

ALL EDUCATION WAS HIS PROVINCE

Professor Shelley Pioneered in Many Fields

THE retirement of Professor James Shelley, Director of Broadcasting, brings to a close a career of nearly 30 years of public service in New Zealand. He has been Director of Broadcasting since 1936, and for 16 years before that he was Professor of Education at Canterbury University College.

Although the problems of administering the NZBS have occupied most of his time for the past 13 years, Professor Shelley has always been an educationist in the widest sense of the word, and his interest in all branches of drama, art, and music has been life-long. In 1920 he came to Christchurch as New Zealand's first professor of Education, and while at Canterbury College he founded the Christchurch Repertory Theatre, was instrumental in getting music recognised as an arts degree subject in the University of New Zealand, and organised the scheme which developed into our present Country Library Service.

Because of the war many of his plans for broadcasting in New Zealand have been slow in coming to fruition, but with the formation of a National Orchestra, and the establishment at Timaru of the first of a projected chain of local radio stations which will be in the nature of "radio community centres," he feels that much of his work is done. The ideal he has kept rigidly before him in all phases of broadcasting has been to raise the standard of whatever work was broadcast. "If it is drama we must try to raise the standard of New Zealand production," he says, "and the same applies to music—I don't care if it's swing, but it must be good swing." If the Broadcasting Service in New Zealand to-day can compare favourably with that of other countries, it is because these standards have been set and that outlook maintained.

At Cambridge

Professor Shelley was born at Coventry, England, on September 3, 1884. He was educated at Bablake School, Coventry, and Christ's College, Cambridge. He became an assistant master at Heanor Secondary School in 1907, and tutor at the Training College, Chester, in 1908. He was a lecturer in education at Manchester University in 1910, and in 1914, at the age of 29, he became Professor of Education at Southampton University College. When war broke out with Germany he enlisted in the army as a private, was later commissioned in the Royal Field Artillery, and was invalided home from the front in 1917. In that year he became Chief Instructor at the War Office School of Education, first at Cambridge University, and later at Newmarket. In this capacity he helped to organise a scheme of education for the whole of the British Army, which became the prototype of similar schemes adopted universally in the Second World War.

In his own mind he sees his past career, as divided into phases, according to his dominant interests. That which he places first, as coming perhaps closest to him, is drama. "I can remember playing at making model stages

when I was very small," he says, "and I started a play-acting group when I was just a youth. When I was 17 or 18 I produced *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night*. At Chester we started dramatic work in the college, and produced Browning's tragedy *Luria*—as far as I know the only time it's been produced. At Manchester University we started a drama society and produced works like Masefield's *Pompey the Great*, Ibsen's *Brand*, and Yeats's *The Hour Glass*. I started drama work at Southampton University too, but we weren't able to do much there because of the war. We did do a lot of dramatic work in the army, however, and produced what were known as 'soldiers' plays'—some of Lord Dunsany's I remember amongst them.

Drama and Art

"In Christchurch I gave a series of lectures in modern drama to the W.E.A. in 1920—the first, I believe, ever given on the subject out here—and we formed the Canterbury College Drama Society. We produced plays like Masefield's *Good Friday*, and Thomas Hardy's *Queen of Cornwall*, and when the Christchurch Repertory Theatre was formed we produced more, among them Clifford Bax's *Socrates*, Ibsen's *Pillars of Society* and *An Enemy of the People*, and Clemence Dane's *A Bill of Divorcement*."

Professor Shelley has always been interested in practical stagecraft, too, and he has designed a great number of sets over the past 40 years, both in England and New Zealand. He has also been intensely interested in stage lighting, in which he made many early experiments. And in many of the plays he produced he also acted in the leading roles.

Art has been the second of his major interests, and he remembers that the first public lecture he ever gave on art was over 50 years ago, when he was just 14 years old. The subject was Michelangelo. He feels as if he has been lecturing on art ever since, and while at Canterbury College he was Lecturer on History of Art to students for the Diploma of Fine Arts.

There is hardly an aspect of art in which he has not experimented as an amateur, whether it be watercolour, oils, woodcut, miniature painting, or illuminated manuscript work. Among the fruits of such activities those which have given him most pleasure are an illuminated address which was presented to Sir James Hight when he retired from the rectorship of Canterbury College, and one or two hand-set brochures, illustrated with woodcuts, about plays he produced

in his early days. He is also interested in the restoration of old pictures, and has spent hundreds of hours on this delicate work.

Pioneering in Education

But it is education which has been his life work, and from among the positions offered to him after the war ended he chose to come to New Zealand, because he felt there was pioneer work to be done here in that field. After his appointment to the Professorship of Education he worked to get that subject recognised in the higher stages, and took the first Honours classes in it. Professor H. Field, the present Education Professor, was one of his first Honours students. He also lectured in allied subjects such as psychology and anthropology, and numbered among his students Dr. C. E. Beeby, now Director of Education, and Roger Duff, Director of the Canterbury Museum. Art and Drama he taught to W.E.A. classes, and in 1920 ran the first Summer School at Oxford, in Canterbury. He introduced the W.E.A. "Box Scheme," by which boxes of records, dramatic scripts, and coloured prints are sent around rural districts. He also evolved a scheme for running a van fitted out as a travelling library to the country districts of Canterbury, and Geoffrey Alley, now Director of the National Library Service, was in charge of this first van. In this work great help was received from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, whose representative, Dr. F. P. Keppel, came to Canterbury at that time.

In 1931 Professor Shelley visited the United States at the invitation of the Corporation, and gave a series of lectures at Universities and other institutions there. While he was in the United States he wrote a book, *Speech, Poetry,*

"Things to Come" will be found this week on page 11.

and Drama, and made 12 gramophone records, published along with the book, as an approach to the teaching of poetry through the dramatic method.

Music in Schools

There was little music taught in New Zealand schools when Professor Shelley first came here, and he was one of those who helped to introduce the subject, going around himself to lecture to the children, with gramophone records to illustrate his talks. It was when he saw that children were forgetting what they had learnt because there was no opportunity to carry their study further, that he suggested to the Academic Board that music be made a degree subject, a recommendation which was implemented in the same year.

Amongst Professor Shelley's most prized possessions is a copy of John Masefield's play *Pompey the Great*, the text of which has been altered in the poet laureate's own handwriting for the production at Manchester in 1913. The third act has been deleted entirely, and a new one substituted. This was the only production of the play in that form, Professor Shelley thinks, and later John Masefield wrote him a letter thanking him for his production.

"Praise and blame one gets hardened to," wrote Masefield, "as one comes to realise that one deserves neither, but to be understood and to have one's drift perceived, being much more rare than these, is a real reward, which gives more pleasure than one can say. I thank you very much."

Professor Shelley will be succeeded by Mr. William Yates, at present Assistant-Director of Broadcasting.



THIS PHOTOGRAPH from Professor Shelley's collection commemorates the production of Ibsen's "Brand" at Manchester in 1912. Taken between acts it shows him (in costume for the title-role) seated in the centre with, on his left, Professor J. R. Herford, the Shakespearean scholar and translator of "Brand," and on his right, Mrs. Herford. John Masefield is at the extreme left.