

# America Hasn't Enough Money, Says Richard Crooks

## World-Famous Singer Passes Through Auckland

(Specially Interviewed for the "Radio Record" by ROBIN HYDE.)

**I**F only sad-voiced youths in white jackets wouldn't say "Starboard" when they mean "Right" and "Forward" when they mean something I still don't grasp, groping one's way through the innards of the great white Mariposa would be so much simpler. As it was, when at length I burst in upon Richard Crooks, the tenor from New Jersey with the voice that knocks 'em all, from metropolitan opera patrons 'way down to your little radio fan, the daily paper boys had already got Mr. Crooks pinned to a cane lounge, and were passionately questioning him about the public reaction to advertising in sponsored radio programmes.

Mr. Crooks, dark, clean-shaven, smiling, immaculately tailored in brown, and, like the average tenor, full in build, laughed and said that the public didn't distress themselves much about advertising on radio when, every day of the week, sponsored programmes offered them famous singers. In a half-hour's programme, the advertiser would be allowed just two minutes to drop his little reminder in the public ear; and, even so, it had to be unobtrusive and delicate, not a brick. For instance, Richard Crooks sings for Firestone: the advertising expert would spend his two minutes drifting gently around how wonderful soya beans are, and how many ways they can be used, such as mock alabaster and flooring. Right at the end, in a terrific hurry, he would breathe, "And, of course, in Firestone products," and that would be all over for the evening. After this the public would divert themselves with the voices that breathe o'er the Metropolitan Eden.

I like Mr. Crooks, because Mr. Crooks is the only American who ever said to me that America hadn't got enough money — such a pleasing conclusion for the subject of the "broke" British Empire. Or, to be exact, what Mr. Crooks really did say was that there had been little elaboration in the staging of opera, little repowdering of the Metropolitan Opera House's nose, much drawing-in of artistic horns, because America hadn't so much to spend, during the days of depression, as before them. Moreover, he added, votes had a lot to do with spending, and if a Government thought it would get more votes from firemen than from opera singers, the firemen were quite likely to get the hand-out, if any.

The Metropolitan

Opera, dependent almost entirely on subscriptions and on the popularity earned by its own unquestioned merit, found its financial position gone to glory. But, to make up for this, its last year was a record for subscriptions, and prosperity simply poured back into its great hall; where, by the way, you can purchase standing-room for a dollar and a half, a seat for from two and a half to five dollars, but never a place in a box, for metropolitan boxes aren't available for public purchase. "Traviata" was expensively restaged there last season, for the farewell of Madame Bori, who has sung in grand opera with Richard Crooks for the past four or five years, so successfully and happily that there has hardly been a change in the cast since they started to work together.

But this is starting a long way ahead of Remote Beginnings; which were, in Mr. Crooks's case, the little seaport town of Frenton, Jersey. At nine he was a boy soprano in an episcopal choir, warbled there till his voice broke, and can still, at times, hit that same dulcet soprano note. At a party last year, Mr. Crooks and his friend, Lawrence Tibbett (who has also sung for Firestone and other sponsored programmes), suddenly decided that they could and would render Mendelssohn's sacred duet, "I Waited For the Lord," just as well as in the old days when had worn white surplices. They lasted till the party threw cushions.

Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra, was Richard Crooks's first musical inspiration. While his voice was breaking, he studied in Germany, came back and joined the U.S. army, went air-minded, qualified as a cadet flying officer, and was about

ready to leave the U.S.A. when the war ended. He still flies everywhere, has held a commercial pilot's license, but doesn't own a plane yet. In America, he says, the sky is a network of planes — you can get from anywhere to anywhere in a few hours, and the sight of the majestic Graf liners sailing over New York, two days after they leave Germany, is now quite familiar. But smaller plane movements, like the Flying Flea, are discouraged because unless the pilot is capable of flying on electric beam, he is liable to bump into something outside his own size, and overturn what may be quite a valuable passenger airboat. America's sky, with Flying Fleas left hopping, would be rather like Christchurch and its bicycles. (Continued on next page.)



Snapped on Board the Mariposa by a "Radio Record" photographer — Richard Crooks, the world-famous tenor, with his wife and family. Mr. Crooks is giving a series of concerts in Australia and will later tour New Zealand.