



LEFT: Four laureates—(left to right), D'Avenant, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Masfield

POETS BY APPOINTMENT

What could be daffier
Than John Skelton's laughter?

IT was Robert Graves who asked the question. Skelton, a rowdy, harum-scarum English poet with a noisy, scampering way of writing, was born about 1460—an extraordinary fellow, and at this distance of time, rather likeable. That, anyway, is how Professor J. Y. T. Greig describes him in the first of his illustrated talks on *The Poets Laureate*—an NZBS Coronation programme—which will start this month. It will be heard eventually from all National stations. Professor Greig, who is Professor of English at Otago University, talks chiefly, but not only, about the official poets laureate. As he says, he could have gone back as far as Chaucer, who had some sort of post at the royal court, and he could have included Shakespeare, who now and then had to put on the royal livery. About half-way between these two came Skelton, and with him Professor Greig chooses to start his story. Listeners will find, whether or not poetry is their cup of tea, that it is a very good story, too. On the first programme with Skelton is Ben Jonson. Like Skelton he was "a vain, prickly, quarrelsome fellow," but even the poems he wrote to order—unlike the work of some who were to follow him—had the ring of a powerful mind and a practised hand.

When Jonson died poets began "scrambling and lobbying" for the succession to the laureateship, as by that time the post was commonly, though still not officially, known. It went to William D'Avenant, generally believed to be Shakespeare's godson and perhaps an even closer relation. If D'Avenant was never really of much account as a poet, his successor, John Dryden, was "not merely a great poet but also a great man, and no poet laureate after

figures of fun." Quite a batch of these came after Dryden, and they are discussed together in one programme.

Two of Professor Greig's major poets are included in the second half of *The Poets Laureate*. Wordsworth is bracketed with Southey, whom he succeeded; and Tennyson gets a programme to himself. When Southey was appointed it was known that the salary would be welcome to him. In a letter to Scott, who had declined the honour, Southey described the delays and indignities he had to suffer before he could be sworn in. The salary for the office, he mentioned, had been raised for Jonson to £100 and a tierce of Spanish Canary wine, "now wickedly commuted for £26, which said sum, unlike the Canary, is subject to income-tax, land-tax, and Heaven knows what taxes beside." The whole net income was now only about £90. Nevertheless, "It comes to me as a God-send," Southey said, "and I have vested it in a life-policy."



PROFESSOR J. Y. T. GREIG

Bringing the story down to the present is a talk on Austin, Bridges and Masfield. Like all the others, it contains a generous measure of readings, including a long extract from *Reynard the Fox*.

The Poets Laureate will start from 1YA at 3.20 p.m. on Sunday, May 10, from 3YC at 7.30 p.m. on Wednesday May 6, and from the other YC stations about a fortnight later.

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track would provide interesting programmes and at the same time enlarge our knowledge of the composer's work.

Unfinished Story

WHAT happened to Fraulein Adelheid Reichenbach? What became of the love-birds nestling in the grey hair? Or is Sarah Campion so confirmed a Berkeleyian philosopher that she could no longer believe in the Fraulein's existence when the tippet of many furs was no longer present to her senses? This talk from 4YC was witty and lively, told by an inescapable spellbinder of the Ancient Mariner variety; it had an arresting opening, an interesting development—but where was the end? With many radio reminiscences, one could hardly care less about the fate of the people involved; but Adelheid Reichenbach had, in the first few minutes of this talk become such a person that one wanted to hear all. And that, I suppose, is the final test of the power of Miss Campion's story-telling. Yet I wish she had given it an ending, instead of chopping it off in mid-stream when the requisite time had elapsed.

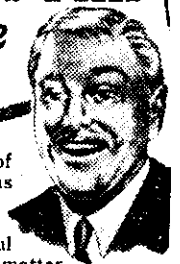
—Loquax



Spencer Dighs photos

ELEGY—verses written by Alistair Campbell (right) in tribute to a friend accidentally killed in the Southern Alps—is read by William Austin in a programme to be broadcast from 1YC at 9.30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 5, and 3YC at 8.48 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6. The reading is preceded by an appreciation of the poem by John Summers, of Christchurch, and followed by a setting by Douglas Lilburn (left) of eight verses, sung by Gerald Christeller (baritone), with Frederick Page at the piano. The Lilburn "Elegy" will be repeated from 1YC on May 7 and 3YC on May 8. The complete programme will be heard from the other two YC stations in the week starting May 18.

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