



Why not write Our Own Drama?

"NO. I disagree," contended Mr. Montague when we expressed the opinion that radio broadcasting was killing amateur drama.

"On the contrary, it is bringing to light a great amount of talent, both in authorship and in acting. It is tending to develop the New Zealand spirit—to make New Zealanders more self-reliant, and to encourage them to do things that were previously left to the outsider.

"In these days of seemingly exorbitant royalties we have to do these things ourselves or go without."

And so the whole subject of plays and royalties was opened.

"There are literally dozens of plays that could be put on the air, but the high price that has to be paid for them makes their presentation utterly impossible. Splendid one, two and three-act plays they are, too. In England and America, where conditions are somewhat different, the public have grown to appreciate these excellent plays, and they look forward to their presentation. In our country there is no doubt that the listening public appreciate the radio play, but there are factors that greatly restrict the number broadcast."

"But isn't it a fact that a large number of these plays are produced by amateur societies? How then, are they not affected by the royalties," we asked.

"Yes, sometimes there are as many as four and five plays produced in Auckland at the same time. These plays are either free from royalties, like some of those put over the air, or their producers evade the payment by changing the name or trusting to their good luck. There is no doubt that a great deal of this dodging goes on. Over the air, of course, there is no opportunity for doing this, even if the inclination were there. We can get over the difficulty by using certain American material, but it is not altogether suitable, and often has to be arranged and altered."

"Then there is a definite opening for New Zealand talent?"

"Exactly. We have had a little, though not enough. There is enough talent in

this country, but it is dormant or is attracted overseas. We are willing to produce over the air anything that reaches a sufficiently high standard. Not a little matter reaches us but it cannot be used because the authors forget that the play has to be broadcast. They hide their characters behind curtains, make them change their costumes, have them unfold the plot through facial or body expressions, and sometimes hinge the climax on one of the characters, removing some characteristic such as a beard.

"WRITING a play for the air is a much different affair from writing one for the stage, but one can often be adapted for the other. Down south there is a society which produces nothing but New Zealand plays, and a high standard has been reached. I should like to get some of these, as they could probably be adapted for broadcasting purposes."

"You say that people go wrong in not writing a radio play. What would you consider the main elements of such a play?" we questioned.

"In the first place it must be dramatic. Drama is so much easier to write than humour, for the latter needs brilliant dialogue to make it a success. Some New Zealanders have succeeded, but not many. But there is ample scope for the dramatist. Our history abounds with incidents that can be dramatised—scenes from the lives of the early Maori, the landings of the explorers, the Maori wars, the lives of the politicians, soldiers, and pioneers, who figured in our early history—all are dear to the New Zealander, and he likes them infinitely more than the imported play.

"The plays should be restricted to one act, though two and three are always welcome. It is somewhat difficult to maintain interest over three acts, and a long play must reach a high standard to be successful.

"The climax must be dramatic and forceful. This is essential. The play that just fizzles out is useless for radio purposes. There must be interest and excitement all the way, and it must culminate in the last few lines. (Concluded on page 2.)

Our Conversation with Mr. J. F. Montague on

New Zealand Dramatic Talent and how it can be made to solve

The Royalty Problems