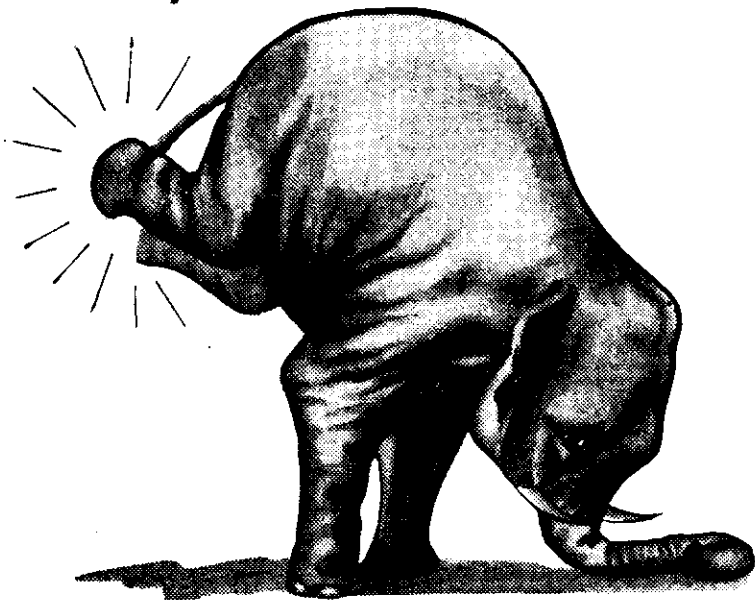


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ROBERT GIBBINGS—a photograph taken in the NZBS Production Studios last week, when the Irish author and artist was recording excerpts from his new book

MORE READINGS BY ROBERT GIBBINGS

HAVERSACK on back, the bearded 20-stone figure of Robert Gibbings, the Irish author and engraver of *Lovely is the Lee*, *Sweet Thames Run Softly*, and *Coming Down the Wye*, has been a familiar sight in the streets of Wellington again during the last few days. Although he has been back from the South Sea Islands for some months few people have seen him, because, with his secretary, he had locked himself up in a house at Eastbourne, writing his new travel book *Over the Reefs and Far Away*.

"I admit I have been most unsociable, but that's the only way to write a book," he said when *The Listener* called in to see him making recordings of extracts from his book at the NZBS Production studios. The day we called was a red-letter day for Gibbings, for that morning he had written the 80,000th and final word of his latest book.

The Listener had met him before—when he arrived in New Zealand, and six months ago when he returned to this country to start putting on paper what he had seen in Polynesia. He had recounted for us some of his exploits as a marine diver and an explorer of rivers by boat, and on the last of these occasions we had asked him if there was any likelihood of his making a study of our rivers by the pleasant method of drifting down in a canoe.

"I'm afraid that seems to be impossible," he says now. "There are too many difficulties in the way of transport, and in getting meals and accommodation at odd hours. But I may come back to New Zealand some day; I would very much like to, for there is plenty to write about—Maori history, the birds and so on. But there are not the facilities for a bloke like myself who likes to mooch.

"In France, now, it's much easier. There is always somebody ready to knock you up an omelette, no matter what the hour. You see, I may be busy watching some particular bird late in the evening, and not thinking for a moment about dinner. And I might be out till midnight. In Ireland, too, the old fisher-folk will rustle up a meal at any odd hour."

Home for Six Months

What were his plans for the immediate future?

He would probably go to England for about six months, follow that with a spell in his native Ireland and then to France or Portugal.

We asked about the new book.

"It contains," he said, "about 100 engravings in addition to the letterpress, and it will be published about September next by Dents. It is a series of illustrated impressions of the people of the Polynesian Islands and their customs." He spent six weeks in Tonga, eight months in Samoa, four months each at the Cook Islands and Tahiti, and visited other groups, including the Tokelaus and the Tuamotus—about 30 islands altogether. Sometimes he travelled by mail boat, sometimes by cargo boat, sometimes by plane, sometimes by schooner.

"If I saw something I couldn't write about, I drew it; and if there was something that I couldn't draw, I wrote about it. Sometimes a subject was too difficult for either so I let it go," he said.

Did he do any under-water work with his special diving helmet, to record undersea life? Not this time.

How did he choose his book titles?

For his latest he adapted a line from John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*—"If with me you'll fondly stray over the hills

(continued on next page)