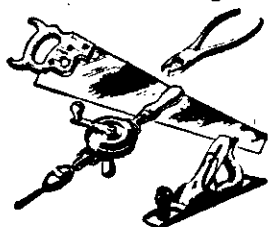


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## BOOKS

### B.B.C. FROM WITHIN

BBC AND ALL THAT. By Roger Eckersley.  
Sampson Low, Marston & Co., through the  
British Council.

THE author of this entertaining volume emphasises (1) that it is not a history and (2) that he is not his brother. When it ends he is just about to walk out of Broadcasting House for the last time—to his frankly expressed sorrow. Though he does not say that he would have liked to linger on, he does say plainly that the retiring age in the BBC is 60, and the rule rigid. He makes it clear, however, that it was a wonderful life the BBC gave him while it lasted—a little more than 20 years—and he is engagingly frank about his limitations, educational and professional, the day he walked in "as a shy new boy, in a new blue suit and a bowler hat." The boy was actually 39, but since he had never really had a job before, or qualified for one, he no doubt did feel very young, very raw, very unsure of himself, and very far from clear in his mind about the direction in which he was now going. One of his troubles was the fact that his mother was a Huxley, daughter of the great T. H., which of course made him a cousin of Julian and Aldous and required him to be as clever. "My cousins raked in scholarships as a matter of course wherever they went. I was sent up for a scholarship at Charterhouse, but produced such pathetic results in my papers that I was bidden to go back and take the ordinary entrance examination." He never became a scholar or an intellectual of any kind, but he was not long in broadcasting before he revealed other qualities that carried him through directing and controlling jobs of the most difficult kind with credit to himself and great benefit to radio. That, however, he nowhere claims himself. The man he presents as himself is a friendly, far from confident, but very happy and interested executive with a capacity for ironing out difficulties and spreading goodwill. He repeats over and over again that his job was not to do things himself but to find other people who could do them, whether it was letting listeners in on the launching of the Queen Mary or building up the symphony orchestra or getting King George to open Wembley. It is clear that he was the perfect Public Relations officer, always at the right place at the right time, genial, patient, and never unduly worried, and with an almost uncanny capacity for adapting himself to all kinds of men. His book is full of good stories and of interesting situations that he somehow makes the reader see clearly. But he is just about as careless with his pen as he must have been careful with his tongue and his personal approaches. He writes dozens of sentences that, if he had written them at school, would have brought him a *haudquaquam* at the end of the week and some painful moments with the Godalming headmaster he still remembers after 50 years. Sometimes, too, his stories are too tall for easy belief—like this one about the opening of Broadcasting House by King George and Queen Mary:

I remember I was enjoying a plateful of strawberries and cream with Lady Minto

when Sir John came across, tapped me on the shoulder and said the Queen wished to talk to me about the programmes. I was feeling rather shy, but not more so perhaps than the Queen, who must herself have been feeling bewildered and exhausted by the complexities of a long walk round this particularly mazy place. I don't know why I should have been shy, as no one could have been kinder than Queen Mary, or more patient with my endeavours to explain things. But I felt I was not being particularly bright, and when for instance the Queen told me she didn't like jazz—and didn't it?—perhaps it was unnecessary for me to say that I wrote it. At all events, I felt that I had not been much of a success, and when I said so afterwards to a friend of mine who had been sitting at the next table he replied: "I'm not surprised. Why did you persist in calling the Queen—my dear?"

To readers connected with broadcasting technically some of his chapters are meat, drink and dessert. He has not only encountered most of the problems with which all broadcasting systems are still struggling but he has met most of the men and women who have made the BBC. He deplores never having kept a diary or preserved notes; but it is doubtful if he would have written a better book if he had been as methodical as that, and he would certainly not have written anything so easy as his memories are to read. Nor does he give any support at all to those who think that the BBC is a forbidding place to work in and that the staff tiptoe from room to room in case they disturb the gods. The reality is not at all like that:

The offices are warm and comfortable enough, the water in the lavatories is hot and everything is kept bright and clean. Small boys with syringes burst into the room from time to time and spray one copiously with a nasty mixture that makes one sneeze, and the Corporation cat is always at hand for use in any office where mice are becoming too insolent. Incidentally, not very long ago we invited her into our offices. She was busy after dark—but slept the day through in the outer office in-tray.

During the war many of the staff slept on the premises too, but the BBC in war-time is a story by itself. Here it gets only one chapter—not because the author has nothing he would like to say but because it is a part of the general history of the war and calls for documentary evidence. Though he never says so he leaves you with the impression that a document is just about the last thing he would wish to be compelled to absorb.

### Walking Tours

- (1) *FARTHEST EAST*. By A. H. Reed.
- (2) *FARTHEST NORTH*. By A. H. Reed.
- (3) *GREAT BARRIER*. By A. H. Reed.

All printed by Coulls Somerville Wilkie Ltd., Dunedin, and published by A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington.

MR. REED has done at 70 what far too few New Zealanders have ever attempted at any age—seen New Zealand on his own feet and through his own eyes. Although I have never been able to decide between walking and riding, there is no other method of seeing a country with the inward and outward eye simultaneously, and Mr. Reed took the further precaution of walking alone. The pictures he has given us of these three interesting areas—the East Coast from Tolaga Bay to Opotiki, North Auckland from Awanui to Spirits Bay, and a considerable portion of the Great Barrier—are therefore his own first-hand impressions, with nothing added but the historical background. No one else could or would have told the