

"UNCLE WILLIAM" RETIRES

Eight Years Of Telling Bible Stories Over The Air

"UNCLE WILLIAM" was on a camping holiday in the centre of the North Island on one occasion, and stopped at a lonely farmhouse to buy some milk. To the gruff old farmer who answered the door he merely said: "We are campers and I see you have some cows. Could you sell us a pint of milk?" The farmer said nothing, but went into the house and called to someone: "Hey, here's Uncle William at the door," and in a moment he was introduced to a family, including two or three children, none of whom had ever seen him before, but who had recognised him from his voice in the 2YA Children's Song Service on Sunday afternoons. The family had no church connections of any sort, and were miles from the nearest church, but for some years the parents had been trying to teach the children something about religion with the help of "Uncle William's" talks.

An experience like that reinforces "Uncle William" in his whole attitude toward Sunday radio services for children. In his eight years at 2YA he has followed one policy—that he has a job to do of teaching religion. He has sought always to avoid becoming a radio personality, he has studied every aspect of his service in order not to intrude himself above his message.

"Time for A Change"

His method has been simple. He has divided his service into two parts, and in each he tells a story. One part is aimed at children from, say, 12 to 15, and the other, which is made as simple as possible, is aimed at children from five to seven. Simplicity is indeed the keynote.

"But," said *The Listener* representative, "I heard you sometimes and I got to know your voice and associated your personality with 2YA Children's Sunday Session."

"I am very sorry indeed to hear that," replied "Uncle William," "for that is just what I wanted to avoid—and in fact that is the very reason why I am giving up the work. I am very keen on it, and have loved doing it, but I think the public should have a change."

Every Moment Worth While

"Uncle William" is the radio name for the Rev. H. W. Newell, M.A., Minister of the Terrace Congregational Church of Wellington. He came to New Zealand some years ago after having

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That story is one of the highlights of the new ZB feature *The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street*, a dramatised series of incidents from the crowded history of the world's most famous financial institution.

The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street is an Australian production and features several well known players. Narrator, and actor in several of the main parts, is Ronald Morse. The programme started from 12B on May 22, and will be heard from 22B and the southern commercial stations on succeeding Thursdays. It plays on Thursdays and Saturdays at 7.30 p.m.



S. P. Andrew photograph

THE REV. H. W. NEWELL

As "Uncle William" his voice is well known

been a minister in India and headmaster of a big secondary school for boys. He entered radio work almost by accident. One day he stepped in to replace a man who was unavoidably absent, and "Aunt Molly" of 2YA thought he had a good voice for the job. After a short trial he was appointed permanently to a purely honorary position. He has been the conductor of about 400 sessions from 2YA, all of which have required the telling of two separate stories, and every word he has spoken has been written out some days in advance. He has answered many hundreds of letters from children and devoted a considerable amount of time and trouble to the whole question of suitable music. "But it was never a burden," he said. "Every moment of it was worth while."

The Musical Side

The musical side of the children's services has always been prominent in Mr. Newell's mind. First of all he organised a rota of Sunday schools in the Wellington district to provide a choir of singers to accompany the services, each school taking one turn a year.

Dissatisfied with the type of hymns usually sung in Sunday schools, he secured the services of Mrs. O. E. Burton to organise a small choir of children to give the sort of music he wanted, but after about 18 months he was able to launch an entirely new scheme. A Wellington school teacher, Miss Dickson, organised a choir of State school children which met twice weekly for practice and broke new ground in the types of hymns they learnt. This is the children's choir now known as the 2YA Choir which has sung once a month in Mr. Newell's session. They secured copies of a new inter-denominational hymn book, "Songs of Praise," published by the Oxford University Press. About 90% of the contents consists of quite new hymns, set to good music, much of it traditional. The children have learnt over 50 of these new hymns.

Letters from Many Parts

Letters arrive for "Uncle William" from all points of the compass and from all kinds of people. A little child of four or five once wrote a badly-scrawled letter asking: "Please tell me where God is," and an irate father was equally brief when he wrote:

Dear Sir,

If you will kindly talk a little less and let the children sing more, we will all be much happier."

He has had letters from all over Australia, from remote farmhouses not so many miles from Wellington city, and from a man in the completely savage part of the Solomon Islands. Once when he was visiting a schoolmaster in Suva, Fiji, his host introduced him as "Uncle William" to a class of Sixth Form boys, including Fijians, Hindus and Chinese. Out of curiosity he asked the boys if they had ever heard him on the radio. Over three-quarters of the class put up their hands to say that they listened to him from 2YA!

All the same, "Uncle William" suspects he has just about as many adult listeners as children. They will be sorry to hear that he is giving up the work, but they will also be pleased to learn that he has not yet completely severed his connection, but will carry on in the meantime, with his special choir, on the first Sunday in each month.

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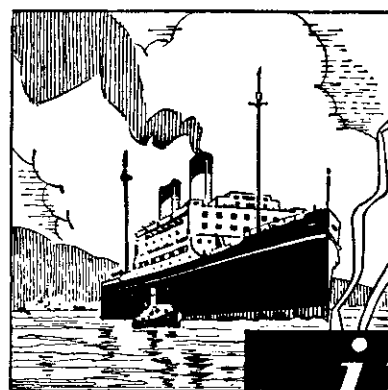
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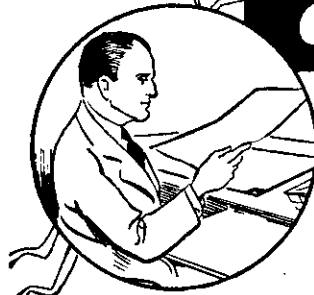
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