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RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say

What is Realistic?

TOM ROBERTSON was merely a name to me, before I heard the programme dealing with "The Realistic Stage" in the *English Theatre* from 4YA. Although his plays don't seem to be known nowadays, Robertson was evidently the first playwright to shuffle off the coil of high-falutin' melodramatic dialogue of the unhand-me-sir type, in favour of plain everyday speech such as ordinary people commonly use. This, combined with the fact that he invented realistic stage scenery (real door-handles, forsooth!) made him a pioneer to whom the modern stage owes a great deal of its naturalness. As the speaker said, however, there are two schools of thought on the subject. Realism carried too far has strange results. On the one hand, the players do their stuff in a spectacular setting which has the audience gaping and allows it to ignore the words; there is very little difference between the real floods and fires of melodrama and the urge which made Wagner request, in the first act of the *Rhinegold*, "the upper part of the scene filled with moving water which restlessly streams from L. to R." On the other hand, realistic dialogue carried to extremes results in the one-syllable conversations of Noel Coward. And there must be, among play-goers, not a few who would be quite content to have their plays acted against Isadore Duncan's plain blue curtains, provided they could, at the same time, listen to the un-realistic blank verse of Shakespeare, or some such pre-Robertsonian dramatist.

Posthumous Performances?

IN a carping moment I wrote down several announcers' errors which annoyed me at the time—the announcer who always says Shawmann for Schumann, the announcer who added a syllable to the word "pavane," and the one who pronounces "viola" as though it were a species of pansy. But the palm must surely go to the announcer at the South Otago Schools' Choral festival, who told us that two women accompanists had "just been presented with floral wreaths." Or is this a custom in Balclutha?

Sea Beast

A VETERAN who prefers to be known as "Bosun" spoke the other night from 3YA on "Pelorus Jack," the porpoise or dolphin of whom the young New Zealander first hears while gazing suspiciously from his cradle. "Bosun's" choice of a name and his reminiscences somehow suggest the Ancient Mariner (though his manners are far superior and his persistence correspondingly less and certainly Coleridge—or perhaps Melville—would have been the best authority on this fish (as we, with "Bosun," may agree to call him, with his unflinching accompanying of vessels and the innumerable legends that gathered about his name. Some New Zealand folklorist will have to make a collection of these; and "Bosun" will provide a number. I particularly appreciated the tale of the steward who did something to offend Jack and was dogged by ill-luck for the

rest of his seafaring days, his ships running aground or sinking under him "so that he finally left the shipping company and took up a position in Napier." The story of Pelorus Jack illustrates the interesting fact that the instinct of play seems to have developed in the sea-going mammals, so that men have traditionally regarded them with a measure of affection. The most ancient illustrations to Homer are those of the Greek black-figured vases of the 8th Century B.C. In these the men have pointed beards sticking out at right angles to the profile, and white gleaming Levantine eyes that make the words "the wily Odysseus" come suddenly and disreputably alive; and whenever the artist wishes to convey that his scene is at sea he shows leaping about the human figures a company of dolphins, who have a cheerful appearance and even a facial expression very like the man's. It is in this character that one should think of Pelorus Jack.

The Reluctant Revolutionary

STATION 4YA's BBC programme, dealing with Darwin's *Origin of Species* and how it came to be written, was extremely fascinating. Naturally, that remarkable book *The Voyage of the Beagle* formed an early source of quotation, and not having read it, I was impelled to fill such a gap in my education by getting hold



of a copy as soon as possible. This account of a five-year voyage in a 235-ton brig must be one of the curiosities both of science and of literature. Darwin's subsequent notebooks gradually reveal the development of the great theory of the origin of species which was to rock the foundations of the civilised world. Preceded by a few cautious entries in the notebooks, over several years, comes finally the definite statement that in his opinion ("it is like confessing to a murder," he wrote) species are not immutable. The programme then gave an all-too-brief glimpse into the Darwin home-life (a comfortable countryside existence with the accompaniment of dogs, children, experiments, conversation, backgammon, and reading aloud), and reached the moment of the joint publication of the theory by Darwin and Wallace. It ended appropriately at the moment of the fearful and wonderful scrimmage among the opposing forces of science and reaction, a battle in which the result might be set down as "Huxley defeated Wilberforce, 100 to nil."

Vox Anonyma

MYRA THOMSON and H. Glaysher have returned to the 3YA air with a series based on the harp and voice combination and entitled *The People Sing*. In her introductory remarks Miss Thomson spoke of the vast mass of anonymous folk-song—lullabies, nursery rhymes, market, labouring and popular ritual songs—selections from which she