

The Wonder of Radio in Raratonga

Impressive Story of Special Transmission



VERY interesting account of a modern "Island Night's Entertainment" has been received by the Broadcasting Company from Captain Campbell, of Raratonga. He gives a graphic description of a large gathering of native chiefs, sitting in a palm grove in the brilliant moonlight of a tropic night, listening to a programme broadcast by 1YA, Auckland. The feature of the programme was a talk given by Mr. F. W. Platts, C.M.G., late Commissioner for the Cook Islands, and now S.M. at Hamilton. The natives knew that Mr. Platts was far overseas, yet his voice, which they knew well, was heard clearly and distinctly. This caused greater wonderment than did the actual musical items. The realism of the occasion was further heightened by Captain Campbell hanging a large photograph of Mr. Platts above the loudspeaker.

The concert was broadcast on Saturday, June 8 (Friday in Raratonga), the suggestion for a special concert having

come from Captain Campbell, who also suggested that Mr. Platts, beloved in the Islands, should be asked to send greetings to the native chiefs. This Mr. Platts kindly consented to do, and journeyed from Hamilton to Auckland for the purpose.

Captain Campbell's letter reads as follows:—

"On behalf of the native chiefs of Raratonga who were present at the reception of the broadcast from 1YA on the evening of June 8, I wish to thank your company for the excellent programme arranged for our entertainment, and particularly to thank you for giving us all an opportunity to again hear the late Commissioner of these islands, Mr. F. W. Platts, C.M.G."

"On receipt of your radio advising me that Mr. Platts had consented to speak from 1YA, I erected my set in one of the large village houses and tested it out on the evening of June 7, hoping that it would be possible to allow a number of the natives, in addition to the chiefs, to be present, but unfortunately static, combined with rain

on the iron roof, completely marred reception, and it seemed probable that it would be very unlikely that even a portion of Mr. Platts' talk would be audible.

"The following day I erected the set in a large native are of my own. This are (native hut made of thin sticks tied with bark fibre and roofed with rau thatch) is right out at the southern end of the island, as far away as possible from the Government radio station."

"I tested the set very carefully, and found some slight set noise, tracing it to a bad earth. There was considerable static then. At 7 p.m., our time, Friday evening, (5.10 p.m., Saturday, N.Z.), the first of the chiefs began to arrive by car, in most cases motoring ten miles from the principal village. The invitation said 9.45, but they did not intend to be late."

"You can imagine the scene; a beautiful clear tropic night, with the moon shining like silver on the coconut palms. The are is situated right in the bush, surrounded by coconut trees, on the top of two of which the aerial is mounted. As each car or motor truck arrived with their parties of men, most of whom were well past middle age, for a few moments the lights of the car lamps brought into prominence the stems of the coconuts like the pillars of some gigantic temple. Then, as they were switched off, black darkness for a few moments until the eyes grew accustomed to the change. There were handshakes and "kia orana kotu" greetings. Then they went off into the "are," more greetings, and all sat down to listen to the "apinga ou" (the new thing)."

"When the set was switched on the static had completely gone, and there was not the slightest fading. We got Chicago, three stations in Sydney, two in Melbourne, Hobart, and some of the market reports from Christchurch, the price of oranges and bananas from the Cook Islands, as quoted on the market being shillings above the returns that they received here, as per usual."

"Then we brought in Auckland, and they heard for the first time from the announcer, that a special programme had been arranged for the benefit of the South Sea Islands, and that Mr. Platts was to speak at nine o'clock (N.Z. time). I had a clock set at New Zealand time, and it surprised them to see the difference in the two clocks, and to know that it was Saturday night in New Zealand. Of course, some of them had been to New Zealand to meet the Duke of York, but it required radio to bring the different right home."

"As the first Maori song and the various Hawaiian items came through with full speaker volume they were delighted, but slightly inclined to regard it as very much like a gramophone. At last came 9 o'clock. Then the announcer gave out the weather report. One could almost feel the disappointment; they were sure Mr. Platts was not going to speak, but no one made a sound; then came his greetings, beginning 'Kia Orana ki Tinomana Ariki,'

etc., just at nine. I had hung a photograph of Mr. Platts above the machine, and every eye was lit up and fixed on the photograph. As he went on they leaned nearer and nearer to the machine. When he finished there was not a word until well into the next item, and then I am afraid they did not hear much of it. Those who could understand English explained to those who could not, and I was asked to send you a radio first thing to give you our thanks. This I did. It should decode, 'Delighted, reception perfect, express our thanks,' and we hope you have done this to the staff of 1YA also."

"The chiefs listened to every item with a new interest, and when the special 'Good night' came, followed by the National Anthem, they all stood up, and the Native pastor, on behalf of all, expressed thanks for the opportunity of seeing and hearing another of the marvellous works of the white man."

"It was nearly 1 a.m. as the last car moved off into the darkness, not to seek their beds, but to spread the news from end to end of the island that they had heard Mr. Platts speak the same as if he stood before them."

"In the Resident Agent's house at Mangaia Island a group of Europeans listened to Mr. Platts's greeting."

"At Raratonga I was the only European present, and it was an experience I will remember for ever with delight."

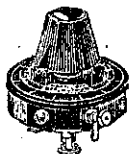
NOW that the Postmaster-General has decided to counterpane the use of B.B.C. stations for television tests, the Baird company is confident that experiments can be started before the opening of the Brookman's Park station in July.



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