

CRIME IS HER SUBJECT

A Parlour Game Began It

THE first thing you notice about Ngaio Marsh is her deep contralto voice. The next, perhaps, her enthusiasm for whatever project she has on hand. At the moment this is, of course, the production of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* for the Wellington Repertory Theatre, and this formed our first topic of discussion.

"I think it's one of Coward's best," said Miss Marsh. "It's got wit and sparkle and all the qualities one expects from Coward, but perhaps more substance than most of his plays. And like all Coward it's extremely difficult to produce. It demands a technique all its own, and it's rather difficult to keep up the extraordinarily rapid pace without dulling the sparkle of the dialogue."

But the success of *Blithe Spirit* in Christchurch leads her to hope that, in spite of such setbacks as cast defalcations through laryngitis, the play will have a successful season.

"Producing this play is the reward I allow myself for finishing my last detective story," said Miss Marsh. "I always give myself some sort of break before I start on the next."

Author to Actress

"When did you first start writing?"

"I've been scribbling ever since I was a child. I didn't know at first whether I wanted to write or to draw, but decided

that drawing was my forte. So when I left school I went for some years to a school of art."

"And used your art school experience in *Artists in Crime*?"

"Yes, it did come in useful. While I was at art school I wrote a very bad romantic drama and showed it to Allan Wilkie when he came down to Christchurch with his touring company. He didn't accept the drama, but he asked if I'd like to come on tour with his company. I accepted. That knowledge came in useful later on too."

"After that, I went to England. It was about the time of the depression, and a friend and I opened a Christmas Shop in London. We intended to sell things like lampshades, but we found ourselves launching out as interior decorators. That was great fun."

"When did you write your first detective story?"

"Nine years ago, I think. I didn't usually read detective stories, but one day I happened to read one and said to my mother, 'I'm sure I could write something like that.' It was the time that the murder game was sweeping London, and that gave me the idea for *A Man Lay Dead*. A rather amateurish effort, of course, but it was a start."

Patterns in Prose

Death and the Dancing Footman is Miss Marsh's favourite among her own books. She doesn't read many detective stories, but has a great respect for Austin Freeman's wonderful thoroughness and masterly handling of detail, and for Margery Allingham's brilliant prose.

"Crime stories are showing an amazing development," said Miss Marsh. "They're getting further away from the crossword puzzle type of story and becoming novels in their own right. Writers like Margery Allingham have shown that within the austere pattern of the detective story you can write as well as you please."

"And another point about the detective story—it has got a pattern. It imposes discipline upon the writer. In these days of long and comparatively formless novels like *Anthony Adverse* and *Gone With the Wind* it's good to find something that must have a beginning, a middle and an end."

Miss Marsh does not use a typewriter. Up till now she has always written her stories in longhand in a large manuscript book, but in her latest book she tried dictating to a typist and found it much less of an effort. She works surrounded by volumes of constitutional law, police procedure, and medical manuals, because she explains, there's so much that even a comparatively experienced writer of detective stories doesn't know.

"But I must go," she said suddenly. "I've got two dozen plates to paint before lunch-time."

"Starting up another Christmas Shop?" I asked.

"No—just want to make some plain white plates look like 18th Century Spode for my cast to smash in the last scene of *Blithe Spirit*."

—M.I.

—M.B.



In the Army, communications are vital... messages must get through... that means Batteries and lots of them.

If you occasionally have difficulty in obtaining Eveready Batteries for your radio or torch, remember the Army, Navy and Air Force come first. You can be certain, however, that the utmost efforts are used in endeavouring to supply the EVEREADY Batteries you need.

A National Carbon Company Product

ER/42/B26

EVEREADY
TRADE-MARK
TORCH and RADIO
BATTERIES
Serving the Nation

The most
STUBBORN
COUGH
or
COLD

gives way to

WOODS'
GREAT
PEPPERMINT
CURE

(Continued from previous page)

grassy glade, other Waacs in brief sunsuits and bare feet were learning a Danish folk dance, under the guidance of an officer lent by the Physical Welfare Department. And on our way back to the Commandant's office we passed the six girls we had watched earlier at the digging, this time lining up, fully equipped, for a period of routine drill and marching.

Army Routine

"Which Waacs come to this camp?" I asked the Commandant.

"All North Island girls who join up," said the Commandant. "Up to now, the girls haven't always been able to go into a camp—many of them have begun straight away on their clerical jobs and mess duties. But we think every girl who joins up whether she needs specialist army training or not, should come here for her first six weeks. She's got to learn something of army ways and army discipline—I suppose you could call it being 'licked into shape.'"

I looked through the timetables. Squad drill, map-reading, recreational training, field craft, signalling instruction, and a mysterious subject called Internal Economy ("doing their own washing and chores," explained the Commandant).

"And I think that's a wonderful idea," said Aunt Daisy, "not expecting the girls to do their washing in their free time. And all that physical education! So good for them! And such fun!"

I agreed with Aunt Daisy. So did the Commandant. And so apparently did the six smiling and be-freckled Waacs who stood smartly to attention as we stepped into the car.