

Editorial Notes

Wellington, Friday, Jan. 15, 1932

THE famous "Goo-oo-ood night" of 2YA has disappeared from the air—to the joy, be it frankly said, of some and the dismay and concern of others. With the change in control new formal announcements at the opening and closing of sessions were adopted, and under that system of uniformity disappears Mr. Drummond's famous "vowel elongation of saccharine unctuousness," as it was once described. On the other hand, it is beyond doubt that to many that "Goo-oo-ood night" was a welcome link with 2YA. From these admirers and adherents have come protests. Some of those protests are published elsewhere, and possibly more will follow as the sense of loss is appreciated. Those welcoming the change are not likely to be so vocal.

ON the whole we think the famous farewell may fittingly pass away with a suitable epitaph as having served its turn. At the same time we sincerely trust that the Radio Board and its management will not restrict unnecessarily the personality of its announcers on the air. Radio for its best development requires friendly, yet dignified, intimacy of contact between the station and its audience. Undue formality and mouthing assumption of dignity are out of place. Standardisation of announcement to the total exclusion of radio personality would be undesirable and disastrous, and, while standardisation in the opening and closing announcement is desirable and necessary, we trust that room will be left for a certain amount of elasticity and expression of personality in the contact between Mr. Announcer and his listening friends.

AN exhaustive analysis of the merit of various styles of announcers was made some time back in America by a "Radio Voice Technique Committee" formed at the request of the Radio Corporation of America and New York University for the purpose of determining what characteristics constitute a perfect radio announcer. As an outcome certain definite conclusions were reached, and to encourage the announcers of America to aim at the highest possible standard in their work a gold medal is awarded annually to the announcer whose technique is adjudged the best by a jury of scholars, literary figures, fore-

most actors and exponents of speech. This award is in high repute and fosters the ideal of the announcer's art. That the influence of the announcer is great needs no argument. Already it is being shown in Britain that provincialisms and local dialects are tending to disappear in conscious and unconscious adoption of the standard speech as heard over the air. The same thing applies in America. The dialects in various States are disappearing, attributable in the main to radio influence, and perhaps in lesser degree to the increased personal contact permitted by the modern revolution in transport.

ONE of the early shocks experienced by the investigating committee was the discovery of the distinct unsuitability of the feminine voice for radio work. Five thousand listeners of a leading station were canvassed as to which announcers they preferred—men or women. The vote was 100 to 1 in favour of the masculine voice. And that sounded the death-knell of women in this field, which on somewhat superficial observation seemed specially suited to them. What is the reason for this marked preference? Primarily, a man's voice, it has been found, "takes" better over the air and has more volume. Further, the announcer requires to possess a tremendous range of general knowledge, to be familiar with the terms and phrases distinctive of sports of all kinds, a knowledge of politics, weather, business, statistics, market practices, terms, etc. That information sounds better from a man than a woman. But possibly the greatest fault with the woman announcer was that she had difficulty in maintaining balanced utterance, in repressing uncontrolled enthusiasms, and maintaining that reserve and dignity essential to the position. The listener naturally resents a voice that is too intimate on short acquaintance, or that has a patronising quality, such as a teacher might use toward school children. Women, for some reason, have difficulty in avoiding this effect on listeners, and people dislike being talked down to in a condescending manner.

ANOTHER trend revealed by the investigating committee was that in the early days radio announcement was allowed to run toward spontaneity. As maturity developed in the art, that phase passed. (We now witness the abandonment of its last expression in New Zealand.) Following on the period of spontaneity came a phase of artificiality, when the forced laugh and meticulous enunciation of each syllable were notable. That, too, has disappeared, and the art, as evidenced to-day, aims at a balanced and artistic imitation of spontaneity, without vulgarity or artificial stiffness. The value of the voice lies in its ability to portray character, emotion, mood, and atmosphere. The manner must be suited to the occasion. The announcer must speak with conviction when conviction is necessary; must vary his voice to the character of the announcement; must change his tempo as need arises—for instance, from the 125-word-a-minute rate required for statistics, market reports, etc., to the probable 175-word-a-minute rate permitted by descriptive matter and brisk advices. It has been hard to find good radio personalities. Nevertheless, they have been discovered, and the standard is steadily improving. In New Zealand a creditable standard, we consider, has been achieved in the past from the YA stations. We have no doubt that in future that standard will be maintained, and possibly improved as opportunity offers. From the listeners' point of view, it is essential that radio personality be not unduly curbed. Extraneous matter may be clipped and controlled, but it must always be remembered that an attractive personality may be permitted to break rules of a formal character and still please.

THE announcement made in this issue that it is intended by the Board to maintain the system of advisory committees on specialised subjects instituted by the Radio Broadcasting Company is pleasing. Under that system some 114 people, each of distinct capacity in their field, had become affiliated with the broadcasting service in an advisory capacity associated with each of the main stations. Their collective advice was valuable, and it would have

been a distinct loss had their interest and intimate contact with the general body of listeners been lost. We congratulate the Board upon its decision in this field.

AN early corrective should be given to the tendency displayed in some quarters already to demand speedy action on the part of the Board in announcing its programme of future development. Through no fault of its own, the Board's appointment was delayed. Its personnel was announced only in the last few weeks of the Old Year. One meeting only, of a preliminary character, was held prior to the Board assuming control of the service. Before the Board can bring mature judgment to a decision upon the numerous major policy points that confront it, a period of study and close investigation of the whole situation must be undertaken. Many of its decisions on these major points are of an interlocking character; for instance, the question of the degree of support, if any, to be given to "B" stations is wrapped up in the determination of the Board's policy for subsidiary or supporting stations throughout the Dominion. It is helpful to remember that the Post and Telegraph Department has at command large technical resources for rendering aid on this point. Mr. A. Gibbs, the chief electrical engineer of the department, visited America some years back in connection with radio matters, and compiled a report for departmental guidance which doubtless will be available and be of value to the Board. The Post and Telegraph Department is after all primarily concerned with the radio service. Even under the company's regime it must be remembered that the company operated only under a license from the Post Office, and while the company had formulated a scheme for the extension of the service, that scheme was not adopted, probably for political reasons, by the Postmaster-General. It may be that later technical knowledge of broadcasting needs may displace those proposals and make it desirable for the Board to start on an entirely new foundation. These points are mentioned to show that the Board, composed as it is of men definitely chosen for business and administrative reasons, must first call for technical reports of an involved character before it can be in a position to determine its future policy. That period of study will necessitate some months, and as the