

TO HELP LISTENERS TO LISTEN

Printing Press Called to the Aid of the Spoken Word

By the DIRECTOR

In a world haunted by new and terrifying fears, Broadcasting may be either an engine of war or a powerful agency for peace. In this brief article explaining why the "New Zealand Listener" has been brought into being, the Director of Broadcasting, Professor James Shelley, says that it rests largely with listeners themselves to preserve broadcasting from mean and anti-social uses.

In the early days of aeroplanes, John Galsworthy published an earnest appeal* to the nations, pleading with them before it was too late to outlaw the use of 'planes in warfare. But, alas, his words fell on deaf ears. The brains of the nations were too busy developing the hideous potentials of our greatest modern terror. Had Galsworthy's appeal succeeded, what a different world we should be living in to-day. The "rapid-action" menace, which has decided so many recent issues, would not exist and the time gained would allow the agencies of peace to function. If the speed of 'planes had been at the service of messengers of reconciliation, but not at the bidding of the war god, a new era of international diplomacy would have begun—as indeed we thought it had when Mr. Chamberlain made his dramatic flight.

It seems as if it is impossible for nations to resist the temptation to use whatever power they have at their disposal against others, should their desires or fears press them hard enough. In the light of this thought, and of recent happenings in other parts of the world, it behoves us seriously to consider whether it is possible to enlist that powerful modern invention—broadcasting—in the service of peace and understanding between nations. Sir John Reith—when he was Director-General of the B.B.C.—said that wars of the future would be fought with four arms: Navy, Army, Air Force, and Broadcasting!

Of the extraordinary powers of radio there can be no question. The results a few months ago of a too realistic broadcast in America of a fictional invasion from Mars, when hysterical terror seized so many people, should convince even the most unimaginative of the power of the broadcast word. The

recent events in Europe would have been impossible had it not been for the speed of radio and the aeroplane. The League of Nations has done its best to limit the use of broadcasting to the interests of peace, but there seems little chance that its efforts will succeed. The anticipated war in the air seems likely to be preluded by a hideous overture on the air of warring propaganda.

Would that the thousands of millions now being spent at the dictates of fear could be



Spencer Digby photograph

PROFESSOR JAMES SHELLEY,
Director of Broadcasting.

used for the building up of new human harmonies. But this can only come by the penetration of the individual minds of the world by a spirit of trust. And in the gradual achievement of this, surely broadcasting can play an important part. To do so it should, obviously, be the aim of a broadcasting service to transmit, honestly and simply, only such information as has the stamp of authenticity, as well as opinions that have the backing of mature minds and adequate knowledge. Broadcasting should bend its efforts to develop a spirit of trust and tolerance, and not succumb to the temptation to provide the superficial excitement of petty strife. This is

no light task, for it is so easy to be pugnaciously cocksure and intolerant, and so difficult to be considerate and tolerant. The destinies of broadcasting are largely in the hands of listeners, and they must do their share towards building up a tradition that will not allow so powerful an instrument to be used for anti-social or mean ends.

In order to give every chance to listeners to play their part in this important national service, the power of the printing press must be added to that of the spoken word. We hope it will provide a closer and more permanent link between the service and the public, and give some insight into the difficulties of satisfying the desires of hundreds of thousands of citizens. In matters of taste it is not easy to persuade anyone that what he likes may be abundantly detestable to hosts of others. Letters are frequently received expressing diametrically opposite opinions, and each letter claims to speak for the "great majority" of listeners. All we can hope to do is to provide a reasonable choice of programmes from various stations, so that a listener can pick and choose to suit his taste. It is also our desire that the *New Zealand Listener* should provide a means whereby, as far as possible, licensees may be taken into confidence in the attempts made by the Minister and the staff of the Broadcasting Service to meet the innumerable obstacles they have to overcome daily.

Broadcasting is so new and so rapidly developing that it is not easy to provide and co-ordinate its rapacious needs in its creative, programme, and technical sides. However, much has been learnt, and it is hoped that evidence of this will continually be seen as listeners develop the habit of careful selection. Some of the lessons learnt from the past will be embodied in a new programme schedule which will shortly be introduced and which will provide the opportunity for different types of listeners to choose more easily what suits their tastes. This journal will help to enable this to be done; and if it succeeds in assisting listeners to make a fuller and more discriminating use of their programmes it will be fulfilling its main purpose.