NEW ZEALAND LISTENER

INCORPORATING N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday — Price Threepence

AUGUST 19, 1949

Editorial and Business Offices: 115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.1.
G.P.O. Box 1707. Telephone 41-470.
Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

Radio Enters a Creative Phase

THE first Reith Lectures were given for the BBC by Bertrand Russell and were later published by George Allen and Unwin. Book and lectures have now arrived almost simultaneously in New Zealand—the book for sale to the public, and the lectures for rebroadcasting by the NZBS. Details of the broadcasts may be found on another page of this issue. Our purpose here is not to discuss the ideas in *Authority and the Individual*, but to take notice of the enterprise as an event in the development of radio. The Reith Lectures are intended to be "a stimulus to thought and a contribution to knowledge." Eminent thinkers are invited to "undertake some study or original research" and to embody the results of their work in broadcasts much longer than the usual talks. The lectures are therefore intended by the BBC to be the year's highest point in the use of the spoken word. Bertrand Russell's lectures have not been received without criticism in England, and it may be said that the quality of the first talk is maintained unevenly throughout the series. But even when a great thinker is below his best he may still be stimulating. The most interesting feature of the Reith Lectures, however, is to be found in their probable influence on broadcasting. For some time past there have been signs that radio talks were being studied as a new department in modern letters. Collections of scripts, by individuals and groups, have been published in London; and in some of these books the editors have used prefaces to discuss essential differences between the written and spoken word. A talk is not merely different from an essay; it is also different from a lecture given to a visible audience. The microphone makes special demands on the speaker. His thought must be sharpened, and he needs to use words economically, since communication between speaker and listener is immediate and direct. The choice of words should lean more towards a colloquial than a literary idiom. Finally, when the script has been prepared, it must be delivered naturally; and this cannot be done through the microphone unless the speaker is either a good talker, entirely free of self-consciousness, or something of an actor. It is interesting, therefore, to speculate on the possible results of an attempt to lift the radio talk to an academic level. Eminent thinkers have already been drawn into broadcasting; but a short talk, or even a series, is different from what is visualized in the Reith Lectures. Most talks on serious topics have been interpretative; the speakers have tried to give simple explanations of ideas and projects that have been conceived elsewhere. But now the thinker is to come straight to the microphone. Lectures will be given by authorities in sociology, literature, history, public affairs and economics. People who are invited to use this new platform will understand their opportunity. They will see that ideas can be sent into circulation far more quickly and widely than would be possible if they were contained in books. Publication comes afterwards, but interest has already been aroused, and many people who heard the broadcasts will want to study the material at leisure. The incentives are great enough to attract men and women of high reputation. In this way radio will provide opportunities for research, an immense audience, and a new discipline in expression. It may be too soon to suggest that the Reith Lectures will restore an ancient vitality to the spoken word, but the possibility is obviously in the minds of those who have planned the enterprise.