



THE SHORTEST DRAMAS IN THE WORLD

(Written for "The Listener" by B. HEYMANN)

STRICTLY speaking they are not dramas at all, but only the material for them. They have no dialogue; they are not divided into scenes and—above all—they always lack the last Act. They do not appear on any radio programme; they always happen out of schedule. Sometimes they consist of a single sentence:

"We have been asked to make the following announcement: Will Mr. John O. Blank, believed on a hiking tour with a friend in the Wairarapa district, please communicate with the Wellington Public Hospital at once."

That is all. The announcer introduces a musical item, and while we are listening we begin to wonder whether this message will reach Mr. John O. Blank, and why it has been sent.

Perhaps his father has had a heart attack or his mother has met with a street accident. For the next few hours we can't help thinking occasionally about J.O.B. and imagining how he went away for this hike, lighthearted, with his pack and a tent most likely, never thinking that anything might go wrong at home in the meantime. If he or his friend has not taken a radio set along or the farmer from whom they buy their milk hasn't heard the announcement, and even if he has, hasn't had the idea to ask them whether one of them is John O. Blank, he will never know that his father is dangerously ill until it is maybe too late. And then we begin to think of the father or mother and we are sorry for them because we can well imagine how sad it must be to be ill and not have one's son around.

And, of course, we never hear what happened in the end, and it is left to us to write our own version of the drama and let Mr. Blank get the news

in time, jump on the next train to Wellington, rush to the hospital and find that his mother is much better and not dangerously injured at all, but has kept on asking for John O. and is very happy to see him.

SOMETIMES the Shortest Dramas appear like this "Will anybody knowing the whereabouts of Tony, aged three, please communicate with the nearest police station. He has been missing from the home of his parents at 18 — Street, Wellington, since 10 o'clock in the morning. He has blue eyes, fair hair, is of sturdy build and was wearing navy blue shorts, a grey flannel shirt, blue socks and brown sandals."

Or it may be "... Mrs. Annie F. —, staying with her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. D. M. —, of 21 — Road, Auckland. Mrs. — is 74 years of age; she left her daughter's home early in the afternoon, and was wearing a dark grey dress, black coat

and hat, and black shoes. Mrs. —, who was supposed to go for a quick errand to the grocer's, is believed to be suffering from loss of memory."

Or: "... Alison —, who left home to go to school as usual this morning, but did not return. She is 11 years old, tall for her age, with brown hair and freckles. She was wearing a print frock, red cardigan, no stockings, and black shoes."

STRANGE, how the knowledge of a person's age, the colour of their hair and of the things they wear is sufficient to make you experience a whole family's anxieties, if all you know apart from that is that they are missing from their homes. We can imagine how Mrs. — was hanging out her washing with little Tony playing around, and while she was inside getting the second lot he must have slipped away. He had the habit of going round to the neighbours and when he wasn't there she went down the road,



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