

TEN YEARS OF STORY-TELLING

Bryan O'Brien and His Young Listeners

WHEN the ZB's "story-time man" called at a Wellington school recently to arrange a ZB Gazette feature, the headmaster took him into a classroom of six to eight-year-olds, and said "Hands up all those who listen on the air to Bryan O'Brien." All hands shot up. "Well," said the Head, "here he is in front of you." And pleased smiles were mutual.

So later we asked Bryan O'Brien to tell us, not a bed-time story, but how, once upon a time, he came to take up the hobby of story-teller to youngsters. He has, he said, lots of nephews and nieces and when they were very young, he could never get away from a visit to them without making up a tale or two for their amusement. It was impromptu and he soon found himself expected to dig up episodes for what threatened to become an endless serial. "They were little tyrants, but they trained me well and I enjoyed it as much as they did," he said.

Before he took up story-telling, he practised law in Wellington, didn't like it much, and decided to give more attention to musical, dramatic and radio work, going in for these seriously at the first opportunity. He has produced several one-act plays in Wellington, won the *Radio Record* cup in 1933, and, for two years in succession, the cup presented by the *Dairy Exporter* for the best play by a New Zealand author in the British Drama League's festival. Out of doors he represented Wellington in inter-provincial tennis for some years.

It is now about 10 years since he began to take parts in radio plays for 2YA, and since he did his first job at 2ZB in the Sunday afternoon story-time session. Then this later became a daily feature,

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oftener than a certain weekly paper uses the word "alleged" and the mistress of the house presided. Let me hasten to add she was as hard a worker and as good a housekeeper as her predecessors. In addition she was an adviser in business affairs, a good friend in need and as happy and cheerful a body as ever you'd see. She no doubt had her worries, but for all you saw of them they might have been as mythical as the technical majority at certain European elections.

Well-nourished and cared for and thus equipped by five years of tutelage under these ladies (in loco parentis), I was launched to face this "busie watchful and suspicious world"; with what success I permit only my friends to say. One can't, of course, be good at everything.

and now it is one of the oldest entertainment sessions in New Zealand radio. O'Brien is now producer for the Commercial Division of the NZBS.

We seemed to be getting near the end of the interview when Bryan O'Brien remarked casually that a trip to Little America had provided him with a great deal of material.

"Little America? With Byrd?"

"Yes, in 1934, as a programme producer attending to the entertainment side of the expedition," he said. "I was away four months and one of my jobs



BRYAN O'BRIEN and two young helpers about to take part in a studio broadcast

was to train the dog-team drivers in a choir which sang songs depicting the general atmosphere of the expedition."

Strange Audition

He told us about what must be one of the most unusual auditions in radio anywhere. An ambitious young songwriter named Byron Gay on board the Jacob Ruppert, was inspired to write a song which he called *The End of the Earth*. The ship was then in the pack-ice. By short-wave they got into touch with Gay's publishers in New York who took the audition. Gay played the accompaniment and Bryan O'Brien sang the words.

"What was the result?"

"It may have been my singing, or the fault of the song, but I, at least, heard nothing more about it."

Like most radio personalities, Bryan O'Brien is familiar with fan-mail, but the letters he gets are probably far more interesting than those which go to adults from adult admirers, for children are too honest to be diplomatic. Here is one from his collection: "Dear Bryan—I am in Standard Four; I am a very good cricketer; I am the only boy ever to smash the school window with a sixer."

He recalls an intense-looking boy approaching him once as he was going into the studio and, with a rush of words saying: "Please Bryan O'Brien can I sing on the air I know Kiss Me Good-Night Sergeant Major and I know Roll Out the Barrel my grandmother's very sick she's dying."

Handling children's sessions, he has found, calls for exercise of the wits. An

announcer who was not quite used to it fell into a trap when conducting a children's quiz advertising a breakfast food. There was to be a money prize for the winner and a packet of biscuits for every entrant. Unwisely the announcer asked a boy: "Well, little man, and how do you like this session?" Holding his hand out for the biscuits, the boy replied firmly, "I don't; I can't stand it."

Naturally Bryan O'Brien has learned a good deal about children, about their outlook on life, and their likes and dislikes, and he has put it to good use in the two children's books which he has already published. Two more, he told us, have been accepted for publication.

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