

PICTURE POSTAGE

AFTER a lapse of 25 years, New Zealand is once more to have pictures on a normal issue of postage stamps. An international competition is at present being held to obtain suitable designs. The stamps, which will be ready by 1960, will be only the third "permanent" issue since this country adopted its own postage in 1855. Pictorial stamps have been issued to commemorate occasions such as the 1940 Centenary, and as Health stamps, but for everyday mails

think of the proposed new issue can be heard in a documentary entitled *Our New Pictorial Stamps* which will be broadcast on Sunday of next week.

Pictorial stamps are widely regarded as good advertising. A contributor to the programme, an Irish immigrant, seems to confirm this when she states that she was first attracted to New Zealand by the 1935 pictorial issue, especially the picture of Mitre Peak.

The United States has posted democracy to the world with numberless special issues honouring such things as the anniversaries of statehood and of Japan's opening to foreign trade, and such people as the labour leader Samuel Gompers, the American Boy Scouts, the nation's bereaved mothers, and the newspaper boys of America.

Sandwiched between portrait stamps of Lenin and Marx in the Soviet Union's list are such items of undying pictorial interest as the stamp commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Soviet Defence Forces, which shows Marshal Bulganin at a military school.

More obviously purposeful, in the advertising sense, is a pictorial issue by Hungary designed to show the populace which pests to tread upon. Accurately drawn and coloured, the stamps depict parasites like the Crawling Cockchafer, the Hornet, the Black Cricket and the

numbers of large stamps has a bearing on this arrangement. To ensure that stamps stay stuck no adequate substitute for the human tongue has apparently yet been devised.

The competition, which closes on September 30, gives the would-be designer a good deal of freedom. The Post Office specifies only the dimensions of the desired black and white drawings and that the words New Zealand shall be in Roman characters and the values in Arabic figures. There is a polite hint that the lowest value stamp may, if designers wish, feature native flowers or berries. The prize for each design accepted by a panel of judges representing Art Societies, Philatelic Societies and the Post Office is £100, and there are some smaller merit awards. The hunt for subject matter may take designers well away from the tourist centres, for the Post Office asks for "pictorial subjects, preferably scenic views, which have not already been featured in New Zealand stamp issues."

Competitors are not asked to submit designs in colour, though there is nothing to prevent them from making suggestions. Where possible, colours are selected to match the designs as closely as possible, but with 18 stamps to be made as easily distinguishable from one another as possible there is not much room for manoeuvre. In the present issue, for instance, the 3d and 8d stamps are difficult to tell apart.

Except for the designs, New Zealand postage stamps are entirely produced in England. Skilled craftsmen engrave the design, in reverse, and actual size, on a soft steel plate, using a sharp hand-tool called a burin. The die is then hardened and the impression transferred under a pressure of 80lb. per square inch to a softened steel roller, which, after hardening, is used to "rock" the final reverse impressions into the plate used for printing. Most New Zealand stamps are produced by this method.

Another process, little used by New Zealand but extensively used by some countries, is photogravure. Here, the design is laid down photographically on copper plate and etched into the metal by acid. The copper is then chromium plated to give more wear. Photogravure is satisfactory for bold and simple designs, lacking as it does the precise clarity of recess-engraved work. The method is quicker and cheaper than hand engraving. It was first used by New Zealand for the 1½d and 1/- denominations of the Peace issue of 1946.

To the collector, of course, the appearance of a stamp tends to be subordinate to its oddity or rarity, or both. One denomination of the Christchurch Exhibition issue, for instance, was at first wrongly printed in claret. The colour was later changed to the correct vermillion, but in the meantime some of the claret



REGARDED by the Post Office as a good example of Health Stamp design—James Berry's 1947 Eros



E. MERVYN TAYLOR, one of the artist-designers who will be heard in the programme

we have relied heavily on portraits of our kings and queens.

The previous pictorial issues not connected with some particular event were in 1898 (one of the first anywhere) and 1935. The last change of design, on the other hand, was as recently as 1954 when one crowned head replaced another. Something of what the designers, collectors, buyers and lickers of both kinds

Rhinoceros Beetle. Hungarian stamps, like those of Switzerland and Austria, are specially prized by some collectors for their high artistic merit.

The 18 denominations of stamp required for the Dominion's new issue will be made in three sizes, those of lowest value (1d to 8d) being the smallest. The objection of office boys to licking large

stamps had been sold. Today each is worth £90. The most coveted of all New Zealand stamps appears to be the 1862 threepenny lilac, which is estimated in the catalogues to be worth £1800.

Tracing the first postage stamp is almost as difficult as acquiring a threepenny lilac. There was a kind of local postage system set up in Paris as early as 1653, but it was not till last century that postage as we understand it was introduced. In 1838, New South Wales issued embossed letter-sheets first at 1/3 then at 1/- a dozen, but they were not popular. The first adhesive stamps, similar to present-day stamps, were issued in Great Britain in 1840. They were the 1d black and the 2d blue, bearing the queen's head, and produced by substantially the same engraving process as that described above. The 1d black was later changed to red when it was discovered that black was no safeguard against deliberate removal of postmarks. There is certainly enough interest in stamps to make any collector look over his eyeglass at the man, in the programme, who asks: "Why all this fuss about stamps? You might as well make a fuss about tram tickets!"

Our New Pictorial Stamps: YAs, 4YZ, 9.30 a.m., Sunday, August 3.



"MANY ARE CALLED..." but not every one can be chosen—two unsuccessful Health Stamp entries. On the left, a workmanlike if uninspired New Zealand effort; and, right, a more primitive art form from the United States