

Shakespeare Anniversary Night

The 315th anniversary of Shakespeare's death falls on April 23, and in commemoration special programmes have been arranged for 1YA and 2YA on that evening.



Madge Thomas as Lady Macbeth, and John Storr as Macbeth, in the scene they will present from 2YA on April 23. During the recent Competitions held in Wellington, they won the open dialogue section with this scene. They broadcast regularly from 2YA as "The Sketchers."

ON April 23, Stratford-on-Avon, the birth-place of Shakespeare, will commence its annual Memorial Week in honour of the greatest poet and playwright England ever knew.

Each year celebrated Shakespearean actors and actresses from all parts of the Empire foregather to pay homage to the long-dead bard. Names such as those of Sir Francis Benson and Sir Johnstone Forbes-Robertson, two leading figures of the Shakespearean world of today, and that of Sybil Thorndike, one of the greatest tragic actresses of our time, are but three of the galaxy of world-famed names whose owners will attend Memorial Week.

In addition, thousands of Shakespeare devotees from all parts of Great Britain make a yearly pilgrimage during Memorial Week to Stratford-on-Avon and its historical neighbourhood, made famous because of Anne Hathaway's cottage, the house of Shakespeare's birth, the celebrated Droeshout engraving, and a hundred other antiquities which perhaps knew the touch of genius.

Processions and festivals, gay with colour, are held in the streets where once Shakespeare walked, while in the famous Memorial Theatre, Shakespearean plays are performed, often by foreign companies. The settings are always of the simplest.

Though we in New Zealand have no Memorial Theatre to keep fresh the name of Shakespeare, nevertheless the approaching

anniversary of his death—the 315th—will not pass unnoticed. On the evening of April 23 Clement May, noted elocutionist and President of the Dickens-Shakespeare Society of Wellington, will present from 2YA four excerpts from three of Shakespeare's most famous plays, namely, "Julius Caesar," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Macbeth." Assisting him will be a chosen company of his pupils.

Below Clement May makes several interesting observations concerning Shakespeare's works, and explains why they are immortal.

"To say that Shakespeare's plays will never die is almost a truism, but the fact was never so forcibly brought home to me as when I was watching a performance of 'Julius Caesar' recently.

"The dress of those taking part was, of course, strange, but I closed my eyes—and heard thoughts and emotions ex-

pressed as I have often heard them in everyday life. We are all unconscious plagiarists of Shakespeare, and that is why his works are modern, and always will be until humanity ceases to exist. They are not just historical writings, but are human documents, instinct with life.

"IT is in this respect—in Shakespeare's uncanny ability to clothe himself in the very personalities of living beings, and to voice their thoughts as they themselves would—that he was a genius. His plays live, for they are life, and because of this they are ageless. Pitt, famous statesman and orator, once paid tribute to Shakespeare's beauty of diction by quoting him in his famous speech on the Slave Trade: 'But yesterday, and Britain might have stood against the world. Now none so poor as to do her reverence.' Read 'Caesar' for 'Britain' and 'him' for 'her,' and the quotation is from 'Julius Caesar.' . . ."

The first scene Clement May and his company will present is from "Julius Caesar." It commences just after the murder of Caesar by Brutus and his fellow-conspirators, when Brutus is telling the people not to be affrighted at the tragedy. The conspirators talk among themselves, congratulating each other on the deed, and anticipating the esteem in

which they will be held by posterity: "So often shall the knot of us be call'd, the men that gave their country liberty," avers Cassius.

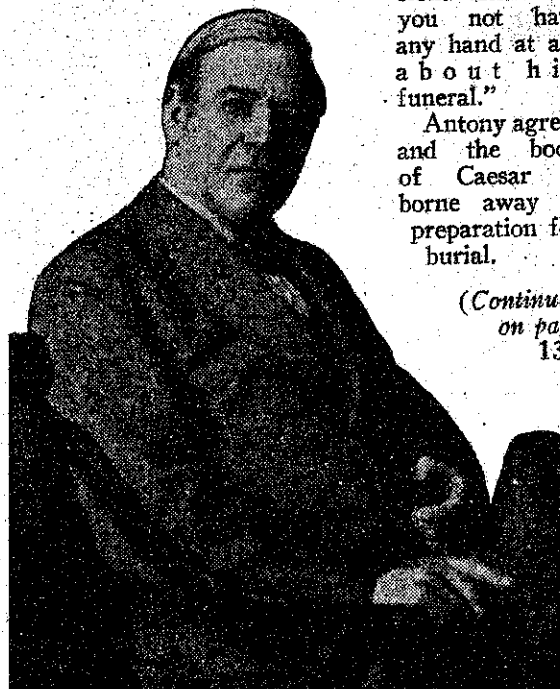
Then Mark Antony enters, shocked at the death of Caesar, and demands an accounting. Brutus, anxious to avoid antagonising Antony, endeavours to placate him, and promises that a full explanation will be forthcoming. Sorrowfully Antony realises that what has been done is perhaps for the well-being of the Empire, but nevertheless he demands proof of Caesar's shortcomings: "Friends am I with you all, and love you all; Upon this hope, that you shall give me reasons, Why, and wherein, Caesar was dangerous."

Antony then asks permission to speak at the funeral. This Cassius counsels against, for Antony's powers of eloquence are well known and would be dangerous if used to sway the populace against the conspirators. Brutus, however, over-rides the objection, provides, as he tells Antony:

"You shall not in your funeral speech blame us. But speak all good you can devise of Caesar: And say, you do't by our permission. Else shall you not have any hand at all, about his funeral."

Antony agrees and the body of Caesar is borne away in preparation for burial.

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Clement May, who is producing excerpts from Shakespeare from 2YA on April 23. From 1YA J. F. Montague and his dramatic players will present several scenes and vocal numbers from Shakespeare's works.