

# McCULLOUGH OF THE BRAINS TRUST

## Will Take Part In NZBS Sessions This Year

A Special "Listener" interview, by airmail from London

DONALD McCULLOUGH, whose voice is already well known in New Zealand through the recordings of the BBC *Brains Trust*, and who will take part in the same type of session from the four main centres when he visits the Dominion next April, is not yet in *Who's Who*, but when the next edition comes out he will be. Perhaps he will be described there as humorous author, broadcaster, and countryman. It was in the town office of *The Countryman* (that is to say, in the offices of *Punch*, at No. 10 Bouverie Street, just off Fleet Street) that I interviewed him for *The Listener*, but most of the time he is well away from Fleet Street. He lives in Norfolk; I'm not sure exactly how far away he is, but he is out of range of television (on which he once wrote a book) and nearer to the beauties whose preservation is the aim of the National Council for the Preservation of Rural England (of which he is a member). He comes and goes by train, but he has not forgotten that he was the author (with Fougasse) of *You Have Been Warned—A Complete Guide to the Road*, which has lately gone into still another edition and is selling in thousands. He gave me a copy of *Fancy Meeting You*, a little booklet on the same unmistakable (Fougasse) lines which is handed to everyone in Britain who renews his driving licence, by the Royal Society for the Prevention of

Accidents. Its catchphrase emerges from the door of the receding ambulance at the bottom of every page; "Anyhow, I was in the right!"

WE settled down in the sheltered comfort of Mr. McCullough's *Countryman* room in the precincts of Bradbury, Agnew & Co. (a room like a rich man's study—leather chairs, a finely made desk, parquet flooring, and a rich, handsome carpet) and the facts came out in a voice I kept thinking I knew.

His father was a Minister of the Church of Scotland in Roxburghshire, and he was educated at Watson's, and Edinburgh University. He's been writing, in one way or another, for 15 years (that is, in print), and when I asked him directly how I should describe his connection with the periodical within whose halls we were conversing, he murmured and demurred in that agreeable marshy croak one always heard when the Brains Trust discussion seemed to be heading for things better left unsaid. After a series of such syllables, he told me it was "just a rather pleasant association—'contributor,' say."

But that was on the way out, going down those dignified curving stairs... In his own room, Mr. McCullough told me he was on the National Trust, on the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, is chairman of the British Motor Racing Research Trust (and a great friend of the racing motorist Raymond Mays), author of *You Have Been Warned*, etc., author (at the request of the BBC) of the first book on

television, entitled *And Now*; was on the Television Development Commission, has "an exceedingly handsome wife and five very charming children" (their ages being from 12 years to three months); was in the R.A.F. in 1939-40, and later was Public Relations Officer for the Ministry of Agriculture, and has been at No. 10 Bouverie Street (when not in Norfolk) since the war ended.

Here I interpolate what I know without going to the mouth of a modest horse for it: his choice by the BBC as the questionmaster of the controversial *Brains Trust* (which is now being rested for a while) was a brilliant one. He has been an unqualified success in the job, and but for him the session probably would have needed resting much sooner. It was going out in 10 BBC services and had the biggest audience of any spoken word programme except the news. My guess about the secret of his success there would be that it was in the faint dimpled smile that is almost on his face all the time, and the faint trace of humour that is always ready to slip into his speech. A photograph shows it plainly—humour playing like a light breeze through his ideas, quite the opposite of wisecrack humour. There is not one wisecrack in *You Have Been Warned* as I remember it. It's just consistently funny, in a tickly sort of way.

FOR the last three years he has been throwing himself into a job which he obviously loves telling people about. I had noticed that the only pictures on

the walls of the room we sat in were some attractive maps of English counties, with coloured miniatures of various buildings and places, and short texts, in the white surrounds that enclosed the irregular shapes of the shires. Mr. McCullough got up and walked to one of them, to show me what they are all about.

They are a series, of which 14 have so far been produced (under the care of *The Countryman*). The profits from their sale go to the Women's Land Army Benevolent Fund, which Donald McCullough founded, because there were no gratuities for Land Girls. There is to be one for each county, the illustrations in the margins drawing notice to the ways in which the county contributed to the war, and each one having a quotation from Mr. Churchill's nuggety English prose. Mr. McCullough read one out to me, and told me he was "a very great admirer" of Mr. Churchill.

"Do you feel he's doing the right thing at the present time?" I asked, and I murmured something about "getting on with his book." Mr. McCullough murmured too, in the wordless voice we all know well, and after some reflection said he thought he would just leave it at that—he was "a very great admirer" of Mr. Churchill.

Well, anyhow, he wasn't in the Left.

—A.A.

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into still wider fields, even to an arrogant claim for universality? Yet those who took this fatal step cut themselves off both from the vast masses of their contemporaries and from the root principles of the science in whose name they spoke. Belief in the goodness and intelligence of mankind was an act of faith, not the fruit of rational enquiry. Political scientists who worked on the wildly unscientific axiom that man is an essentially rational animal were disciplined by the pressure of hard facts.

### The Moral

The moral, if moral one seeks, is so obvious as to be trite. The sovereign remedy of 1848 was indeed a delusion. There are no short cuts to universal happiness, no set formulae, and no adaptation of the British Constitution which can be administered like a modern miracle-drug to disordered societies. That which was discredited in 1848, however, was not human intellect, but the false claims made in reason's name. It is a matter of mere scientific fact that man is not the intellectual animal of 18th Century vision; as indeed Burke sharply pointed out during the very height of revolutionary optimism. Reason itself must insist that there be brought into the calculation forces which are not of its own essence.

It is not surprising that a troubled world finds itself drawn once more towards philosophies which seem to recognise and come to terms with the challenging complexity of mankind; towards mysticism of the East as well as of the West, and the magnificent Thomist reconciliation of reason with faith.



A TYPICAL photograph of the BBC Brains Trust in session. Donald McCullough is in the centre of the picture, with Commander A. B. Campbell on his right and Professor C. E. M. Joad on his left

BBC Photograph