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Mervyn Taylor is Unconventional Engraver

WHEN I was invited by the secretary of the Auckland Society of Arts to go round to see a one-man show by E. Mervyn Taylor the other day I said I'd be most interested to see it, but as we weren't in the habit of reviewing one-man shows I couldn't very well write anything about it.

"Well, that's a pity, but come round just the same — coffee's on at five o'clock," she said. So I went round, knowing that the show consisted of the wood engravings recently published in book form (reviewed in the last issue of *The Listener*) and, in addition, about two dozen water colours, pencil drawings and lino-cuts.

Mr. Taylor himself was there with the secretary and a teacher from the Technical College and we all had coffee and a pretty good gingerbread. The conversation proper began when I told Mr. Taylor that the Snail was my favourite engraving in his book, and he looked at it with his head on one side and said:

"Yes, I like it myself. That's the one I got most excitement out of doing. I got terrifically excited over it. I was furious when I was interrupted for meals. Funny thing was that it went quite quickly, built up well. No hitches." Upon which I decided to change my mind about writing something. Mr. Taylor stood up and began to walk with his hands in his pockets. He is a small dark man and he speaks with an accent he describes as original Auckland overlaid with Wellington. The result is a sort of wind-blown speech in which words and sentences fall and hang, fall again, fall and disappear. . . . I asked him which was his own favourite, if he had such a thing as a favourite.

"Oh yes, I have favourites. But they change from day to day. At the moment it's the Snail and Viking, the boat. But I can't for the life of me guess why this or that one becomes a favourite with the public. Queer." I looked round the walls and saw repeated red stickers on the Weta (which appeared as a cover illustration on *The Listener* of June 14 last) and on a dark lino-cut entitled "Toward Evening"; others as well, but these two in particular.

"The fact that it appeared on *The Listener* cover explains the popularity of the Weta, I suppose," Mr. Taylor said, "but why on earth should this one be so popular?" This was folded hills, a leaning tree, an old wooden gate and bit of fence—it was clear to all of us

that its appeal was in its homeliness; no one would be heard saying of it, "I like it, but I don't think I'd like to live with it."

"The funny thing about the Weta is that I saw it again soon after it appeared on *The Listener* cover," the Technical College teacher said. "One of my pupils achieved an enormous lino-cut which puzzled me very much until I realised what inspired it."

Crayfish to Follow

"I suppose it appeals to them because it looks like a design for a tank of the future, something monstrous and fearsome. The next thing I want to do is a crayfish, something that will really keep me busy." Mr. Taylor looked as if he had hopes of more terrific excitement, more opportunities of being furious at interruptions for meals. He is away back to Wellington by now and I can imagine that he is scowling with concentration over a red and spiny monster. He has made many peaceful and soothing engravings and lino-cuts and drawings, but those are not the chief characteristics of his clear and vigorous work.

The engravings in the book were reproduced from the originals. I asked Mr. Taylor what effect such a printing (an edition of 500 copies) had on the blocks and he explained that it is only steel engravings that need to be used sparingly. "Some wood engravings have stood up to 90,000 printings—not that any of mine will ever reach such figures—and the blocks are not any worse after the last printing than after the first. But I limit each engraving to a certain number—see the inscription in the corner of each: 'Ed/35' and so on, indicating the number in the edition. Then I scrape off the surface and use the block for another engraving."

"But suppose that becomes very valuable and you haven't the original? Might you not be sorry in ten years' time?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"What sort of press do you use to take off these 35 prints by hand, one by one?" I asked.

Enter the Teaspoon

"I ink the block and put down the printing paper and then more paper, and then I just rub with the back of a teaspoon. I find it's the only way to get a satisfactory print." We all looked somewhat amazed; the same thought struck two of us at once—that the prints didn't allow much margin of payment for patience. The water colours and drawings were all priced higher than the prints—some twice, three times, or four times as high—and the highest-priced print was 3 guineas, the highest-priced water colour 17 guineas. But when you work it out you get the charming conclusion that the sale of a full edition of 35 prints at 10/6 each brings in just a little more than the sale of the one water colour at 17 guineas. Which, for me, was a delightful addition to the teaspoon-back for a printing press and Mr. Taylor's general air of uncomplicated enjoyment in his work.

—J.

Radio in Germany

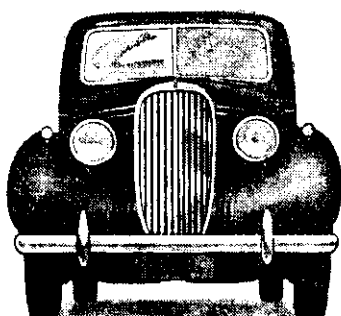
REX PALMER, first director of the BBC's London station at Savoy Hill in the early 'twenties, has been appointed Controller of German Broadcasting in the British zone. He has the task of building up an efficient, trustworthy, and, above all, Nazi-free radio organisation. Palmer, a baritone, often sang at the microphone, especially in the Children's Hour.

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