

REUNION ON THE AIR

Story of the BBC's Christmas Programme

HOW the BBC's Christmas programme "At Home Again" was built up this year is described below by **LAURENCE GILLIAM** who, with **Leonard Cottrell**, is in charge of its production. His article arrived too late for inclusion with our own Christmas programmes (and trouble with the International date-line prevents the BBC's Christmas from reaching us until 2.0 a.m. the next day), but it is still in time to be read before the broadcast.

THE Christmas Day programme of the British Broadcasting Corporation will again form a gigantic family re-union on the air. From two o'clock until three on Christmas afternoon the microphone will circle the United Kingdom, Europe and the British Commonwealth in the 60 minutes that precede King George VI's Annual Christmas Message to his peoples throughout the Commonwealth. All BBC transmitters will carry this programme and it will be re-broadcast in every country of the Commonwealth and in the United States. This means that it is the radio programme with the largest world audience.

The producers, Leonard Cottrell and myself, start work on this programme early in October. From then until Christmas our lives are a constant round of meetings, cables, telephone calls, and flying visits to all parts of Britain and Europe. Here in brief outline is the theme of this year's programme as we have sketched it to contributors in many parts of the world:

Last year on Christmas Day millions were still on their way home from the wars. This year most of them are home again. What is Christmas like after the first year of settling down, of re-building the blitzed cities, of changing from uniform to civvies; how are we getting on as individuals and as nations? Let us check up, not through governments' conferences, but with individuals, let us cross frontiers and drop into each other's houses. Let us use the microphone to enable the common people in every land to talk to each other across vast distances.

Collecting Cameos

At the moment of writing, my fellow producer, Leonard Cottrell, is in Hamburg, trying to arrange a picture of Christmas in defeated Germany. Two facets here—the bitterness and misery of the vanquished, and the re-union of soldiers of the victorious Rhine Army with their wives and children. In Scotland we are on the trail of an ex-prisoner of war; we hope he and his family will be able to speak this Christmas to a brave woman of the Italian Resistance; like thousands of Allied soldiers they owe their Christmas at home to her and other unknown helpers of the Resistance Movements in Europe. From the Union of South Africa comes an offer of a lively and colourful broadcast from a group of native miners in Johannesburg. Two days ago I was driving around the English countryside, looking for a farmer who had converted a war-time airfield to a wheat-field; he'll be interviewed with a Dutch farmer doing the same job, making reclaimed land work for food and peace instead of war and destruction. A team of BBC engineers had just flown to the lonely Bishop's Rock Lighthouse off the Scilly Isles, to carry out tests. If successful, we hope to link the keeper with one of the

lighthouses across the Atlantic. Every day, every hour, the pattern is changing. A British Overseas Airways Corporation official has just left my office, promising to do his best to arrange a Christmas dinner in a Golden Hind flying boat over the English Channel. I have just put down the telephone after asking the engineers if they can get the microphone to the coal face of a mine in Kent, where a Squadron-Leader of Britain's Royal Air Force is fighting the new "Battle of Britain" for coal.

World Co-operation

The organisation of a programme of this scale calls for a high degree of co-operation between broadcasting organisations in all parts of the world. The technique of this co-operation has been built up through the years, was interrupted during World War II, and is now as keen and efficient as ever it was. Indeed the war threw the radio men, both programme and technical staffs, together in many unexpected places, and they found that they formed almost an international class who speak the same language. So when questions of wavelengths, timing, or cues are cabled from one country to another, radio experts at each station know what is wanted and supply it. There is a great sense of confidence, and this gives strength to anyone with the job of organising an international world-wide broadcast. One has the feeling that keen, trained, people are handling the dials and switches, following the script, waiting for cues. When the programme goes on the air, it gives, or should give, a feeling of great ease and certainty. Behind this lies weeks of meticulous preparation. This roughly is what happens:—

The producers, in this case Leonard Cottrell and myself, plan the broad general theme. This year it is the theme of reunion, therefore we decided to take as much advantage as possible of the technique of the two-way conversation to give radio reality to the theme so that people in different countries could actually speak to each other and hear for themselves what conditions are like. Then comes the long search for actual contributions, speakers, and scenes.

The BBC has never made any secret of the fact that although every attempt is made to get every item actual and live at the moment of broadcast, every contribution is also recorded in advance so that in the case of any accident or failure of transmission the programme will flow on uninterrupted.

The BBC Christmas programme which has become a tradition since it was inaugurated in 1932 has a long and blessed reputation for transmission luck—very rarely have the standby recordings had to be used, but it is an absolute rule that nothing must be left to chance. So all through November and December cables and telephone messages are passing between London and the points of origin until in the last days before Christmas the time for rehearsal of each contributor arrives. Then the

producers talk to the overseas contributors; listen to the contribution; make suggestions; time the items; as each rehearsal comes to an end London says "goodbye" to Capetown or Sydney, Oslo, Prague, Hamburg or Canada, and says "rehearsal satisfactory, exact timing confirmed, word cues agreed, everything O.K., good luck at Christmas, many thanks."

It is a thrilling and humbling experience to sit at the centre of this vast network of goodwill and watch it taking shape. When Big Ben strikes two on Christmas Day, and the pattern of *At Home Again* is at last revealed, we shall remember with very real gratitude and admiration, the energy, skill and unselfish devotion of the hundreds of engineers and programme men who make this intricate mosaic seem so simple. To all of them I would like to say, "Thank you, and a very Happy Christmas."

HOLIDAY SPORT

Special Coverage by 2YA

OWING to a heavy programme of sporting events during the Christmas and New Year holidays, special coverage has been planned by Station 2YA. Listeners will hear a round-up from all centres, and from Australia, of the following:

RACING

COMMENTARIES on events in the meetings at Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin: Thursday, December 26 (Auckland); Friday, December 27 (Auckland); Saturday, December 28 (Auckland and Dunedin); Wednesday, January 1 (Auckland and Christchurch); Thursday, January 2 (Auckland and Christchurch). In addition, results from all race meetings held during the holidays will be broadcast frequently.

CRICKET

COMMENTARIES on Plunket Shield matches, Wellington v. Auckland, at Wellington; and Canterbury v. Otago, at Christchurch, will be broadcast on Thursday, December 26; Friday, December 27; and Saturday, December 28—as well as on the Sheffield Shield match, Victoria v. New South Wales, from Australia. On New Year's Day and Thursday, January 2, there will be a commentary on the Third Test at Melbourne, as well as on the Plunket Shield games, Wellington v. Canterbury, at Wellington, and Auckland v. Otago, at Auckland.

TENNIS

ON Thursday, December 26, Friday, December 27, and Saturday, December 28, commentaries will be heard on the Davis Cup tennis at Melbourne.

As Station 2YA will be engaged in transmission of these broadcasts in the afternoon hours of the days mentioned, Station 2YC will come on the air to provide an alternative musical programme.

HIS MAJESTY'S COLONIAL SERVICE

There are vacancies for Civil Engineers in the Public Works Department, Malaya.

2. Qualifications entitling applicants to consideration are Corporate Membership of the Institution of Civil Engineers of Great Britain or Degrees or Diplomas recognised by that body as granting exemption from Sections A and B of its examination. Applicants, preferably between 25 and 30 years of age, should have had experience of the construction and maintenance of roads, buildings and bridges, or of aerodromes or of urban water supply schemes.

3. Appointments, which will be subject to a medical certificate of fitness for tropical service, will be on probation for a period of three years with the prospect of emplacement on the pensionable establishment at the end of this period. Salary is at the rate of 400 dollars a month, rising by annual increments of 25 dollars a month to 800 dollars a month. Starting salary will depend on age, civil experience, and length of approved war service.

4. Free quarters are not provided, but Government quarters partly furnished are usually available at low rates. Free passages for the officer, his wife, and children under the age of ten years, are granted on first appointment and on leave. Home leave on full pay is normally granted after 3 to 4 years of service at the rate of 4 days for each month of service.

5. Allowances in respect of children are payable at the rate of 70 dollars a month for the first child and 50 dollars a month for the second child until completion of the 18th year of age, and outfit allowance equivalent to £60 sterling is payable on first appointment.

6. For the purpose of exchange with sterling one Malayan dollar equals 2/4.

7. Applicants would be required to serve anywhere within the Malayan Union, Singapore, or Brunei.

8. Those interested should write to the Colonial Office Representative, Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, P.O. Box 992, Wellington, stating age and professional qualifications and giving data when those qualifications were obtained.

RELIEF
or No Cost!
Lumbago
Neuritis
Rheumatism
Sciatica

Every large packet of R.U.R. has the famous guarantee certificate plainly attached. You must get relief—or it costs you nothing.

TAKE

RUR
AND RIGHT YOU ARE
SOLD EVERYWHERE

The five in one Health Tonic, made by R.U.R. (N.Z.) Ltd., 141 Cashel Street, Christchurch.