

(continued from previous page)

course, a distinct odour of mothballs about these glimpses of a young man, a "toy philosopher," flitting from flower to flower to the accompaniment of popping champagne corks, and occasionally stopping to wonder what it was all about. But if you could lull your social conscience to sleep the sketches were good for a chuckle or two (at the young man who hypnotises his sweetheart and then lacks the will-power to ask her if she has another lover) or a sigh or two for chorus girl who, having nerved herself to tell her lover she must leave him for another, is annoyed when he makes a similar confession. I suppose "Anatole" was very true to life, but to a life incredibly remote in time and space from the average New Zealander.

### Super Summer-up

MISS BETTY ODELL'S masterly summing-up of the Friday night appreciation talks (2YA, October 8) fills me with faith in an education system that can produce so feat a summer-upper. Miss Odell's method of quoting verbatim from each of the preceding appreciation talks and adding her own comments was delightfully informal, and had the merit of reminding listeners of the salient points in each speaker's argument while at the same time implying that there's no more obligation to believe all we hear from the NZBS than there is to believe all we read in the newspapers. I think it is the first summing-up I have heard over the air which was more than an uncritical and unquestioning résumé of previous arguments. Now this method of rounding off a series could in unskilled hands be destructive, it could concentrate the attention of listeners on minor and less proven policies and make them feel that they and their speakers had got nowhere. But that did not happen. The guarded rather than facile optimism of Miss Odell's conclusions bears witness not only to her own judgment but to the calibre of her predecessors.

### When Silliness Fails

THE old saying about one man's meat is particularly true in humour, and what will rock the theatre audience often falls flat in radio. The "whimsical" brand of humour is especially prone to mishap on the air-waves, and seldom appeals unless the listener is whimsically-minded or has seen the comedian and so can bring memory to his aid in elaborating the purely vocal picture. I am thinking especially of a recent session featuring Mr. Baker, who accepts the nick-name "two-ton." The sort of whimsy in which he delights is the delicate little personal song of naive and childish appeal, and those who haven't heard him will understand what I mean when I append a few of his titles, "I Wove a Wabbit," "I'm a Wittle Teapot," and "I'm a Wonely Wittle Petunia in an Onion-Patch." This, of course, is the sort of thing Arthur Askey has been doing for years, with seagulls, fairies, worms, and bees as his subjects. But for me Askey succeeds (except in an occasional record) in putting it across, and Baker does not. The explanation may be that Askey succeeds by pretending to be perfectly serious about the whole darn silly thing, and by adding

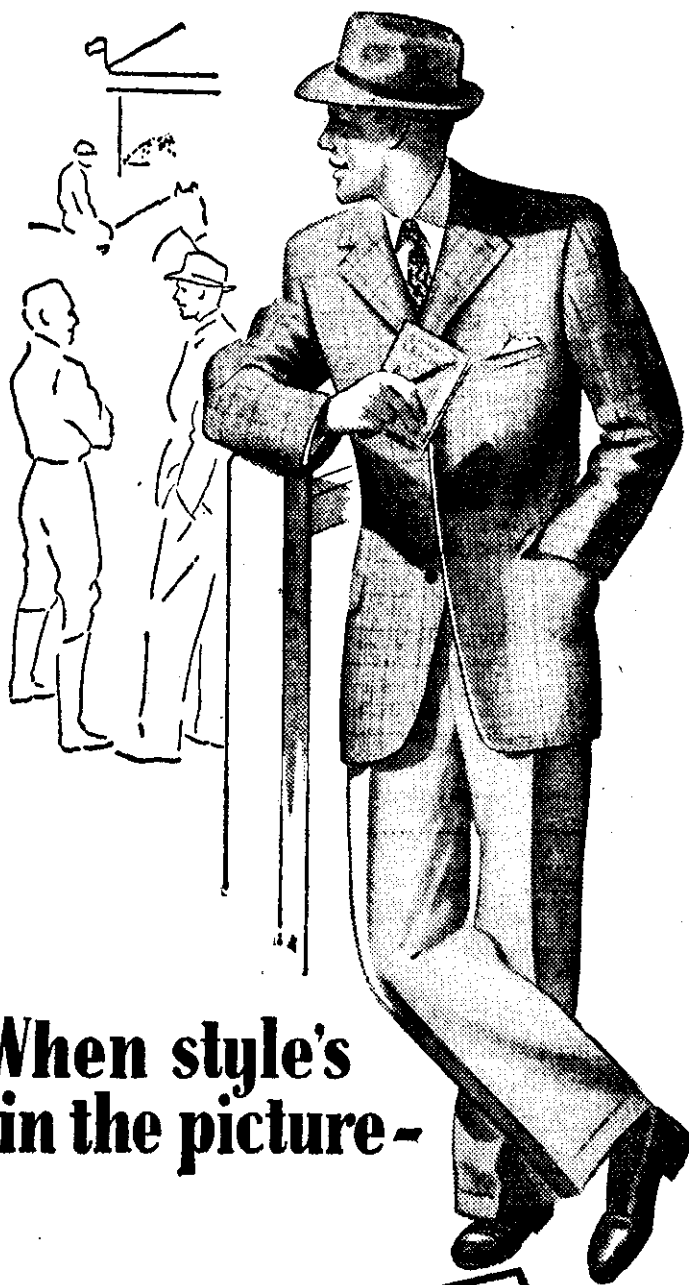
a spice of pure malice to his whimsy, whereas Mr. Baker too obviously has his tongue in his cheek. Besides, no copy is effective when you have known the original for years.

### Microphone Impromptus

*MIND Your I's and Q's* is announced as "a new type of quiz," offering listeners entertainment and amusement. The average radio quiz is often a dull affair; those amateurs who offer to compete usually fall into two classes—those who know the answers but can't talk, and those who can talk, but in doing so reveal themselves as abysmally ignorant. In *Mind Your I's and Q's* we have a few selected speakers who seem to have been hand-picked for both knowledge and the ability to face a microphone with ease and confidence. The result so far is not only a fluent session but a brilliant one. The art of extemporising has practically vanished from ordinary human intercourse, as it has also from the list of the average musician's accomplishments. In this session we are reminded that facts are a poor substitute for sparkling conversation, and that many a speaker may be more entertaining on a subject of which he knows nothing than a learned professor on his own dry-as-dust hobby horse. This is the kind of session which appeals to all heights of brow, and we can do with more such programmes.

### Lost in Time

GEOLOGICALLY speaking, seven hundred years is but a moment in time; the species *homo sapiens* could not change in any major way between 1200 and 1948. Yet the dominant impression after listening to the 3YA presentation of Prokofieff's Cantata *Alexander Nevsky* was of separation and complete unfamiliarity. Not with the music, but with the people, and particularly with those mechanised myths the Teutonic Knights. Apparently Prokofieff sensed deeply this separation. He researched into 12th Century music, looking for a theme for the Knights, but he could find nothing that would have stirred a 20th Century ear. Their expressions of passion, as they advanced across the snow from Pskov, were not ours. So Prokofieff wrote grinding modern mechanical dissonances for them. Oddly enough, the modern sets off the ancient perfectly, and there they are, in *Nevsky*, frighteningly unfamiliar, locked up in their armour senseless and inhuman as railway engines in a rage. What were their thoughts? How did they live? Did they ever smile at small children or potter in the vegetable garden? How were they able to split their personalities sufficiently to reconcile their religious pretensions and their brutality? For all we know of their real selves they might as well have existed on another planet. But the strange thing about this separation in time is its very inconsistency: the Teutonic Knights are unfamiliar and meaningless silhouettes, but it is easy, on the instant, to think of three people who appear to us in the round, living and breathing; their names are Herodotus, Thucydides, and Christ, and they lived further away in time from the Teutonic Knights than those mechanical monsters do from us.



When style's  
in the picture—

