

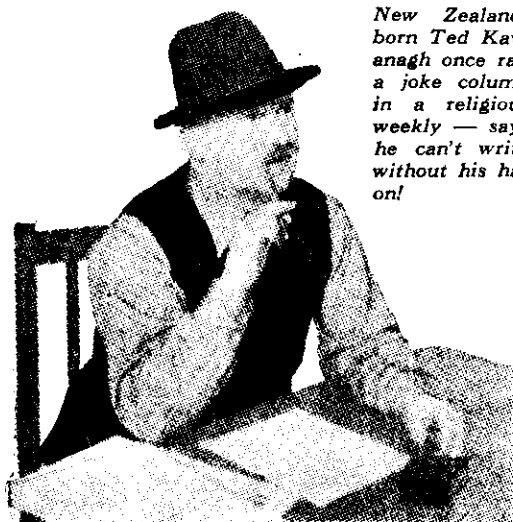
HE WRITES THROUGH HIS HAT!

Aucklander Who Has Made Good With The BBC

(By Harold Rathbone in "Radio Times")

EVERY Thursday afternoon at two o'clock a stocky figure climbs the stairs of the BBC Variety Department's headquarters in College Road, Bristol, lights the gas fire, takes off his jacket, and seats himself at a desk in an empty office at the top of the building.

He writes hurriedly, scratching away on sheet after sheet of ordinary writing-pad. The only thing that stays his pen is an occasional moment's gaze out of the window for inspiration or the lighting of a cigarette.



New Zealand-born Ted Kavanagh once ran a joke column in a religious weekly — says he can't write without his hat on!

Just another radio script-writer at work, the only peculiarity being that he always wears his hat while he is working—he says he can't write without it.

At 5 p.m., only three hours afterwards, Henry Edward Kavanagh, author of "Itma," collects his writings together and makes his way to producer Francis Worsley's office. Worsley reads them through carefully, and sometimes he says "Fine! Just what the doctor ordered!" and sometimes he suggests alterations here and there, but at the end of it all Ted Kavanagh's handwriting is consigned to the typewriter of Miss Stand. (It is said that Worsley and his secretary are the only two people in the BBC who can decipher Kavanagh's hand.)

Five days afterwards, on the following Tuesday, the show is on the air.

There is much more in it than that, of course.

Kavanagh is the first one to admit that the quality of his scripts is due largely to the co-operation of Francis Worsley and the rest of the "Itma" team—Tommy Handley, Vera Lennox (secretary), Jack Train (Funf), Maurice Denham (Mrs. Tickle), Sam Costa, and the Cavendish Three. Worsley has been

clever enough to foster the family spirit of the show, just as Harry Pepper and Gordon Crier did in "Band Waggon"—with a similar happy result.

Each Wednesday, the day before Kavanagh writes his script, an "Itma" sit-round is held in Worsley's office. Around Worsley's desk sit Kavanagh, Tommy Handley, Maurice Denham, and Jack Train, all making suggestions. Only two of them make notes—Worsley and Kavanagh. When the meeting breaks up these two have a discussion of a-quarter of an hour or so alone, and Kavanagh goes away with the script crystallising in his head, to be set down on paper later. By 2 p.m. on the following day the show has taken such a definite shape in Kavanagh's head that he writes it from beginning to end with hardly a single crossing-out.

Kavanagh's task is made easier by the fact that the principal characters of "Itma" are good friends off the stage. Often you can see him and Worsley having lunch in the BBC canteen with Tommy Handley, Maurice Denham, and Jack Train, and you can be sure that from these meals many ideas arise. "Itma" has a hold on them in private life, just as "Band Waggon" had on Askey and Murdoch. "Mine's a Persico!" "I always do my best for my gentlemen," "Vous pouvez cracher," "Friday! FRIDAY!" "Well, all right, all right!" "What a common boy!"—the Itma catch-phrases are part and parcel of their meals together. In Tommy Handley's words, "We're slaves to the Ministry, even off duty!"

Kavanagh's particular friend is Tommy Handley. The first radio script he ever wrote, way back in 1926, was written for Handley—a story about a man who had a confused dream in which his wireless set gave a commentary on the Grand National, the Boat Race, and Cup Final all rolled into one. It was not until thirteen years later that Kavanagh was able to achieve his ambition—to write a weekly series round Tommy Handley's personality.

Kavanagh is a New Zealander, a native of Auckland. He served during the Great War with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and when he doffed his khaki returned to his medical studies in Edinburgh University and at Bart's.

Just before he was due to qualify as a doctor, he forsook medicine for journalism.

He has contributed, mostly on scientific subjects, to all kinds of periodicals, from the highbrow kind like *G.K.'s Weekly* to the popular twopennies.

His first attempt at humorous writing was a joke column in a religious weekly.

His versatility as a radio writer can be gauged by the fact that in the first ten weeks of the war he wrote thirty-four complete shows, among them "At the Billet Doux" and "Lucky Dip."

His favourite job, of course, is "Itma," and if there is anything like pride in this New Zealander's taciturn make-up, it is "Itma" that provides it. He admits that he has been walking on air ever since a week or two ago his elder son, who is in uniform as a signaller "Somewhere in England," was asked by the Army Cook if he was any relation to "that bloke who writes 'It's That Man Again.'" As a reward for having such a distinguished father, young Kavanagh had an extra titbit on his plate that day.

Radio Personalities

(12) H. A. S. Rollinson, Acting Station Manager, 3ZR Greymouth



WHILE he was still at Rangiora High School, H. A. S. Rollinson's interest in the technical side of radio began to develop. Radio was in those days only a hobby, but in 1930, a chance came to join the staff of 3YA, Christchurch, and Mr. Rollinson was quick to seize it.

A year in the office taught him much about recordings, the administrative and programme sides to broadcasting work; and after a year, he became operator on the Christchurch subsidiary station, 3YL, later becoming announcer there as well. This showed him that it was on the announcing and presentation aspects of the work that his interest lay. Towards the end of 1937 he was transferred to 2ZR, Nelson (which afterwards became 2YN), as officer-in-charge, with the job of organising the station.

This meant a good deal of hard work, in what, as he says, "I then thought was diabolical heat, but which I appreciated later, when I discovered facilities for indulging my favourite sport of swimming." He also enjoyed motoring in Nelson.

The year of work in Nelson gave him a thorough insight into the intricacies of running a radio station. There he had the opportunity of trying out some ideas about programmes; that is, making them short, and contrasting each section with the ones that preceded and followed it; and trying to give each section as much continuity as possible.

To the West Coast

When, about a year later, Mr. Rollinson left Nelson to go to Greymouth, it was not without some reluctance. He had been on the West Coast only once before, and on that occasion it had rained continuously and heavily. The prospect did not at first seem a very bright one.

He soon discovered, however, that the West Coast does have fine weather at times, and that any discomfort from the climate was more than made up for by the famous, and authentic, West Coast hospitality. "It doesn't take long before one seems to have been on the Coast for years, and is just as proud of its traditions as the real Coaster," says Mr. Rollinson.

The task of reorganising 3ZR has not been an easy one, but it has been full of interest — perhaps because Mr. Rollinson's chief hobby, as well as his work, is radio.

After radio as a hobby, comes reading. He is building up what he hopes will one day be an extensive library. Other activities are debating, and "a good deal of bad tennis."