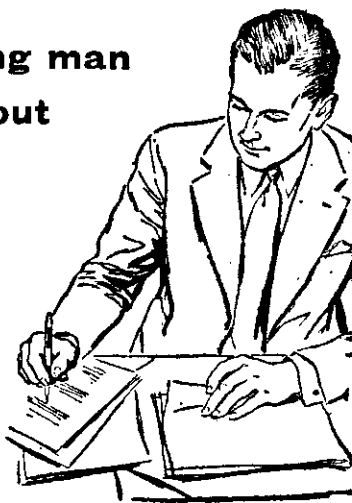


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Radio Review

THE GREAT McGONAGALL

THE recent republication of *Poetic Gems*, by William McGonagall, "poet and tragedian," has led to the delighted rediscovery by many of this prince of bad verse, this master of bathos, author of the immortal lines:

*Beautiful Railway Bridge of the Silv'ry Tay!
Alas! I am very sorry to say
That ninety lives have been taken away
On the last Sabbath day of 1879,
Which will be remember'd for a very long time.*

McGonagall, a 19th century handloom weaver, who recited his own amazing doggerel before bedazzled audiences, was the subject of an entertaining talk by Ray Copland from 1YC last week. The generous helpings of McGonagall's works bore out Mr. Copland's claim that the rhymester was unfailing in striking the bathetic note. However, he did not merely guy the itinerant bard, but was able to create a certain sympathy for him by suggesting that McGonagall's single-minded pursuit of his offbeat muse indicated a certain poetic integrity. For some time I have held McGonagall, with Amanda McKittrick Ros, as monarchs in the realm of nonsense absolute, and thus I enjoyed Mr. Copland's talk hugely. But he was, unhappily, a less than adequate reader, his colourless voice throwing away most of

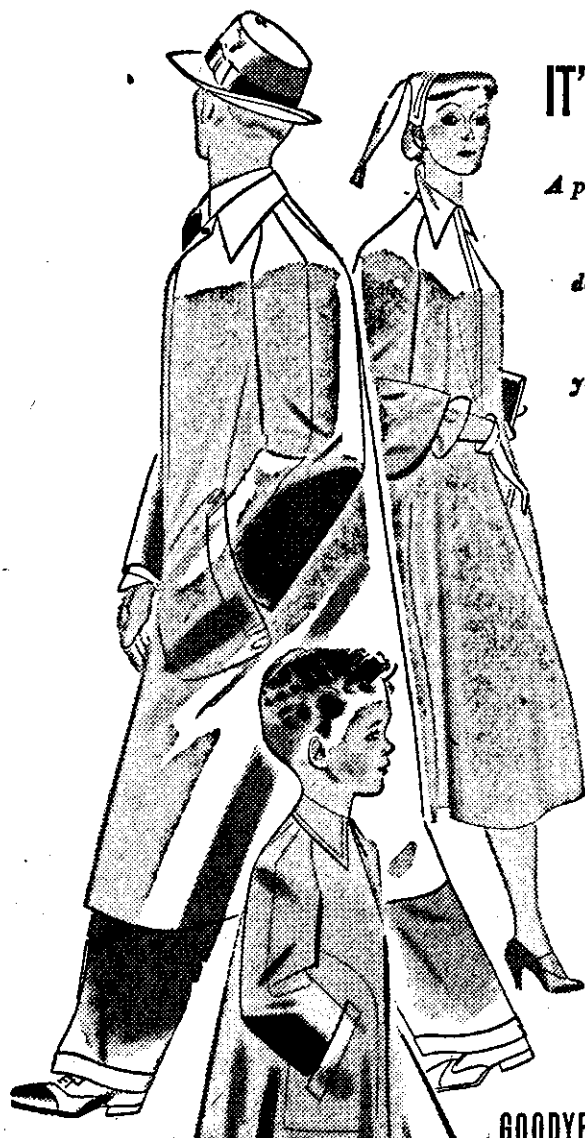
his nice points and making McGonagall's verse sound drab rather than amusing. Here was surely a case in which a professional reader would have done more justice to the fine script than the author himself was able to.

Ancient Mariner

MORE than once, I have averred that the NZBS *Portraits from Life* series is among the most original, interesting and individual features New Zealand radio has given us. And this before I heard what is surely the gem of the series—the "Portrait" of Captain A. H. Davey, broadcast in *Feminine View-point* last week. Captain Davey, a retired sea captain, who has a son who is "something in radio," revealed himself, when interviewed by Cherry Raymond, as one of the most engaging personalities I have ever heard on the air—a kind of cross between Joseph Conrad's Marlow and Lee Fore Brace. In his racy narrative, the great days of sailing-ships were brought back again, with a vividness as compelling as the Ancient Mariner's eye. Captain Davey's account of a storm at sea, and of the sailor washed overboard and back again, had all the excitement and authenticity of Conrad's most glowing pages. Nor were his stories of the later days of steam hardly less absorbing, in particular that of the epic-race-that-was-not-officially-a-race, when the Awatea, commanded by Captain Davey, outpaced the Mariposa and the Wanganella. For the vigour of the old sailor's personality, the richness of his nautical experiences, and his unusual gifts as a raconteur, I rank this "Portrait" as one of the finest local programmes of the year. —J.C.R.

Contented Cows

THERE was a time, two or three years ago, when a person writing to the NZBS Head Office was likely to receive his reply on paper with a water-mark bearing the legend *From Contented Cows*. I am aware that this sounds scarcely credible and I wouldn't believe it myself if I had not several specimens before me as I write. It's a good sign, really, that a Government department should be capable of self-criticism, even to the point of unjustified harshness. But, alas, their latest writing-paper has no watermark at all. In case this means they really are becoming contented cows I propose to write of something I haven't heard instead of what I have. I miss from our stations serious New Zealand imaginative writing. We have some light stuff with a local flavour (though not enough), but our best writers appear on the air only as talkers. There has been good work in poetry in the past—A. R. D. Fairburn's *To a Friend in the Wilderness* and *The Voyage* were both broadcast before they were printed, and there have been other things. But the only local poetry heard this year has not been new. We do not hear serious short stories, and our only good radio playwright prefers settings far beyond New Zealand. I don't blame Mr. Gundry for this: it's his own business. But I miss New Zealand themes. The only approach to them so far has been in adaptations from novels. It would be wrong to expect too much of the radio as a patron of the arts. It is



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