Drama

ENJOYING A NECESSITY

MRS. PAULINE HERBERT (Westport, left), producer of Saroyan's "The Beautiful People," argues with Frederick Farley (right) over a line just spoken by Don Brown (Community Arts Service), while Mollie Wilson (Westport) looks on

THE young, shock-headed Hamlet came on stage barefoot, took a pair of white socks from his pocket, slipped them on and tied his shoe laces. Frederick Farley, Director of the Drama Council's School for Producers, smiled up from the body of the hall.

"Whenever *you* are," he said.

Hamlet moved to the left and assumed character:

"Now I am alone," he moved centre slowly and broodingly,

"O! What a rogue and peasant slave am I.
Is it not monstrous . . .!"

Feet scattered the gravel outside and thumped on the doorstep. A telegraph boy. Half of Hamlet resented the interruption, the other half tried to carry on. The performance lost its reality.

"You're working under difficulties," the Director said, when the telegram had been delivered. "Let's take it again."

Hamlet dressed himself in his illusion. "Now I am alone. . ."

Further right, Harold Baigent, the lighting expert, bumped and pottered with his step-ladder, wobbling about on its summit, only his legs showing under the scalloped, green-edged curtain.

"What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her?"

Baigent came down off his ladder, squinted across the stage at floor level, lining up something, and then started hammering spasmodically near the footlights.

". . . for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liver'd, (bang) and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this (bang)
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain! (bang)
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O vengeance!" (bang)

"First part good," Farley said. "But does your movement fit the words there? I don't think so. Do it again."

Hamlet did it again.

". . . Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across? . . ."

"Hum," Farley said, in a tone of marked disbelief. "Seems better this time."

"Sorry!" Hamlet said wryly.

Farley mused, chin in hand, taking no notice until someone beside him said, "Apparently it isn't good to be better!"

Everybody laughed, and the rehearsal went on.

The Scheme

This soliloquy, one of the gems Olivier left out of his film of *Hamlet*, was being rehearsed in the hall of St. Matthew's Diocesan School, Masterton, where the New Zealand Drama Council sponsored a Producers' School between January 12 and 22.

The School was attended by sixty representatives of repertory societies and drama clubs from the Bay of Islands to South Otago. Adult Education sent tutors and underwrote the Drama Council against loss. Gordon Kirk, of Nelson, managed the School, Professor S. Musgrove, of Auckland University College, conducted a play-writing course, and Arnold Goodwin, producer for the Auckland W.E.A., held classes in practical scene design.

The Listener spent part of two days at St. Matthew's, talking to members of the School, and watching them work. Some of them hadn't known what to expect, and they were pleased that the people they met were, on the whole, within the New Zealand convention of uniformity of appearance.

"And yet," one of them said, "there must be something odd about us—"

"'Distinctive' is a better word," suggested a second.

"Well, whatever it is, we're recognisable. Two of us went into the post office and the man behind the counter asked how they were treating us up at St. Matthew's. We'd never seen him before. I don't know . . ."

But they were too busy for much introspection. Whenever two people gathered together there was a rehearsal, or a question, or discussion of an idea:

"I thought if I paused *then* . . . How's that? Do you think it's better that way?"

In the corridors and dining room, the lounge, the side verandah, about the grounds, in the class rooms, in the swimming pool, the ideas swirled into arguments, and the arguments into demonstrations.

Management

The members of the School were able to concentrate continuously because of their keenness, and because the project had been well planned and ran according to plan.

"Ah, the food!" said everybody. "Wonderful. Gordon Kirk laid everything on."

Gordon Kirk, the manager, pulled this job down on himself voluntarily. "A residential school has been a pet idea of mine for a long time," he said. "I've been pushing for it ever since I got on to the Drama Council Executive. Weekend schools had been held before, but the time was too short to accomplish much. This ten-day school is the first of its kind, and the first attempt in New Zealand to achieve something with advanced students.

"Organisational problems? Oh, there were a few. No more than is usual with a set-up like this. Masterton was pretty good to us. They were short of water, but they let us fill the swimming pool. They have their power problems, but after some pleading they let us use the lighting equipment we wanted. We hired army blankets, sheets and pillows, two of the St. Matthew's cooks gave up part of their holidays to help us out—and that reminds me, I must slip into town and get a case of tomatoes and a dozen lettuces. Go and have a look at Arnold Goodwin's scene designing class."

Scene Design

In the scene design room, scale cardboard set models were scattered about on desks. That morning, towards the end of the course, some of the models were finished, and the class bore a triumphant, weary air.

"We've learnt something, all right," one of them said. "I've never used my brains so much in all my life."

Scene designing is easy for anyone with universal knowledge; for ordinary people it means hard work, wide research and fixed attention to detail.

"We've tried to give them a lead into the practical," Arnold Goodwin said. "So many people are not visualists. They think vaguely of a set, but they have no idea of what they really need on the stage. Designing models teaches them to see. Then we aim at simplicity, first because small stages with few facilities must have simple sets, and also because the modern trend is away from clutter. Here, we are trying to help producers lift their standard, and adopt a courageous, experimental approach." He

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DOROTHY BERROW (Christchurch Repertory), who was in charge of costumes at the Masterton Producers' School