

These Milestones . . .



DAME NELLIE MELBA faces the microphone to broadcast the first British programme in 1920.

"It is impossible," writes Garry Allighan in his biography of Sir John Reith, "to place a finger on the leaves of the book of Time and say: 'Here began radio.' Radio existed from the day that the life-giving sun first threw its rays over a dead earth."

Mr. Allighan's education in astronomy may differ from the orthodox, but his statement of philosophy at least draws attention to the fact that radio is *not* man's invention. Man has merely learned gradually how to harness the forces of nature.

The reader has probably heard or read half a dozen accounts of the first broadcast, all dissimilar. The fact was that several men discovered sections of the radio truth and that the co-ordination of their ideas resulted in the famous Marconi experiment in transmitting "wireless" signals.

The story of how Marconi rigged his home-made apparatus on the roof of the family home at Pontecchio and how, with his mother as witness, he rang an electric bell with power transmitted through the ether, is known to nearly everyone. Some contend that in this strange experiment radio broadcasting was born. Others hold that the first real broadcast was made years later when for the first time he transmitted the Morse letter S to his farmer-assistant, Mignani. Some even hold that the first broadcasts were made in the technical sense by Hertz.

But, since the story of radio has been the story of how man learned to apply existing natural forces, there are other milestones in the history of it no less important

FOR instance, who now remembers that radio telephony—something we had hardly ever heard about in New

Forgotten Moments Of Drama In The History Of Radio Broadcasting

Special to the "Record"

by

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Zealand until after the war—was far beyond its infancy in 1909?

Years before, the invention of the thermionic valve had made possible a series of experiments which culminated in 1909 when Lee de Forrest obtained permission from the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company, New York, to rig a microphone backstage.

The management, looking down its nose at this new-fangled scientific experiment, put a musty attic at the inventor's disposal and tolerated him to build a cumbersome microphone on a trolley on the stage. The opera was "Cavalleria Rusticana," and before the curtain rose the tenor sang "Siciliana." The microphone was then hastily trundled out of sight by the scene-shifters.

The tenor who took part in that historic broadcast—the first radio entertainment of all time—was Enrico Caruso.

The intervention of war, the preoccupation of the official world with radio's material uses, delayed the evolution of broadcast entertainment, but hastened the development of technique. In 1912, 1913 and 1914 the Wireless Club, later to develop into the Radio Society of Great Britain, held sporadic telephony broadcasts, and de Forrest,

on the other side of the Atlantic, regularly broadcast Columbia records. But it was not until two years after the end of the war that another great artist faced the microphone. The

CARUSO AT THE "MIKE"

London "Daily Mail" wrote of that memorable occasion: "At the invitation of the 'Daily Mail,' Dame Nellie Melba, the famous prima donna, sang to the world on the wireless telephone. . . . She told me it was the most wonderful moment of her career. The prima donna began with a long trill, 'my hallo to the world,' she called it. Then followed songs in English, French, and Italian—all of them swelling out into space through the mysterious electric force which made the unique experiment heard within a thousand-mile radius of Chelmsford."

AND, in recalling that radio milestone, let it be recorded that Marconi, the man responsible for the transmission, was reprimanded by the British Post Office for the "trivial employment of wireless equipment," and was "warned to cease activities calculated to hamper legitimate wireless service!"

UTILITARIAN radio has had its dramatic moments, too. Who now recalls the first wireless rescue—way back in Queen Victoria's day? In March, 1898, the steamer "F. F. Matthews" collided with the East Goodwin Lightship, and was so severely damaged (Cont. on page 30.)