

DRAMA IS WHERE IT FINDS YOU

DRAMA is where you find it, or it finds you. But it does not often come so strangely as it did to the passengers of a plane over the Pacific who heard of the surrender of Germany halfway between Canton Island and Fiji. Two of those passengers were Professor J. Shelley, Director of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service, and J. R. Smith, Chief Engineer, who were returning to New Zealand after attending the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference in London. The news was picked up and passed round by the wireless operator, and received without comment or apparent excitement.

"There was certainly no demonstration," Professor Shelley told us, "but it is not easy to stage a demonstration in a bucket seat."

Professor Shelley has no complaint to make of air-travelling, but thinks that it will be long before it is very popular among people who are not in a hurry.

"We crossed the Atlantic without much discomfort in eight and a-half hours, and that of course is rather marvellous. But there was nothing to see, nowhere to go, nothing that one could do. Most of the time we were just floating in space between two layers of cloud, because there is of course almost no feeling of movement or speed in the air."

"Not when you are doing 200 miles an hour?"

"No, it makes no difference how fast you are going if there is nothing to indicate motion. In a train or a car you see other objects racing by. In the air you see nothing and feel nothing—except the slight vibration of the engine."

"What about other kinds of motion—rolling, bumping, and so on?"



AT THE COMMONWEALTH BROADCASTING CONFERENCE (left to right): H. Bishop (controller, engineering, BBC); J. R. Smith (chief engineer, NBS); Professor James Shelley (Director, NBS); Professor A. S. Bokhari (Director-General, All India Radio), S. Gopalan (officer on special duty, All India Radio)

"You get that of course in bad weather, but on the whole air-travel is very smooth. In clouds there is usually some bumping, but the pilot gets out of those as soon as he can."

"Did elevation trouble you?"

"Not much. In itself it did not trouble me at all, though the effect on people with respiratory difficulties can be very trying. But I found the pressure of the oxygen mask unpleasant."

"Not the atmospheric pressure?"

"No, It would have been unpleasant without oxygen, since we were 21,000 feet up for hours on end. But the only discomfort felt with the oxygen was the pressure of the mechanism strapped on my face."

"No cold?"

"No. Some passengers I think did feel cold at those high levels, but the cabin was heated sufficiently for me."

"Then what about the heat of the tropics? Did that trouble you?"

"Yes, that is the real problem of a world flight. It is not worth while taking tropical clothes for a few hours, but those few hours can be an ordeal."

THE Broadcasting Conference is not yet a matter for public discussion, but both Professor Shelley and Mr. Smith were enthusiastic in their praise of the "wonderful British people." What they have endured New Zealand does not yet realise—partly because the story has not yet been fully told—but the courage and cheerfulness with which they have carried on in all circumstances is something, both visitors felt, that no one can realise who has not experienced it.

"It was not just a build-up to deceive the enemy and maintain public morale?"

"No, never. The facts were far more arresting than the reports. Britain just rose above herself—there is no other way of putting it—and is there yet. If any people ever deserved victory it is the people of Britain."

"There was still bombing when you were in London?"

"Rocket bombs were falling somewhere most of the time, but no one took any notice of them. People might go to a

telephone to ring their homes when it seemed that something had fallen near, but there was no excitement, and no other upset of any kind."

And sometimes of course the effect of a bomb was devastating. Professor Shelley and Mr. Smith visited an area where a rocket had recently fallen and the effect on them was shocking: beds, mattresses, pictures, books, all the intimate things of life obtruding piteously from a vast mass of rubble. There were also, of course, human beings beneath the rubble. But there was no such emotional disturbance as might have been expected in the survivors. They would rescue what was worth rescuing, then this mess would be cleared up like thousands of other messes. For London is nowhere a mass of uncleaned rubble.

"You see no rubble at all," Professor Shelley said, "or very little. Not only in London, but in all the other bombed cities, devastated areas have been cleared, and the open spaces put to temporary use. In some cases you don't realise how much destruction there has been till you look closely, and then discover that what you had taken for an untouched block is merely a shell—walls without windows, doors, or interiors."

And the strangest things went on happening till the very last bomb. During a conference at Broadcasting House held in the very centre of that vast building a door suddenly opened with a bang and slammed shut again. To the New Zealanders it was quite uncanny, since the bomb that had caused it had fallen miles away; but to the Londoners conferring with them it was merely another of the vagaries of blast.

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ONE of the results of the Broadcasting Conference was a sharper realisation of the size of the British Commonwealth and the dependence of broadcasting policy on local conditions. In Canada, for example, the problem is the competing broadcasting systems across the United States border. In South Africa bi-lingualism and distance are behind most of the decisions. In India, on the other hand, the central problem is poverty. The potential listeners are so many and the set-owners so few that communal listening seems to be indicated for the millions who can't pay licence fees or buy sets.



AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND REPRESENTATIVES AT THE CONFERENCE. Professor Shelley is fourth from the right, J. R. Smith fifth from the right, and Tahu Hole, second from the left