

HEALING THE SICK

SO convincing was the BBC production of *Children in Hospital* (from 1YC) that it was quite a surprise at the end to hear a longish list of actors' credits. It is a long time since I have heard a programme in which reality was recreated in so lifelike and unobtrusive a manner, and in which studio and on-the-spot material was so neatly dovetailed. Beginning with a moving glimpse of the squalor of early Victorian London with its appalling child death-rate, the programme traced the rise of the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children, from its brave beginnings under Dr. West to the great centre of healing it is today. Listening to Charles Dickens's impassioned appeal for the hospital—as recreated by Emlyn Williams—it was interesting to recall that it was one of the few forms of organised charity to which he gave wholehearted approval in his novels, introducing it into the second book of *Our Mutual Friend*. He would surely have approved also of the result. Whatever there is to be said against the Victorian idea of progress, it is surely true that in the Victorian age and our own there has been an enormous development in at least one good thing—the power to alleviate innocent suffering.

Tailor-made Mystery

THE first instalment of *The Hidden Motive* looked like the start of another tailor-made mystery from the practised hand of Lester Powell. Heavily-insured wife of wealthy actor-manager dies in bath; eccentric onion-chewing Canadian statistical expert suspects murder; insurance agent investigates, interviews rhapsodical Welsh manservant, cool, good-looking secretary and dumb blonde "text-adviser," who later meets foul play in agent's rooms. . . It looks as if we're all set for a cosy exercise in actuarial detection. A minor and perhaps irrelevant mystery is the programming of this serial from 1YC. The "new deal" among the stations a few years ago has made real and substantial improvements; yet much that we get from the YCs is (in BBC terminology) "Home" listening; and *The Hidden Motive* obviously aims at a very medium height of brow. I'm not sure about this—should we resent the encroachment, or is it welcome light relief? After all, the longer the hair, the more you need to let it down occasionally. —M.K.J.

Great Themes

WE could perhaps claim the title of First Lady of N.Z. Radio Drama for Maria Dronke, whose splendid series *Aspects of Great Drama* has just concluded from 2YA. She has both warmth and insight, and there is a kind of majestic urgency about her presentation that makes mental flight extremely difficult. The course was a strenuous one, covering 25 centuries and two continents. Indeed, I felt at times it was too strenuous, particularly in the last talk (on the moderns), when it was necessary to cover a great deal of ground that

one would have liked to picnic on. I can only suggest that Productions come to our rescue by doing for Lorca, Obey and Anouilh what they have been doing with such competence for John Gundry, C. Gordon Glover and William Shakespeare.

Moments in History

THE BBC *Civis Britannus*—a Study of the Don Pacifico Affair, was fascinating to listen to, yet so laced with authenticity that enjoyment was felt to be merely an agreeable by-product of the educative process. Credit for this happy result must go to writer-director Christopher Sykes (who was also responsible for the programme on Edward VII in the *Throne and People* series). His recreation of such figures as Lord Palmerston, Queen Victoria, the young Gladstone and the Prince Consort was masterly, seasoned with a deft irony that has the effect of keeping them in their place in history. Yet at the end of the programme he managed to take his tongue out of his cheek long enough to send us away with some long, long thoughts about the Lessons of History.

—M.B.

Jane Mander's Novel

(LIVER A. GILLESPIE'S adaptation of *Allen Adair*, by Jane Mander, for radio, which was heard recently from 4YA, proved an interesting if not wholly successful experiment. On the debit side, *Allen Adair* showed too clearly its origin as a diffuse and rather rambling novel to make a good "play," and the incursion of dramatised "scenes" into Adair's narrative gave it too much of an episodic quality. It was good, on the other hand, to be given the story in one piece, lasting approximately 70 minutes, and unusual to hear such an extended piece of New Zealand writing which had historical, even more than intrinsic, interest for New Zealanders.

Serious Listening

"YOU cannot please all of the people all of the time" is probably the motto engraved on the hearts of all programme organisers, and Saturday evening entertainment must provide a particular problem. The occasional stay-at-home is apt to be as furious about a light and frothy programme as is the occasional gad-about who finds he is missing something he would have liked to hear. Single, topical programmes, such as *Lookout*, stand by themselves, and can be missed without destroying continuity; but when a station embarks on a whole series of talks with a wide interest, as 4YA has done with its programmes setting out to examine the Welfare State from different angles, the listener must prepare to abandon his social life for a period, or, more probably, lend only an occasional, convenient ear to pick up a fraction of an investigation, the great merit of which lay in its thoroughness.

—Loquax

First Impressions

THE difficulty of *First Hearing* to the commentator is that in a single hearing one can hardly do more than outline a personal reaction. The most surprising thing to my mind is the number of poems coming from new sources. The *Poetry Year Book*, 1952, had half prepared me for other poems from Elsie

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