

THE LATE MR. E. C. HANDS

An Appreciation By A Colleague

THE sketch of the career of the late Mr. E. C. Hands which *The Listener* published last week was necessarily brief, and in justice to his memory and with profit to listeners, may be expanded.

First of all, a current mistake about his career should be corrected. He was not a superannuated servant of the Post and Telegraph Department. He was under fifty when he was taken from the Post and Telegraph service by the Government to be the chief executive officer of the new Broadcasting Board. The service had been in the hands of a company and was now to be directed by a public utility corporation, and it was felt that somebody was required to manage the concern who combined organising ability with a practical knowledge of broadcasting and a keen interest in its development. These qualifications Mr. Hands had in abundance. He had made a name for himself in the Post and Telegraph Department as an organiser. As Supervisor and then Principal of the Telegraph Division he had had to handle the communication side of several emergencies, and he had proved his worth. The whole field of wireless signalling had made a strong appeal to him, so that he came to the position with a considerable knowledge on the technical side. He was persuaded by the Board to accept this position permanently, which meant that he had to forgo his excellent chances of further promotion in the Post and Telegraph Department, and his superannuation.

Problems of Taste

In considering the quality of his achievement as General Manager for the Broadcasting Board, one must try to grasp the peculiar difficulties that were involved in the development of broadcasting, and the first thing to realise is the differences between broadcasting and all other public utilities. Here

was something new which captivated the public by its novelty, its romance, and its amazing possibilities. But its appeal was far more intimate than the appeal made by any other kind of public service.

We may get some idea of the situation if we imagine a suburban train service which changed its very nature every morning and evening and offered travellers a wide and exciting variety of seats and speeds. We may imagine that if such a service was offered, there would be a good deal of difference

of opinion about it. Well, very much more so was this difference of opinion engendered by broadcasting. One of the characteristics of mankind is that tastes differ, and differ profoundly. One man likes Shakespeare, another man likes musical comedy, another man likes Beethoven, another likes jazz. Sometimes a listener will like all these according to his moods, and he may be irritated if he doesn't get just what he wants when he wants it. The National Broadcasting Service was, and still is, a force between two fires—the people who

want entertainment and the people who want instruction. But, in the early days, there was much less understanding of its difficulties than there is to-day, difficulties that range from coverage and finance to copyright.

Evolving a National System

Mr. Hands set himself with great industry and patience to evolve a national system of programmes. Helped by his staff, he introduced what is known in the Service as the Blue Print, a schedule by which each station had a more or less set order of programme for the different nights in the week. The idea behind this was regularity and certainty—that is, a listener could depend upon getting say, opera, light music, classical music, or talks at fixed times. When the war came revision of this carefully drawn up schedule was in progress. Mr. Hands had a way with him in dealing with critics. He was always ready to consider suggestions, but he had a very quick eye for the weakness of criticism. If somebody said that everybody disliked a certain feature, he would politely ask what was meant by "everybody," and it might turn out that "everybody" was no more than two or three of the complainant's friends. Or he might in gentle questioning of another visitor elicit that he was listening to only a fraction of the programme with which he was dissatisfied. He was always ready to receive suggestions, and he kept a close and sympathetic ear to the ground of the listening public.

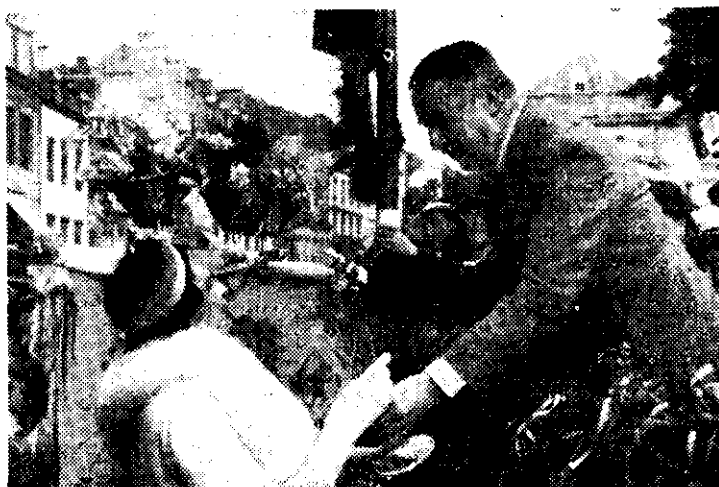
His Kindness

He was naturally a very kindly man, and it is worth noting that he was extremely fond of children. It would be observed that children went to him at once as to one who understood them. He was always accessible to his staff, who came to regard him as a friend. The writer of this tribute can speak with feeling on the point, for he came into the Service with little or no knowledge of broadcasting, and he found his way smoothed from the start by the kindly way in which Mr. Hands gave him his instructions and pointed out when he had made mistakes. There is all the difference between correction given in a censorious spirit, and correction given in the manner of a man who says in effect, "you are new to this game; if I were you I'd do so and so," or "I'm sorry, but the rule is this, that, or the other," said, of course, in a friendly tone of voice and often with a smile. How treatment like this oils the wheels of life, and makes you like a man!

Mr. Hands was a distinguished public servant who pioneered a new public service with great success, and a warm-hearted gentleman.

—A.M.

SILVER TRUMPETER



GRACE ADAMS EAST AND COMMANDER
... The vase was broken to bits

THERE are many ways of seeing the world: Grace Adams East has done it by literally blowing her own trumpet. In November and December of 1938 she did a six weeks' tour of New Zealand for the NBS, and now comes the good news that she is to be heard again in this country. She is due in Auckland this week and will begin a tour of the National Stations with concerts from 1YA, the first on Sunday, February 18 at 8.30 p.m.

Starting to learn the trumpet as a frail little girl for her health's sake, Grace Adams East says that this instrument has brought her "everything in life that is worth while." Through it she has had many interesting experiences, met many famous people. She has played for President Roosevelt in the White House; in the Grand Canyon for the Will Rogers memorial service; she once went to a Southern Californian negro night-club to meet Maurice Ravel, who was working there to get atmosphere; and Gershwin was highly delighted with her transcription of his "Rhapsody in Blue." "You have succeeded in taking the meat of my work," he said.

It seems that Miss East is destined to live a life full of excitement and adventure. On the back of the picture reproduced above, she writes:

"My farewell gift in Spa, Belgium. This gentleman is commander-in-chief of Belgian Army. The vase he is giving me was broken to bits on Aug. 31, getting out of Paris. Such a mob and such panic. I slept in a saloon all night in Le Havre."

No doubt she will have an interesting tale of varied experiences to tell when she arrives here.