

Fifty Years On

MR A. E. CURRIE is, I believe, the second half of the Alexander and Currie whose 1906 anthology, *New Zealand Verse*, enshrines as much as one needs to know about our early verse. Now, half a century later, he's still at it: this time with two selections of New Zealand Ballads, from 2YC. The first included seven ballads by three writers more contemporary with Mr. Currie than with most of his listeners. He began with two sea stories by Will Lawson. The second was written nearly forty years after the first, and was much the more vigorous, with fewer tired images. I could make little of the two by David Ross through their literary clothing; but I enjoyed the three unfamiliar pieces by David McKee Wright, although they weren't as good as the best-known of his poetry. (It seems to be true, of older New Zealand verse, at least, that the most anthologised is the best.) The virtues of his writing, and of Will Lawson's later ballad, were straightforward stories told with unpretentious and colloquial vigour; but I thought the manner of presentation did them a disservice. The rather solemn format as a

YC Literary Programme seemed to claim more for the verse than it could sustain, though Mr. Currie's own words were modest enough. A lighter dress might have prepared listeners better to receive and enjoy the selection on its own level.

Nitrous Oxide

THE usual NZBS voices made a fine frolic of *Parson's Fling*, by David Scott Daniell. In this play a vicar liberates himself from the strong women who have dominated his life by throwing a stone at a car driven by the latest, the wealthy patroness who has just given him a cheque for the vestry restoration fund. He walks away singing "Jingle Bells" and sells the story to a Sunday paper for 500 guineas. The atmosphere is George A. Birmingham without the Irish, Ian Hay without schoolmasters or the navy. The happy ending, which lets everyone out, reminded me of *The Middle Watch*. I couldn't help thinking how anaesthetising a stock scene and characters can be. One expects an English vicar to be eccentric and yokels with rustic dialects to be comic. But shift the scene to New Zealand, make the hero one of our own harassed clergy and his adversary the bank manager's wife who is president of the missionary union, and the humour would be nearer, sharper, not so happy; and the NZBS would certainly not broadcast it.

—R.D.McE.

Speaking Likeness

I CANNOT say when a programme more delighted me than Captain Davey's *Portrait from Life*. As rich, salty, and vigorous as a chapter from Conrad, this radio portrait eclipses all the others by its ripeness and rotundity. The old salt (I hope he will forgive this term; it seems entirely appropriate) is a splendid speaker, with a feeling for the robust image, and the deep satisfaction of a man whose life has been well spent. And for once, the glassy, over-smooth commentary was properly balanced with the sifter; it formed an excellent counterpoint to the warm ruminations of this most likeable speaker. Captain Davey gave a forthright account of life at sea in the days before steam; no bed of roses, perhaps, but always invigorating. Without rancour, he created a vivid contrast with the conditions of a young man going to sea now. My favourite passage, which I still recall with a chuckle, was his hilarious account of falling forty feet from the mast on to the captain taking the sun in his deck chair; he collapsed the chair, and flattened the captain, who was not seen on deck for three days. On shanties, too, he was most illuminating, remarking that "the better the shanty, the better the ship," and explaining their practical importance; that without a compulsive rhythm, some heavy sails



(C) Punch

could never be rigged. In all, fascinating and superbly alive. Let no one miss it, if and when it comes their way.

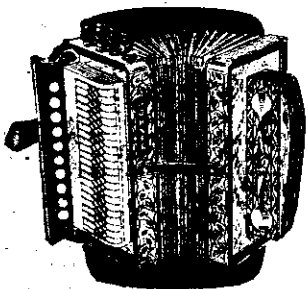
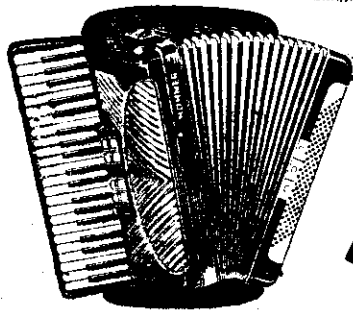
Singing Likeness

THE NZBS made a brave attempt to give a musical portrait of the life of Dame Clara Butt, which was also a portrait of the times. Clara's great, imperial *diapason* was a wonderfully ap-

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