

(continued from previous page)

remote relatives, New Zealand soldiers or airmen, turn up now and then to see him in London.

The First Cartoon

When he was 11 years old, two important things happened. His first cartoon was published, in a Liberal newspaper, the *Christchurch Spectator*; and his eldest brother died. The cartoon attacked certain local authorities for failing to remove trees which were obstructing traffic. Low feels that this epitomised in advance his life's work; certainly its publication was an unmistakable pointer to that work, and the regular weekly publication of other cartoons soon began. The death of his brother—though of so uninfected a disease as appendicitis—alarmed his parents and they took him away from school, schooling not being compulsory then in New Zealand. They went to live on a farm, and young David Low rode horses, climbed trees, and milked cows. Being an inquisitive boy, he was also drawn to study; history interested him, and he educated himself fairly thoroughly, reading Herodotus, Thucydides, and Caesar (in translation) for pleasure, as books.

His parents—who half-intended that he should be a clergyman—were dubious about an artistic career for him, feeling that there was no money in it. They can hardly have failed to be proud of his precocity. Besides his *Spectator* cartoons, he did police-court sketches and illustrations for pamphlets and magazines. Portraits of him surviving from those days show an eager, wise lad with big ears and the dark, heavy brows that are still his: a little like Fred Astaire. His most varied apprenticeship was with the *Exhibition Sketcher* (run by Fred Rayner, who is still alive, aged 85 or so), where he earned about £2 a week and developed an interest in portrait caricature; this became for him a separate and profound art. He would draw the local grocer or magistrate or preacher—just as now he draws the local Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition. His thick, cursive signature has varied little with the years.

When he was 20 he joined the *Sydney Bulletin*. He specialised in Federal politics. He concentrated on opposing the policies of W. M. Hughes; and it was his cartoons of Hughes in book form (*The Billy Book*) that brought him to



SELF-PORTRAIT
Not as in the flesh

London in 1919. Shrewdly and ambitiously, he sent copies of the book to England, not only to editors but to men whose writings had impressed him—Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett. Bennett mentioned the book in a paragraph in the *New Statesman*. Henry Cadbury saw the paragraph and the book, and cable to Australia offering Low a job on the *Star*. He moved from the *Star* to the *Standard* in 1927.

No Easy Way

A fact which may astonish the reader who glances at a cartoon is that Low doesn't find drawing any easier now than he did 25 years ago, and that a cartoon may occupy him for as long as eight hours—"or as long as there is"—from its conception to its final state. His cartoons are not "dashed off"; he does them, in the strict sense of the phrase, "the hard way." He is "a glutton for difficulties," and rarely refuses an artistic challenge. If there is an easy and conventional way of representing a stock figure—Labour, or Peace, or some politician—he avoids it and experiments with a pose that is awkward to draw. Therefore, though the customer is not usually aware why, the drawing is more alive to look at. Finally, he insists on good reproduction.

His brain functions slowly for the first few hours of the morning. He does most of his serious thinking and cartoon-planning around 11 a.m. or noon—perhaps walking on Hampstead Heath.

He usually draws in the afternoon at home (where there is a full-length mirror which he sometimes uses). He does not often now work at another studio that he has in Hampstead, which was damaged in a raid: here he has, neatly filed, copies of almost everything he has published, back to his earliest days; on the wall are desultory whimsical headline-cuttings: "Low Flying" and "Record Low is Expected." At the moment he is, like all cartoonists, busy digesting a good many new faces and figures; he says he finds Attlee's eyes "expressionless."

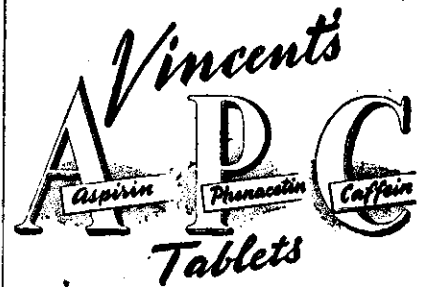
In all the circumstances of his craft, Low is remarkably methodical and business-like; but when he draws, the "thinking part" of his brain goes out of action; and when he has finished drawing, a mood of relaxation sets in. So pedants are occasionally annoyed to find a word mis-spelt in one of his drawings or captions. (Artists are, in any case, notoriously erratic spellers.) Such a flaw is trivial. Low's spirit remains consistently fresh.

He once described himself as "a nuisance dedicated to sanity." It is not a bad vocation.

Auckland Primary Schools' Music Festival

If there is one event in Auckland's musical calendar which depends more on radio than another, it must be the Primary Schools' Music Festival which 1YA will broadcast at 1.30 p.m. on November 6. This year's festival will be the second held since the beginning of the war, and with 2,500 children packed into the Town Hall there just won't be room for an audience. In recognition of the importance of the occasion, the NBS String Orchestra will be there to play the accompaniments and provide interludes, and to those whose ears ache with too much post-war news we commend the massed singing by 2,000 children under the baton of Dr. H. Hollinrake and that of the smaller choir—quite a tiny affair of a mere 500 voices, conducted by H. C. Luscombe. Even if you are not one of the 2,500-5,000 parents involved, you will feel better for it.

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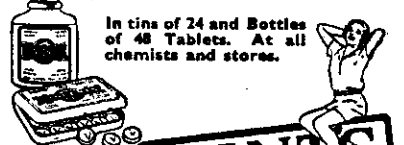
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THREE STAGES IN A CARTOONIST'S CAREER

Drawn at 12. Published in "The New Idea," Christchurch

Drawn at 15. Published in "The Exhibition Sketcher," November, 1906

Drawn at 19. Cover design for the preliminary issue of a Christchurch magazine

A little brown hen, known as Kitty,
Remarked, "To waste eggs is a pity;
Just buy them when cheap,
And with Norton's they'll keep,
You can buy it in country or city!"

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