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THE OPEN-AIR ARTIST . . .

. . . And the People
Who Hang About

(Written for "The Listener" by
JOHN MAGURK)

YOU have hunched yourself into a weird position, in an endeavour to keep the sun off the paper, but the washes of colour are drying much too fast, and it's hopeless trying to get a good even gradation of tone in the sky, and a couple of mosquitoes are making persistent attacks and a breeze is wafting sand to the moist colours.

You console yourself by deciding that it will be a good reference sketch anyway.

Then it happens.

There is a scream in the distance. "A NARTIST!" They come tearing up and breathe on the back of your neck.

"Bring a pitcher?"

"A pitcher of the view?"

You must be tolerant. You must not scowl and mutter. You must smile and say, "Yes, I'm painting a picture." (As though it is not obvious). But you're wishing you were in the Orongorongos or at Terawhiti or somewhere in the Alps or one of the other silent places where you can work all day in peace.

SEVERAL years ago, Martin Hardie sent a questionnaire to thirty leading English artists and one of his questions concerned this problem. He writes:

"On the question of working out-of-doors, I find that twenty of the thirty are adversely affected by onlookers, whether passers or friends, admirers or scoffers, and that ten remain unconscious of their presence, or are even stimulated by a surrounding crowd. . . . John Nash is undisturbed by crowds, or even cows, horses, bulls or pigs!"

I MENTIONED above that you can work in peace in the Alps. Well, generally. In the *British Mountaineering Journal*, Alan C. Browne tells of an experience on the Franz Joseph Glacier, with an audience of one.

" . . . I took a half-Imperial sheet of paper, and through snow nearly waist deep made for where a big clump of bare, wind-swept rocks still showed. Here I began a charcoal sketch of the head of the glacier and the main peaks on the Divide. While I worked 'old John Kea' came along, and in his usual inquisitive way began picking at the laces of my boots, pulling my cape, and doing his best to sample the paints in the box. We talked, old John Kea and I, while I fed him on crust, and so we spent half-an-hour, till the sun disappeared behind Moltke and the icy cold night wind began to blow down from the peaks. Then we returned to the hut, old John Kea hopping along beside me, chattering and talking all the way."

HAVE artists "adversely affected by onlookers" a solution? Here is some advice, given last century to would-be artists, by a Frenchman named Fraipont: "When you have settled yourself nothing must daunt you. J'y suis, j'y reste. Send those who stand in front of you civilly to the right-about; make play



with your elbows on those who get too close to them, and forget those who are behind you. Abstract yourself, or only laugh at their idiotic remarks. An artist of my acquaintance hit upon a plan for getting rid of inconvenient brats. Prussian blue was his means of defence. He suddenly applied a bush well-filled with this strong colour to the face of a prying boy, who, in trying to wipe it off, smeared himself all over. The notion is droll enough, but I cannot altogether recommend it, more especially because the mere-sketcher is not always provided with this dreadful blue; the application of the recipe must be left to the painter."

DEAN FAUCETT, a modern American painter, has a scheme too, though his is not as drastic as Fraipont's. When discussing his water-colour technique re-

cently, with the editor of the *American Artist*, Faucett explained:

"I used to have a paint rag handy for drying brushes, but one day in Sweden I discovered the great advantage of the shaking-out method. I was feverishly painting a rapidly changing sky and had collected quite a group of onlookers. They began to crowd around, politely enough to be sure, but they pressed uncomfortably close and it bothered me. I hit upon the plan of flicking the water from my brush. It worked."

ROYAL ACADEMICIAN W. RUSSELL FLINT can work away at his brilliant water-colours and not worry about a gathering crowd. In Arnold Palmer's biography of Flint, the latter records:

"Venetians become friendly, helpful and interested—too interested, sometimes. My wife has counted packs of more than fifty surrounding me when painting. I have been honoured by exclamations, over a deft stroke, akin to the 'A-ah!' of a crowd watching fireworks!"

CREEP up on that artist if you want to. Peer over his shoulder and make comments if you really must. He may be a genial person like John Nash or Russell Flint, but on the other hand if he agrees with Fraipont and he has chanced to read this. . . . You are hereby warned that Monastral Blue and Alizarin Crimson are the very devil to remove. . . .

CROSBIE MORRISON AGAIN

WHETHER Crosbie Morrison, the Australian radio naturalist, is discussing the habits of the lamprey or the characteristics of the cabbage-white butterfly, his broadcasts are of the kind that hold children from their play and old men from the chimney corner. One of his latest recordings, played through by 2ZB for *The Listener* the other day, finds him as fresh as ever, after several years of wild-life broadcasting, in his description of the coral in the Great Barrier Reef.

Morrison tells many interesting things in this disc. For instance, there is no such thing as a coral insect, though school books of 50 years ago maintained that it existed and declared that it was busy all day building the great reefs. Actually, he explains, coral is the skeleton of a tiny animal, the flesh part of which rots and is washed away. He describes a visit by launch to the Great Barrier, which is 1250 miles long and 20 miles wide in parts—the largest coral reef in the world.

He talks of sea anemones of brilliant colour, and the marine delights to be seen with the water-telescope—which is not so imposing an instrument as its name suggests. Anybody can make one from a tube or a kerosene tin, glassed in at the bottom, and sunk an inch into the water to eliminate the ripple which spoils vision.

Morrison is president of the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, a member



CROSBIE MORRISON
Still going strong

of the Council of the Royal Society, an M.A. (Melbourne University), and lecturer in natural history to the University Extension Board. He assisted in research on the Great Barrier for the Royal Australian Navy in 1925, and was naturalist to the first McKay Aerial Survey Expedition to Central Australia in 1930. But he is best known to New Zealanders for his radio talks on wild life, and a new series of these, *The Junior Naturalists' Club*, is now being heard from 3ZB, 4ZB and 2ZA every Tuesday at 6.15 p.m. Stations 1ZB and 2ZB will present the feature shortly after December 10.

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