

(continued from previous page)

to be found distinct Slavonic characteristics in both the physical and the mental make-up of the Silesian. He is slower and less mundane than his more efficient brother in the north and west, and he even takes his pleasures sadly. His most notable contribution to literature (in the widest sense) is in the realm of mysticism.

### Intense Cold

The intense cold which is reported to have helped the Russians in their advance is no exceptional feature for Silesia. The winters are always hard and long; spring is several weeks behind its coming in the Rhine Valley. Since open fire-places would scarcely suffice in a place where 30 degrees centigrade of frost are nothing unusual, huge porcelain stoves, or central heating in the more modern buildings, have to provide the necessary warmth. One can well imagine that lack of fuel will be an important factor contributing to the lowering of morale. The Oder, which runs right through the centre of Breslau and is there about 400 to 500 yards wide, is a rather swift-flowing stream, and therefore not always completely frozen throughout the winter.

For amusements Breslau provided good choice, including an opera house and three playhouses, open every night (including Sundays) during 10 months of the year. One of these theatres, the Lobe Theatre, had among its personnel about half-a-dozen actors who stipulated in their contracts that they were not to appear in any play glorifying war or indulging in any kind of military propaganda. On the other hand, they staged propaganda plays with outspoken leftist tendencies. This happened just two years before Hitler's advent and I dare say that these highly gifted actors were "liquidated" long ago. The beginning of the thirties brought the slow but perceptible infiltration of the Hitler poison. In Breslau's main thoroughfares newspaper-vendors were hawking Dr. Goebbels' then obscure rag *Der Angriff* with much bawling, shouting, and an occasional fight with vendors of *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag), the Communist paper. Nazi rallies began first on a small and then on a rapidly-increasing scale when Hitler toured the country for election speeches in 1930, the year which brought him his first great increase in votes. Students did not yet appear in the lecture rooms in S.A. or S.S. uniform, but they wore ostentatiously and defiantly a badge with the swastika, and were spreading the new gospel among their comrades.

### Reactionary Students

The students of this eastern capital, as distinct from their contemporaries in other countries, were often reactionary, recruiting themselves mainly from the Silesian gentry and the middle class. While the rest of German universities used to attract students from all parts of the Reich and from abroad, who changed to another town after a few terms in order to hear different professors and different opinions, the students frequenting the Silesian University came, with a few exceptions, all from Silesian stock and were conservative and provincially limited in their outlook.

# STRONG, SILENT MAN

## Lord Reith Declined An Interview

WE knew a great deal about Lord Reith before he arrived in Wellington on a mission in connection with the Empire tele-communications system, and we had read some of the anecdotes about his leadership of the BBC, but naturally we hoped to interview him personally at some time during his hurried visit. That hope, as it happened, was not fulfilled, but we did see Lord Reith at the microphone in an NBS studio, recording the talk that was heard last Sunday, February 18. From the other side of a soundproof glass panel we heard through a speaker the voice that is said to have gone over the air in England only once, and then anonymously, to announce the abdication of King Edward in 1937.

The first words we heard Lord Reith speak were these: "Subscribers are invited to hand in their old directories at the nearest school or waste-paper depot—for inquiries, dial 52-268. Is that enough?" It was so much the voice and style of a man well accustomed to microphone tests, control-room signals, red lights and so on, that one would never have guessed that this was a very rare occasion for Lord Reith. He had declined to broadcast when he was in Australia. He did not submit to Press interviews when he was in Wellington. And after he had recorded his talk, he told *The Listener* politely but firmly that he knew enough about broadcasting not to say something to a broadcasting paper that he was not saying simultaneously to other papers. We were asking him to do something he had never done in the BBC.

So in a mere two or three minutes we saw almost all we were to be allowed to see of the figure that ruled the BBC with a rod of iron for 16 years. We saw the slight habitual stoop of a man so tall (six foot six) that he has to bend towards the face of almost everyone he talks to. We saw the "blazing blue eyes, impressive dome and fearsome scar across his left cheek" as someone has described his features. But we did not get as far as being asked, as R. S. Lambert was before he was appointed editor of the *BBC Listener*, "Do you accept the teachings of Jesus Christ?"

If we also saw Lord Reith on another occasion, after he had attended a Sunday evening film preview, closing up like a jack-knife before getting into a small car, and making us think of the scene in *Alice*, where Alice drank the medicine and went through the little door, that was an unofficial glimpse that this huge and awe-inspiring figure was unable to prohibit.

### Never Missed Sunday School

R. S. Lambert had a good deal to say of his 10 years' association with Reith in his book *Ariel and All His Quality* (published in 1940). "For a long time," he said, "I was handicapped by the sense of fear which he inspired."

It was Lambert who said that Reith had three seats in his office for visitors—a hard one for nobodies, an armchair for senior subordinates and a luxurious sofa for high dignitaries, or people he wished to placate. "He liked being



THIS CARICATURE shows Lord (then Sir John) Reith towering over Broadcasting House.

'sirred,' and was heard once to explain the infrequency of his tours round the office on the ground that his entry would embarrass the staff by causing them to stand up in the middle of their work."

Vernon Bartlett, M.P., the *News Chronicle* writer, says that on Reith's

## -But He Said This On The Air

HERE are some excerpts from the short recorded talk which Lord Reith gave for the NBS, and which was broadcast on Sunday evening:

I DO not suppose anyone is completely normal after flying 15,000 miles in 10 days; but, apart from that, I think I must have wanted to appear agreeable in New Zealand. Anyhow, when asked if I would broadcast, I said I would, but it does not come easily to me.

And I wondered what I could say that would justify attention in a country in which I had only spent a busy few days.

I had to broadcast, however, and I would not, if I could avoid it, waste listeners' time with banalities. There is too much of that in life as it is.

But, if one is to avoid banalities, one risks saying things which were better not said. One may give offence; or bring trouble on oneself—which may not matter; perhaps, also, on others—which probably would matter.

A wise man of old left this observation for all ages to ponder: "The greater part," he said, "of what we say and do being unnecessary, if this were omitted, we should have more leisure and less uneasiness." And, as a further commentary on the perversion of the faculty and responsibility of speech, a modern and perhaps unwittingly honest member of a legislature repelled an endeavour to secure from him an expression of his own opinion on some controversial subject by crying: "How can I tell you what I think till I see what I have said?"

desk at the BBC there was kept a certificate from his boyhood Sunday school saying that he had never missed attendance.

Lord Reith was born in 1889, the seventh child of the Rev. George Reith of Aberdeeh. He trained as an engineer in his youth, and in the first World War he took a commission in the Royal Engineers, and became a major before he was invalided out in 1916. His face still carries the deep scar under one eye that remained after his service from France.

In 1922 the BBC (C stood for company in those days) advertised for a manager, and out of 55 applicants J. C. W. Reith was chosen. Within a year he was manager-director of the BBC (C now stood for corporation), and in 1927 he had supreme power as director-general, which he retained until 1938.

In 1938 Sir John Reith left the BBC to become chairman of Imperial Airways, which had a reputation of being inefficiently organised. In February, 1940, he became Minister of Information, in supreme command of censoring the British press, but in May of the same year he was transferred to become Minister of Transport and then to the head of a Ministry of Works and Buildings, responsible for controlling the replacement of bombed homes and buildings.

At least one should know what one thinks before one speaks; and it is often better not to speak even when one knows what one thinks and is inclined to say.

THE besetting danger of democracy is its tendency to dislike, distrust and disrupt leadership when it gets it—even well-disposed and well-directed leadership. Perhaps the greatest problem of democracy is to secure, by democratic method, the efficiency which comes so easily, so ruthlessly and so abominably to dictatorship.

... World leadership must be based on principles which are, even to-day, more in evidence in our community of nations than in any other. I believe we are still determined, or capable of being determined, in our policy by the moral and spiritual beliefs and values which alone are an effective basis for action. They have to be studied, recognised and exploited. Whether we may care to admit it or not, without the fundamental inspiration of the Christian ethic we shall get nowhere at all. With it, with unity of objective and inflexibility of purpose, we can, in concert, give the world what it needs. If anyone can evolve anything better than the Christian ethic, let us have it, quick. But what has to be sought is the means for translating the Christian ethic into practice, into political, national and international action. Let our leaders at least attempt it. "Pray God our greatness may not fail through craven fear of being great."