

They That Have Ears

*Crusaders for the Hard of
Hearing Make Radio
Their Ally*

Special to the "Record"

by

SYLVIA MUNROE

I STOOD with a friend and watched a tui singing on an apple-tree branch. The air was tumbled with sound.

She said slowly: "I can see the feathers jerking on his throat and the way he throws back his head, but his song is a jumble of discords. I know the little deep roll I should hear when he fluffs his neck like that, but still I cannot hear.

"When you go walking over the fields, the silence is made up of a hundred thousand noises—the thin clashing of grass blades in the wind, the wind's song itself, the scrape of a cricket's legs and the hum of flying things, the muted pounding of the distant sea.

"When I go walking, I walk alone, in a silence so dead and empty it takes shape and presses its hands upon my ears and shouts and calls—yet still is silence. . . .

"You see, I am nearly deaf now. And it is a new, hollow world I am entering. . . ."

IT is estimated by otologists that the number of hard of hearing or deafened people in New Zealand to-day stands at, roughly, 13,000. Although the nature of the affliction itself makes an accurate assessment impossible, because few of the less serious cases are ever reported, yet on the basis of otologists' experience and of comparison with statistics in other countries it is safe to say that probably nine out of every 100 New Zealanders are not in full possession of their hearing faculties.

The thought is staggering, and more so when you reflect that of the percentage of hearing-impaired in New Zealand, an appreciable proportion are a liability rather than an asset to the community. Their productiveness, unless remedial or compensatory measures are taken, is reduced to a considerable degree—and that is a factor particularly important in view of the Dominion's almost stationary population.

This consideration of community usefulness is mentioned apart from the humanitarian aspect of assisting the hard of hearing and the deaf to resume normal living, but actually the two cannot be separated. The problem of restoring the hard of hearing to usefulness is primarily the problem of restoring their confidence and happiness. That is the line that has been taken by hard of hearing leagues all over the world, and during the last six years in New Zealand.

The difficulty is that most people with hearing defects are sensitive about their handicap in an unusual way. They try to cover up, not by taking measures against the defect but by ignoring it. Then, because their affliction inevitably



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. . . Deaf founder of the world's first league for the hard of hearing, was inspired by watching a German woman straining to catch the preacher's words in a little church at Berlin in 1901.

lays them open to embarrassing blunders in social behaviour, they take refuge in a withdrawal from the world. The physical sensation of isolation which is one of the sorest trials of hearing-impairment, is made doubly terrible by the mental loneliness that follows

the severance or curtailment of normal social contacts.

Never do Rupert Brooke's words ring more truly than when they are applied to the hard of hearing—"Each in his own obscure distress wanders in a wilderness."

SOMETHING of these thoughts crossed my mind when I was talking the other day to Mrs. G. A. Hurd-Wood, Wellington, founder of the New Zealand League for the Hard of Hearing in 1933 and

now active in the formation of the first South Island branch in Christchurch this week. Auckland and Wellington are the other two centres.

A woman with a besetting purpose to bring practical comfort to the hard of hearing in New Zealand, Mrs. Hurd-Wood is not working blindly. She began in December, 1936, to study hard-hearing achievement in Europe and America, and during a 15-months' tour contacted 97 leagues.

What she learnt is extensive, but some points are salient. First, that lip-reading is the straightest and widest road from lost hearing to normality; secondly, that the "catch 'em young" maxim applies forcibly in this work, and the children of pre-school age must receive greater attention; thirdly, that New Zealand (Cont. on page 41.)

LATEST cause that will be pleaded through radio's voice is that of 13,000 New Zealand hard of hearing people, whose social usefulness is limited and whose happiness is shaken by their affliction. Mrs. G. A. Hurd-Wood, Wellington, speaks with the backing of world-wide observation and experience when she comes before the microphone at Christchurch this week.