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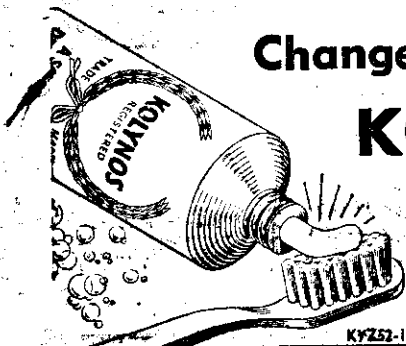


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RADIO REVIEW

Rebecca West's 1920's

A CRITIC in the English *Listener* said not long ago: "Of broadcasters who write their own script, the average, I think, write better than they speak, and I cannot at the moment think of a broadcaster who speaks better than he writes." I thought, a few weeks before Christmas as I listened to a BBC programme from 2YC, that I had found someone who spoke as well as she wrote—Rebecca West on her particular decade, the 1920's, in the decade by decade review of the half century. But at the end of that most enthralling programme I learned that the chief voice had been the enviable gift of Margaret Rawlings; so the honours were divided between writer and actress, slightly in Miss West's favour—it would have been a poor voice indeed that could have robbed that script of its life and vigorous enthusiasm. But Miss West was lucky in having a reader who obviously had her heart in the matter.

Miss West announced honestly that she was 27 when that amazing and racy decade began, and now, twenty years later, she looks back and writes of it with the same kind of zest and warmth and wholeheartedness with which she must have enjoyed it as she lived it. It might not be going too far to say that her story of the decade sounded like the story of a woman who was in love with those years, or at least in love with the life of those years. Perhaps that is the secret of a superlative broadcast—that the broadcaster should have something nearer love than enthusiasm in his subject. Yes, there was more than zest and enthusiasm in that broadcast: there was a whole ten years of life, with sidelights, insights, asides, flippancies—a little much, I thought, of the treasure-hunt flippancies and the extravagant, recklessly expensive party flippancies—and a few of the other things that make up ten years of life, ten years of a certain kind of life. Not, of course, ten years of everybody's life, but ten years of the life of Miss West and her writing friends and her artist friends and thousands and thousands of big-city post-war young men and young women eager to enjoy those mirage years of peace.

This was the broadcast of the year for me. I hope 1952 will bring more from the same team.

—J.E.B.

Ship Up a Tree

THE world of trees is so far from the world of ships that I suppose when a sailor gets into difficulties he never uses the expression "up a tree." Yet in the days of long ago I had to retreat from a little ship's railing as, hugging the bank of an Auckland river, she tore away willow branches; and according to Kipling an Eastern typhoon can send the "stoutest steamers to roost with the startled crows." Poetic licence, perhaps, but "Binnacle" began his series of talks at 3YA on little ships in New Zealand waters, with a true story of a ship that, in a flood in the Pelorus River, was left suspended between the forks of two trees, and bushmen from the mill where the ship was to get her cargo, obligingly came along and released her with axes. This was an excellent start for a series

of talks of a kind for which there is an infinity of good material. Before railways had been joined up and when roads were apt to be tracks of mud, little ships were more important in personal transport and general economy than they are today. Many of them carried passengers regularly, often into out-of-the-way bays and up tidal rivers that don't see much traffic now. They were the sea coaches of our frontier society. Very little record exists of their history or of the many "characters" among their crews. Indeed, the history of coastal shipping generally has been sadly neglected. Given in an easy, pleasant style, with a good sense of narrative, "Binnacle's" talks are doing something to fill the gap.

—A.M.

Credit and Debit

THE Christmas season brought its pleasures and disappointments in radio as in everything else. I thought *You're Welcome* a very agreeable show, if not quite on the hysterically vivacious level the publicity had led us to expect. The orchestra, Oswald Cheesman's music and Peter Gwynne's and Bill Austin's imitations (especially Gwynne's devastating Melvin turn) were its chief assets; and Fred Pollitt's antediluvian jokes and the unoriginal parts of the script (including the Colonel Stoopnagle nursery tale) among the debits. The Alec Guinness *Christmas Carol* was the main disappointment. Guinness was as good a Scrooge as I've heard but, in a typical Towers production, the familiar story was so streamlined into half an hour that only a midget's skeleton remained. Mr. Pickwick, on the other hand, enjoyed an almost unexpurgated Christmas, and Charles Laughton read the Bible narrative characteristically, and, to my ear, beautifully. Although there was appropriate music in plenty, and much of it unacknowledged, there was very little drama which explicitly recognised the religious character of the season, as opposed to the post-Christian and secularly convivial aspects. Yet 1YC's play *Emmanuel* was such a moving and well-spoken play that one would perhaps be greedy to expect more.

Jam in the Sponge

NZBS recordings and studio recitals are usually things to be proud of, but BBC features remain the jam in the sponge and the meat in the sandwich. Perhaps it isn't fair to judge programming over a holiday period, but I could not help noting that one recent Sunday and Monday, every programme I listened to, with one exception, came from the BBC. Station 1YA gave us a delightful *Britain Sings* feature, a *Picture Parade* of "The Browning Version" (having seen the film the previous evening I doubly enjoyed Michael Redgrave's superb Crocker-Harris), a London Studio Concert which gave me my first hearing of Leigh's *Agincourt Overture*; and 1YC in the evening began what seems likely to prove a worthy version of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Then on Monday the exciting potted version of Purcell's *King Arthur* flooded the air with glorious music, and, so far as I could hear them, words not unworthy of Dryden. The only exception,

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