

NUMBER ONE COCKNEY

HARRY PAINTER was down a coal mine. Things were desperate. He and his mates were cut off from the shaft, the air was foul, the water was up to their chins and still rising; you could hear it gurgle. Probably it was dark, too, but that didn't matter so much. What was important was the gurgle of

Zealand. "It was at least one of the first," he says, "and since then there have been so many that it is hard to remember the exact order." In all these he has dealt with sound, and he has by now got his ear and his voice to a state of training where he can recognise what inflection and intensity are needed, and produce them, automatically.

His speciality is the Cockney, and it

is not an artificial speciality. He was born in London and came out to New Zealand in 1924, bringing with him experience gained with the Royal Air Force Concert Party in camp entertainments throughout the Middle East during World War I. After doing some work in repertory in Wellington, he and a group of his friends became interested in adapting stage plays to radio. They didn't know what they were doing, but they met their problems as they arose, improvised cheerfully, had a lot of fun and gradually improved the standard of their performances.

In those days there were no recorded sound effects. They had to make their own. The mine explosion in *Danger*, for instance, was

produced by rolling new potatoes up and down in a box. It took them nearly three hours before they discovered that it had to be new potatoes.

Another early production Mr. Painter likes to recall is the serial *Khyber*, in which he, as Nobby Clark, helped Major Garvey keep the North-West Frontier through fifty-two episodes, a tour de force, whose episodes they recorded without rehearsal. Winston McCarthy, now a most effective sports sound effect in his own right, was the man behind the noises in *Khyber*. He was kept busy firing fusillades, rolling rocks down hillsides, and uttering yells like a faraway Pathan. Once, when he was firing a blank with one hand and grasping for the next noise with the other, the wad from the exploding blank hit Mr. Painter, who was convinced for a while that he had been shot in earnest, instead of for the play.

But the part he recalls with most affection is that of *Topper*. "That was a good show," he says. "It moved. Some of these serials take three episodes for the hero to get over a fence, but not *Topper*."

Harry Painter likes radio, in spite of its limitations. "Sound is all you've got," he says, sounding most unlike his Cockney creations. "You must put everything into the part your voice can give it. On the stage we'd call it overacting." And, with a grin, "Perhaps that's why I like it."

—G. leF. Y.



HARRY PAINTER

"On the stage we'd call it overacting"

the water and the voices of Harry and his mates. That was all the listeners heard, and sound was the only tool the actors could use. Sound is still the radio actor's only medium, but broadcasting has developed from a child to a well-grown youth since the coal mining play *Danger* was broadcast from 2YA about 1930.

Harry Painter, a man not used to keeping details, thinks *Danger* was perhaps the first play broadcast in New

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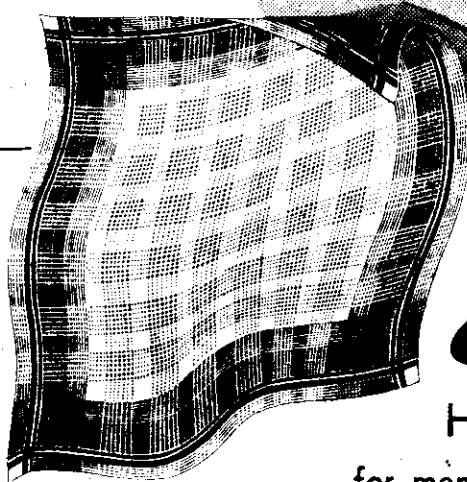
every respect to what is infinitely above even the greatest among them. For of course they do not of themselves breed creative kinds any more, but only novelists, critics, patrons, connoisseurs, and amateurs in fashionable modes of art. They don't exist to any degree in our countries (as we don't exist now to any degree in theirs), and they are of the greatest value to an artist overseas, provided he be firm in his purpose and open to their generosity, yet impervious to their flattery or disdain. But they soon tire and look for new novelties, being more drawn to persons than to their works, which they quickly forget in the flood of new fashions. So that a long absence like mine is difficult to repair. They have another drawback, that the finest among them are apt to be physically delicate, and in a long absence likely to die, as Lowes Dickinson, Ottoline Morrell, and later Maurice Baring, Cooie Lane and Lilian Bowes-Lyon. So that, in the end, nothing is to be counted on but oneself, and one's Providence. (To be continued.)

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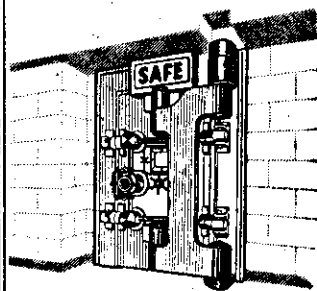


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