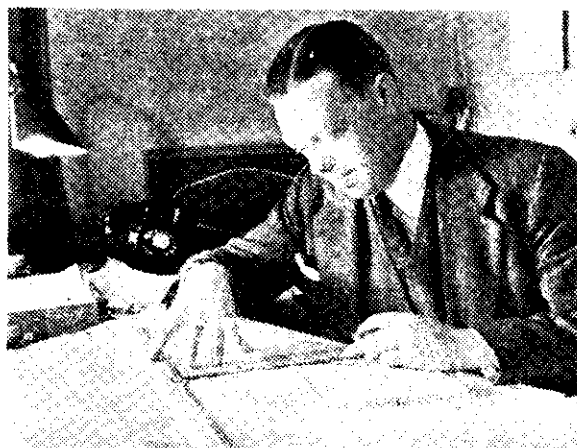


"HUMAN CALCULATING MACHINE"

The Man Who Plans Britain's Radio Offensive



BBC photograph

CLIFFORD LAWSON-REECE

THE British Broadcasting Corporation is now broadcasting two complete Home programmes, an Empire Service that covers the world for twenty-four hours a day, a service embracing all European tongues, a service for Latin America, as well as a variety of other programmes, such as those in Arabic and Chinese. The work of fitting this day-and-night service of over forty languages into the transmitters available, and of keeping the necessary control of all the complications of wavelengths suitable for each region and of time schedules throughout the world, is an immense and unique task. It's success and smooth running is due to Clifford Lawson-Reece, the BBC's Supervisor of Overseas Planning. Lawson-Reece is a human calculating machine with a very unexpected background.

In voice, figure, and maturity of erudition, Lawson-Reece tends to remind one of Dr. Johnson in his earlier days. Incidentally, also like Dr. Johnson, he is a Staffordshire man.

Off the Beaten Track

And yet Lawson-Reece himself has had no academic background at all. His education, it is true, did include a considerable amount of the Classics. But he was soon led off the beaten track by a modern language schoolmaster from somewhere in the south of Europe. Thereafter Lawson-Reece went his own way. After three years at Birmingham, where he studied medicine, he kicked over the traces and joined Barcelona University. That was just before Primo de Rivera closed down that University entirely, and for the next several months Lawson-Reece did his studying among the proscribed revolutionaries in the cellars and other hide-outs of Barcelona. That gave him the opportunity he had

long desired—indeed it really led him to Spain—to learn Spanish music. He learned that so well, as well as the Catalan language, that he ended up by becoming a member of a gipsy group that played and sang songs—not altogether reputable—in the Spanish evenings and nights.

Spanish and Romany failed to satisfy his unquenchable interest in languages and people; and he eventually drifted to Germany where he spent some time developing his own sense of music and the drama, and composing for ballet and mime. Returning to England, Lawson-Reece became both a composer and musical executant on several instruments, including the piano and the guitar, and actually appeared on the variety stage as a member of a burlesque musical troupe. Eventually he joined the BBC—that was in 1936—and after a short time ranging the gamut of all the activities of radio, discovered his niche in the business of programme planning.

A Phenomenal Memory

This, there can be no doubt, was due to his absolutely phenomenal memory. It is not only that he remembers without effort practically all the telephone numbers and car registration numbers that he comes across. There was one occasion when five closely-typed foolscap pages of the BBC overseas programmes went astray in the hands of an office boy before they had been duplicated. They needed to go out immediately, and Lawson-Reece, on being telephoned at his home, woke up and dictated from his bed every detail correctly.

On cross-examination he will attribute this capacity of his to a tendency on his own part to make a pattern in his mind and to include in that pattern every relevant fact. That, however, is only half the answer. Many people who have a very clear idea of their own subject and the pattern into which its details should be fitted, have nothing like Lawson-Reece's memory for such irrelevant and unpatternable details as telephone and car numbers. No, his is a rare and very valuable gift, that of being a walking reference library.

He is married—to a woman who was once his secretary—and is a good enough workman with his hands to make his own violin.

(Continued from previous page)

Trust so popular. And if the questions are as provocative as the sample ones which we have quoted, and if the experts in the studio are on their toes, this promises to be one of the most interesting sessions on the air.

People who have questions which they would like answered are now invited to send them to "Any Questions", National Commercial Broadcasting Service, Wellington, C.I., remembering that to be acceptable, they must have some direct bearing on the Christian message.

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