in his sunny kitchen, I could see only the flourishing green tops of potatoes—"the spuds are pretty small underneath"—green fields and trees and hear only the song of a thousand birds.

"I love life here very much," he assured me earnestly and I couldn't doubt it. "I like meeting people and I've met them here from every corner of the world. And I love the bush and the trees."

Certainly the visitors who have passed his cottage in 38,000 cars in the last six years represent every possible walk of life from Governor-General and Lord Mayors down to the most ordinary of peo-



CATTLE FROM AUSTRALIA DISTURB EARLY NEW PLYMOUTH.—A. H. on this page. Centre is the old bridge across the Huatok

ple. For Mr. Jenkins they all have a common meeting ground. "People have enjoyed this bush. They think, as I do, that it's absolutely wonderful. Dozens have asked to be allowed to stop on the track and take photographs and moving pictures and there must be homes all over the world with Egmont bush in them."

Mr. Jenkins is a non-smoker. He gave up last February on his birthday. "Oh, I was coughing a lot. Touch of gas in the war," he explained.

He is also virtually a non-mountaineer. He and a fellow-grandfather, Mr. R. C. Okey, former caretaker at the hostel, struggled to the crater for lunch to celebrate their birthdays, on the same day, three years ago and "to show what grandfathers can do."

Exercise

His only hobbies are pottering about in his garden, complaining about the quality of the scoria, that passes for its soil and inspecting his opossum traps. For exercise he has placed some traps three-quarters of a mile away to the west and others three-quarters of a mile away to the east.

But when it comes to facts he hasn't much time for hobbies. He and his wife

share responsibility for a job that lasts 24 hours a day seven days a week if necessary. The road must be kept open. They can't even have a holiday together.

He claimed to have no dislikes—"you can't with a family of six"—but there is one. Going to town. He only goes once every three weeks to get a haircut, and recalls that he once went to Wellington for a fortnight's holiday and cleared out after the first few days. "I don't care for town."

"It was when I asked about his nickname that I learned that he is, or was, something of a stage personality as well.

In 1928, M.G.M. sent a film entitled "Mons" the official British record of the war, to New Zealand. "You know how it happens; someone found out I'd been a gunner and they asked me to travel round with the film and give a sort of talk about it wherever it was screened. I was supposed to go to Australia with it but I got bored and it was a long time away from the family."

That was about the last fact I extracted from this engagingly humorous, strongly-faced man but there was a parting injunction in favour of modesty on his behalf and, as I drove away, an arm raised in a farewell gesture that has been genuinely given to thousands of Egmont's visitors. His is a very warm and human welcome to the mountain.

Eating More Whalemeat

Americans are eating more and more whalemeat.

While in 1952 the United States imported only 9,000lb., last year the figure rose to 700,000lb. This year it has exceeded the million-pound mark already.

By far the largest slice of these imports is used to feed animals such as dogs, cats and foxes. But human consumption has also risen sharply.

This year sales have more than doubled, to 29,000lb.

QUEER COLLEGE CLOSED DOWN

The world's strangest university—the University of Lawsonomy—has just closed after 11 years to make way for a shopping centre in Des Moines, Iowa.

No student ever graduated because the course of Lawsonomy, founded by Detroit businessman Alfred Lawson, took 30 years to complete and no one ever stuck to it that long. Students, and they never numbered more than a couple of hundred, studied only textbooks written by Lawson.

He believes, among other things, that gremlin-like beings called "minorogs" and "physorgs" affect the course of human history.

He also believes chimney smoke should be disposed of underground and allowed to seep through the soil. Lawsonomy has no definite form, according to Lawson, but his teachings also oppose paying interest on debts.

He is also against cosmetics, liquor and



CUSTODIAN OF THE MOTOR ROAD TO NORTH EGMONT—Mr. A. G. Jenkins chats with a motorist at the Rahiri Lodge gateway to the Egmont National Park.

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