

HAND-MAIDEN TO A MIRACLE

Written for "The Listener"
by JOHN MORRIS

Do we come on you unaware,
Your set untended
Do you put down your newspaper to lift an
ear.
Suspend what you were just about to say.
Or stay the fingertip that could snap shut
The traps of night between us?
—Norman Corwin in "Seems Radio is
Here to Stay."

IN London a big man makes an important announcement. In Auckland another big man throws his opponent clean over the ropes. In Wellington, a famous English actor and his equally-gifted wife bid New Zealand farewell and give graceful thanks to those who are so much in their debt. In America a Presidential candidate confounds the snatchers of straw votes and stages a last-minute run which carries him to victory. A king abdicates; a mediator is assassinated; and Miss Josie Schultze, of Brooklyn, New York, is installed with all due pomp and ceremony as Miss America of 1949.

And how do we learn of these things? No longer need we wait while patient reporters garner the news; while sub-editors wrestle with sub-headings and skilled operators mould metal for tomorrow's paper. In the quietness and comfort of our own homes we merely

turn a switch and in the twinkling of an eye . . . an electronic eye . . . our radio goes racing round the world to bring eyewitness accounts of triumphs and disasters.

BUT radio brings us much more than headline events. We can learn to make bricks without straw or cakes without butter or how to take ink-stains out of those double damask dinner napkins. We can tune into a streamlined version of an old parlour game and listen to a smooth compère mislead an eager panel with animal, vegetable, and mineral clues. With the aid of a well-known sports commentator we can take vicarious part in Rugby trials where young gladiators battle for a coveted place in the team to tour South Africa. If we so desire we can tune into the very workshop of Democracy itself and listen to Members of Parliament attempting to make verbal mincemeat of "the honourable gentleman who has just resumed his seat" or asking urgent questions about the infinite lack of variety in radio programmes. If our mood is a musical one, we can summon Beethoven, Brahms, or Bing Crosby or listen to Spike Jones and His City Slickers, musical satirists who quickly bring the kiss

of death to a commonplace tune. We can enjoy "soap operas" and marvel at the tangled skeins of human passions which cannot possibly be untangled until the final episode.

AND when we are tired of all these things we can throw the little switch which brings us blessed silence and we can rest secure in the knowledge that the maw of radio is inexhaustible and that for programme supervisors tomorrow is merely another day.

However it is worth remembering that the broadcasting services of to-day—so complex, so delicately tuned and timed—had its humble beginnings here a mere 25 years ago, when radio programmes were provided by a handful of enthusiastic broadcasters whose resources were limited to overseas recordings and a few local artists who were prepared to offer their services just for the fun of the thing. If programmes were meagre, then listeners were few—it is recorded that receiving licences in the first year of issue reached the staggering total of 3,000.

To-day radio licences in New Zealand total 428,000, which means that practically every home possesses a receiving

set. City homes, outback farms, lonely Public Works camps, high-country sheep stations, patients in hospitals, factory workers, housewives, everybody, everywhere an tune in to at least one of our 22 stations, some of which provide 18 hours of broadcasting daily.

And what of the radio sets themselves? It is a nice point whether better sets have demanded better programmes or whether technical improvements have been compelled by the ever-increasing scope and variety of radio entertainment.

IT can be said, however, that New Zealand-built radios offer as wide a choice to-day as the choice of entertainment . . . a choice which ranges from elaborate combination radio-gramophones to sets compact enough to be tucked under one arm. Portable sets, car radios, sets in coloured plastics, sets large and small have been developed in response to the modern demand for a radio for every possible purpose. This month the New Zealand radio industry celebrates its silver jubilee and the record of its achievement justifies its title, "Hand-maiden to a Miracle."

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