

"A Healthy Animation of the Air"...

The Hon. F. W. DOIDGE, Minister in Charge of Broadcasting, discusses the objectives of Radio in a New Year Message to Listeners.

AMONGST the tasks allotted me as a Cabinet Minister is one which will permit me to have a voice in shaping the character of broadcasting in New Zealand. Of all the assignments the Prime Minister has made in the new administration I feel that there is none more attractive than this. But its responsibilities are manifest.

Consider how Broadcasting has grown in a period of little more than twenty years. It seems only yesterday that we marvelled at the miracle of the crystal set. In 1926 there were 4,000 receiving sets in New Zealand. Today there are 433,965. The world over the story of progress is the same. Great Britain has ten million registered listeners. In the United States there are 59 millions. Actually, in America, six million more homes have radios than have bath tubs!

In that period of little more than a generation, it is true that Broadcasting has not followed any immediately definable group of objectives. It has, in this and every other country, simply felt its way forward, year by year. We are still in the process of doing that.

And, in the process, Broadcasting is a natural target for criticism. The listener pays his fee and thinks he has the right to demand the sort of service he wants. But there are 433,965 registered listeners in New Zealand. Tastes differ. What some people like others abhor. Classical music bores one section of the community; jazz exasperates another. Obviously it is impossible to devise a programme that appeals to all the people all the time. It is not easy to balance conflicting tastes. We can but strive to attain a standard of perfection.

THE problems which beset us are common to other countries. A prominent American monthly describes broadcasting in the United States as "in a condition of intellectual purgatory," and an article in a recent *Readers' Digest* on "Radio's Plug-uglies" was endorsed by letters from 80,000 angry subscribers.

It is trite but true to describe the radio as one of the world's mighty forces. How define its purpose? Editorial? Educational? Entertainment? If its function is to raise the standard of public enlightenment and taste, how delicate the task! How can one give the listener what he wants and at the same time give him what he ought to have?

The aim must be the gradual infusion of improved standards. We must seek to popularise good music, good drama, good educational features. It is the view of Sir William Haley, Director-General of the British Broadcasting Corporation, that the secret of leadership in broadcasting is that of being always ahead of the public and yet not so far ahead as to be out of touch. "A broadcast has no purpose," he says, "if it is not listened to. Our task is to draw more and more listeners to all that is worth while."

SO there must continue to be a gradual approach to the desired standard

of perfection. If popularity were the accepted guide to programmes, imitation would become the accepted rule, and new ideas would die at birth. My hope is that the New Zealand Broadcasting Service will adventure and experiment, freely and boldly. We shall make mistakes, and arouse controversy. But we are well-equipped, and we have a splendid staff under a practical Director, in Mr. William Yates.

The listener is, and always must be, the final judge. The intelligent and co-operative criticism of the listener will always be welcome. But if this invitation is accepted, I would beg of the critic to aim at constructive criticism, and to remember that a radio item which may annoy one hundred people, and move them to angry denunciation, possibly pleases ten thousand, who are satisfied but silent.

It was in Rome, just before the war ended, that the Prime Minister and I had revealed to us the extent to which New Zealanders appreciate opera. Night after night hundreds of New Zealand troops on leave thronged the Opera House, demonstrating the desire for good music.

I feel that in the days ahead—particularly in the winter months—we should seek to encourage the development of "listening parties." These have become popular in other parts of the world. It is a new social habit, developed particularly amongst lovers of opera and of drama.

ONE matter of common complaint I have asked Mr. Yates to examine immediately; it is in relation to what might be termed the "universality" of New Zealand programmes. There are times when all stations seem to be given over simultaneously to the same type of programme. And it should be possible to find a niche for the critic who declares: "We want a blessed hour of sanctuary where dance bands and unfunny comedians cannot penetrate."

That is not to say that the dance band has not its place; in popularity it must nearly reach top flight. And when the winter months approach we may be able to arrange a special "dance night" each week, so that young people in their own homes, and in small halls in remote country districts, can plan parties with a certainty of a full programme of dance music from one or two specific stations.

Looking into the immediate future, there is another direction in which I hope to see greater developments in the



THE HON. F. W. DOIDGE

use of radio. During the month of January I shall be in Colombo, attending a Conference of Commonwealth Ministers. The purpose of that Conference is to discuss Empire problems. There, if the opportunity presents itself, I hope to introduce the question of broadcasting.

Letters from Listeners

AN ENGLISH VISITOR

Sir,—I read with surprise the comments of Sir Frank Newson-Smith, sometime Lord Mayor of London, which followed his visit to the Dominion in November. Sir Frank complained of the "indifference" and "downright rudeness" of hotel staffs here.

Like Sir Frank I have briefly visited New Zealand, but my experience has been very different. Although it is true that the rigidity of hotel meal times and table placings may be disconcerting to overseas visitors, I would like to put on record my appreciation of the many courtesies shown me by managers and staff at all the hotels in which I have stayed: in Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin.

Even more surprising and unjustifiable is the reported comment of the Rev. C. P. Newton, Vicar of Smitherfield, England, who has allegedly declared that he was "never asked out for a meal" during his five months' stay. I have been in New Zealand less than a month and have been both astonished and gratified by the warmth of New Zealand hospitality.

Having been a welcome guest in so many New Zealand homes, and having had nothing but kindness at the hands of New Zealanders (many of them complete strangers) I find it hard to believe that anyone could complain of a lack of hospitality. I at least take back

The Empire Broadcasting Service grew enormously during the war. Night after night the actual chimes of Big Ben rang out throughout the homes and cities of the Empire. Each Christmas the voice of His Majesty the King reaches us at our own hearths. These intimate things—how much they mean to every loyal Britisher. At Colombo we shall seek ways and means of a closer understanding of our Commonwealth problems. As an instrument, the Broadcasting service opens up vast possibilities. In the past the BBC has carried most of the burden. But the organisation should be Empire wide, with the BBC as a partner in a scheme in which we should all share. I believe there is an urgent need for such a service.

In conclusion I would say that the New Zealand Broadcasting Service will seek to broaden its association with all those sections of the community it serves—in education; in religious service; in music, drama and entertainment; in the wide sphere of sport; in the hundred and one different directions in which it now operates. It will seek to attain what has been described as "a healthy animation of the air." The helpful and intelligent co-operation of listeners will always be welcomed. But I would ask our critics—and it will be a dull service if there are no critics—to remember that, in the words of an English writer, there is no royal road or easily defined way for broadcasting. It must stand on good principles, and must create and seek to interpret those principles in fresh creative ways every day.

with me to England the happiest memories of New Zealand and New Zealanders.

MICHAEL JOSEPH (Wellington).

HOW THINGS BEGAN

Sir,—A review of a book may be favourable or unfavourable. Mr. Prior's comment on Father Duggan's *Evolution and Philosophy* is not a review at all. Possibly it is a letter which has gone astray. Mr. Prior gives evidence of impatient scanning. Even his criticisms are sadly ineffective. On reading them I was reminded of a disgruntled tourist spending a few hours in a European capital and finding only lack of hotel amenities for subsequent recording. One would expect that a book on a serious subject by a qualified New Zealand writer would have received at least the attention which might in some sense be called a "review." READER (Wellington).

"AND BEHOLD, IT WAS LEAH"

Sir,—In defence of Ruth Gilbert, may one write,
"Not to cry out in her pain? forbidden,
in song to complain?
'Twas for love; 'twas the nature of
love that composed the refrain?"
A.M.G. (Dunedin).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

R.W.G. (Fairlie): More suitable for a daily newspaper.

H.E.L. (Stratford): Your criticisms have been noted.

Two Grandmothers: We hope to make a change early next year.

P.M.J. (Wellington): Afraid the symbols make the letter too difficult for the printers.

"Wood" (Auckland): Thanks for information; the director's name is usually included with films of interest.

(more Letters on page 10)