



TEN OVER-CROWDED YEARS

THE paper was born under the shadow of war, and for the greater part of its existence has been published in wartime. If we had known that war would be on us before we were three months old, it is certain that we should never have started at all. But we did start: the first appearance was made on June 30, 1939—approximately 20 years after the first page of broadcasting history had been written in this country. It was a special free issue of 56 pages, 380,000 copies being distributed to householders, and our office statistician at the time worked out that it consumed nearly 2,000 miles of paper, sufficient almost to encircle both islands!

HITLER CLIPPED OUR WINGS

SUCH prodigal use of newsprint was not to last long. Hitler saw to that. Our size, our shape, and in many respects our make-up too, are still what he made them when he cut our supplies of paper. But first there was a period when we used oceans of white space, wasteful headings, and large type in the editorial section with three wide columns to a page. In the programme section, 19 stations only were covered then, but we took three more pages than now to do it—plus two pages of programme chart in the centre. And of course the advertisements were there too: just as necessary then as now for a paper which, though an official journal, has to make its way without State subsidy, but just as complicating a factor in make-up.

That first issue contained several items which, when one looks back now, seem to have been prophetic. A message from Professor James Shelley, Director of Broadcasting, about the influence of the radio, foreshadowed the coming of war; another article drew optimistic attention to the construction of the future Broadcasting House (it is still in the future); while a prophetic note was also sounded in the title of a feature that is still with us—*Things to Come*.

Book reviews were with us from the start (the main review in the first issue was of J. D. Pascoe's *Unclimbed New Zealand*). So was our artist, Russell Clark. So were the programmes and some of the items and performers in them, and so was our own editorial

WITH this issue "The Listener" will be 10 years old, and though we do not claim that this is a very momentous anniversary or an excuse for trumpet-blowing, it is perhaps permissible to glance for a moment over our shoulder. For the first 10 years of "The Listener's" life have been important formative years also in New Zealand's story, and most of the events and influences of those years, the trends and tendencies as well as the actual happenings, have been recorded or reflected in our pages: the raw material of the historian and the social scientist. However this survey is not concerned to criticise or to evaluate, but merely to remind.

emphasis on broadcasting, entertainment, literature and the arts. So was our special domestic problem of having to print in Auckland a journal that is edited and prepared in Wellington—a factor which has often put us and our subscribers at the mercy of bad weather and transport hold-ups, causing grey hairs among the staff in Wellington, and consternation in the printing works in Auckland. Several times a storm at Rongotai or a slip on the Main Trunk has made it seem impossible that *The Listener* could come out to schedule, just as at least twice during the war Hitler cut newsprint supplies so close to the bone that we gave ourselves only another month to live. But we survived Hitler and somehow we have managed to survive perils on the home front. And we shall probably continue to do so.

Apart from this, however, not a very great deal that was in those first few issues has remained the same. There were farming articles by Mary Scott, articles on sport, and Notes from the Gallery of Parliament (they did not last long); and an interview with Adolph Zukor, president of Paramount Pictures, who expressed himself as "convinced that there will be no world conflict." That was on August 4, 1939. On September 8 appeared our eleventh issue: it was a National Emergency number. We were at war.

THE MAN IN THE STREET

ON September 15 *The Listener* produced its first symposium—"War Comes to the Man in the Street"—the original of a type of feature, testing and reflecting public opinion on all manner of topics, which was to become a speciality of the paper. At the same time we kept pace with popular taste in entertainment by publishing the music and words of "Booms-a-Daisy." But then, and for quite a long time afterward, we were still printing the shortwave listings for stations in Berlin and Rome.

On September 29, *The Listener* incorporated the *Radio Record*; in the same issue was a feature entitled *Wellington Roundabout* by a contributor who called himself "Thid." This was the staff-writer Sydney Brookes, now Reuter's representative in Prague, who before he went overseas left his mark on the paper in many ways; as writer of short stories under his own name, as sports writer, as Puzzle editor, as writer of the two controversial series *Citizen into Soldier* and *Soldier into Civilian*, and as the man responsible for running to earth and interviewing W. H. ("Chinese") Donald and several other elusive celebrities who passed through New Zealand, and our pages, in those earlier days.

In October of 1939 there was the first of a feature called *War Diary*, and of a lengthy series about announcers and other radio personalities; our 19th issue, of November 3, was devoted to the Centennial Exhibition and thereafter the Exhibition was for a time to colour a good many of our pages, especially those devoted to the ZB stations. In the same month *The Listener's* Puzzle



Corner was overflowing into a full page nearly every issue; Dr. Elizabeth Bryson was opening up a series on *Food Fads and Fancies* with the memorable statement that "there is only one exercise that is really effective for reducing weight: it consists of a slow and decided movement of the head from left to right and back again when starchy foods are offered"; Aunt Daisy was making her bow to readers on December 1 under the same heading as today, and with Christmas Cakes as her theme; and in their section of the paper the Commercial stations were carrying out all manner of experiments in the presentation of their programmes and news items.

The year 1940 began with the war still in the sit-down stage in Europe and still a trifle unreal and faraway in New Zealand. We were still being lavish with white space and headings and were still running three columns to the page of editorial matter, but were finding it necessary to reduce the type size in some places—a development not welcomed by some correspondents who, at that stage, were mostly using the columns next to the leading article to say What They Thought of Us. It was, indeed, not until a good deal later that *Letters from Listeners* assumed their characteristic of being often as vitriolic as they are varied, and that the little word "Ed." became something to look for in small type at the bottom of many of them.

NO JAZZ JOURNALISM

BUT even by then the character and purpose of the paper had already become fairly clear-cut. It was expressed in an editorial of January 5, 1940, which, commenting on the debut of the *ABC Weekly*, said: "It would help our readers and help us if they would get it finally into their heads that to ask a Government to produce jazz-journalism is the same thing as asking it to teach the can-can to school children."

As was the case with the correspondence columns and some of the features, it took some time for many of the now-familiar names of contributors and interviewees to start appearing in our columns. But at the beginning of 1940 we had interviews with Halliday Sutherland, John Grierson, Maria Dronke, James Bertram, Ngaio Marsh, and Oscar Natke (that was the way he spelt it then) and we recorded the fact that Andersen Tyrer had arrived to direct the music of the Centennial Celebrations. And there were those special Tributes to Finland, France, and Norway in which we seemed unconsciously to fill the role of a prophet of doom, since almost no sooner had our tribute to its heroic resistance appeared than the country in question collapsed before