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Listening While I Work (12)

By "Materfamilias"

THE planning of Christmas programmes year by year must be something of a poser. For those things that for hundreds of years have constituted Christmas, the rebirth of hope in a mid-winter world associated of snow, carols, yule logs, and plum puddings, are not things which fit into a New Zealand mid-summer. At the same time there are enough people in New Zealand with a nostalgic love of such things to create a demand for something that savours of Christmas. For these the *Christmas Carol*, and Dorothy Sayers's *He That Should Come* must have given the right flavour to the day. On the other hand those who like carols to listen to while they fill stockings or decorate Christmas trees on Christmas Eve may have been disappointed this year, though they were spared the phoney old English Fig and Whistle, Gaffer an' Gammer background that last year was thrown in with carols. But families with children are probably too busy throughout the day and too exhausted at the end of it to do much listening. I am told, but do not believe, that one broadcasting official went round on Christmas Eve hoping for a wet Christmas—so that people would stay home and listen to the programmes from his station. That would be carrying enthusiasm for your job too far.

* * *

THOSE who wanted a little quiet and not too highbrow music on the evening of Christmas day may have decided, as did a friend of mine, to turn on to a musical programme from 2ZB at 9.15 p.m. If so they were told to lean back, and shut their eyes (or something of the sort) and let themselves be carried away on wings of melody. "It carried me straight to the radio to turn on to another station," my friend said. It was a bad day's work for Mendelssohn when he started this wings of song business.

* * *

"GOOD-BYE Mr. Chips" was a popular choice for Boxing Day evening from 2YA. The dramatisation of a well known light novel should be popular and successful. Yet I could not help regretting that the NBS should have chosen a book that was also a very popular film. It was the excellent acting of Robert Donat as Mr. Chips (and for many the fact that it was their first experience of Greer Garson) that made the film stand out. But for this very reason, I thought, it should have been avoided as a radio play, since unseen actors had no hope of matching the film. The producer was in fact cashing in on the success of the picture. The public school theme which 40 years or so ago achieved such popularity with *Stalky and Co.* and *The Hill* has by now seen its best days—especially in a country where Public Schools (alias Private schools) have never been as deeply rooted as in England.

* * *

ON a Monday morning at 11 o'clock I tuned in as usual to hear the Home Front talk. These talks, which have been running for a good many months, are topical talks offering explanations for

shortages and gluts, for prices and how they are regulated; answers in fact which your political colour may lead you to accept or reject as the case may be, but which nevertheless do make some attempt to explain some of the reasons for such things as butter rationing, vegetable price-fixing, standardisation of bread or of underclothes. But that Monday a surprise was in store. Instead of the Home Front we were treated to a talk on *Desert Travel*. We were lifted right from the daily bother of paying rents and gas bills and planning puddings and digging for victory into the glorious imaginary world where we were told how to prepare ourselves for travelling in the desert. I can imagine few things less probable than that I ever shall be asked to pack up a few weeks of Arabian desert, but it took me back to my school-room dreams when I really imagined that one day I would wander like Gertrude Bell or Rosita Forbes, and neither Himalayan fastness or Arabian Desert would present any real difficulty. How long it is since I abandoned those dreams of making for the golden road to Samarkand, or for the hairpin bends that lead from Burma to China, I am not going to say; but if fate should do anything so fantastic as to send me over the desert in the years still left to me, I shall certainly—after hearing Dr. Merlin Minchell, eschew vehicular transport in favour of the time-honoured ship of the desert.

Items From The ZB's

FOR a tale of mystery at sea, listen in to "Lost Destroyer," the BBC recorded programme to be broadcast from 1ZB and 3ZB this Sunday, January 16, at 8.5 p.m. The British Admiralty announces—a ship has been torpedoed. There are no survivors. Actually there is one survivor, but for reasons of National safety this fact cannot be announced. The man is told by the Intelligence Department to stay dead. But therein lies the story. "Lost Destroyer" will be broadcast for three consecutive Sundays. It will commence at 2ZB and 4ZB on Sunday, January 23.

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A SHORT time ago a prize of £13 6s. was won by an Auckland competitor in the session *History and All That*. The question was "James the Second, you remember, was attempting to regain his throne with the help of the Irish. The townsmen of Londonderry refused to admit him, and led by Major Baker and a clergyman withstood a siege of 103 days. What was the name of the clergyman?" Immediately the answer came: "George Walker."

The lucky competitor was H. M. Fraser, of 31 Princes Street, Auckland. The quiz-master, Guy Nixon, was surprised when the question was answered correctly, but he was not so surprised when he learnt that Mr. Fraser had spent some time in Ireland and is familiar with Irish history. He had, in fact, held a bursary at Whitehall School in Glasgow where he made a study of history. This was the first time he had taken part in any such session.