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**REPORT OF H.R.H. THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S
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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
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BOOKS

Low's Progress

LOW'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY, Michael Joseph,
English price 30/-.

(Reviewed by David Hall)

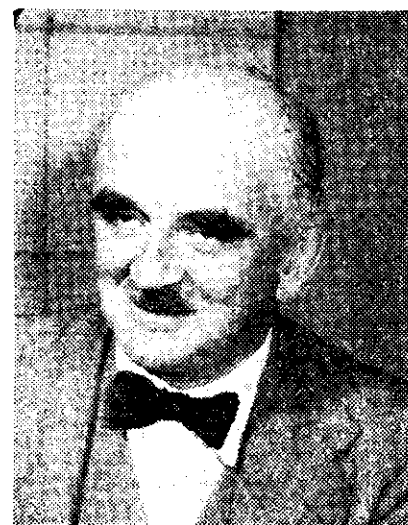
ONE of the persistent night-
mares of educationists is
the abominable success from
time to time of those who almost
entirely escape their enticing nets.
Low left school at 11 (his father
was a man of independent mind, too)
and was a more-or-less self-supporting
cartoonist in Christchurch at 15. True,
he did have a stab at Matric at 16,
with some help from a coaching estab-
lishment, but retained his buoyant in-
dependence by failing miserably, even
in drawing. But that was self-taught:
"For me it seemed that only by dint
of smithing could one become a smith."
The frightening moral need not be
laboured. Perhaps we can give ourselves
a pat on the back that it was New Zea-
land schools he avoided attending.

At 20 Low was called to a temporary
job with the *Sydney Bulletin*, at its
Melbourne office—a strategic point for
political close-ups, as it was then the
seat of the Commonwealth Legislature.
He stayed on with the *Bulletin*. One of
his jobs was roving the country immor-
talising local potentates. About this time
he consciously perfected the technique
of self-effacement, bringing "unobtru-
siveness by experiment almost to a
science. . . I got near to invisibility as
I sneaked myself into forbidden places."
This engaging modesty led him in later
years to diminish his own size (his
actual height is 5ft. 10½in.) when he
appeared in his own drawings, "and re-
created myself a sad little Charlie Chap-
lin kind of character for public use,"
a pop-eyed foil to Blimp—his richest
gift to popular mythology.

Low rose to fame with his comment-
ary on the deeds and personality of
Billy Hughes. A few years of work
("Making a cartoon occupied usually
about three full days, two spent in
labour and one in removing the appear-
ance of labour") under congenial condi-
tions (he could never command such
space in London), and Low went to
England at the invitation of the Quaker-
owned *Daily News*: "I never could pass
the door of Opportunity without trying
the handle."

His famous partnership with Lord
Beaverbrook—whose *Evening Standard*
he adorned for many years—was to be-
gin a little later, one of the strangest
episodes in modern journalism. Beaver-
brook gave Low a contract which ex-
pressly allowed him freedom of action
in the subject-matter of his cartoons.
London laughed often enough at the
cartoonist following his own political
line in defiance of his paper's policy;
Beaverbrook was big enough to laugh,
too. Ironically, when Low recently joined
the *Labour Herald* from a sense of
political duty, conditions were not so
congenial, and he soon moved on to
the *Manchester Guardian*.

Meanwhile, of course, independence
has paid its own dividend, both in self-
respect and in the respect of others.
Low scarcely belongs now to one paper
or another; his cartoons appear in a
great many different journals throughout
the world. In any case, no one can
make him turn his back on his own



BBC photograph

DAVID LOW

"Only by smithing could one become
a smith"

strong, upright, mildly leftish opinions.
He is the original sea-green incorruptible
—on a five-figure income.

His other strength is, of course, his
superb technique—the apparent sim-
plicity, actually the fruit of unremitting
labour. He has never been facile and
has always needed to study his subjects
carefully.

Since his arrival, in a double sense,
in London, Low has enjoyed the society
of the great and the great have enjoyed
Low. Wells was his friend, but Shaw
suspected his bump of irreverence. He
has a lucky knack of getting on with
opponents or victims. Hitler and Musso-
lini might ban him, but he often hob-
nobbed with Baldwin, and carried on a
long flirtation with Jix (the egregious
Joynson-Hicks, a golden gift to a car-
toonist).

Low's penultimate gift is his con-
siderable ability as a writer. He can hit
almost as hard in prose as in caricature.
The last gift of all is that no one can
envy him all the rest—wit, talent bril-
liantly exploited, integrity and success.
His autobiography is an enthralling
document, lively, sincere, cocky, but
essentially modest, full of eminently
quotable titbits I could go on with till
the cows come home.

A PLACE IN THE RECORD

THE HEART HAS ITS REASONS, the
Memoirs of the Duchess of Windsor; Michael
Joseph, English price 30/-.

THE Duke of Windsor published *A
King's Story* in 1951, and though the
ultimate value of the memoir was un-
deniable, many of us were sorry to see
him invite the discussion that follows
a printed book. The Duchess of Wind-
sor's autobiography adds no embarrass-
ment now; it may even improve the
situation. Too suave a chronicle to
answer directly anything said by others,
its tone and content offer some antidote
to such venom as is in Brody's *Gone
with the Windsors*. As autobiography it
succeeds in giving a clear and credible
picture of its subject, and this is prob-
ably what we most require. It provides
our only first-hand knowledge of a
woman about whom we were all obliged
to have an opinion.

It is very well written, in a natural
style which seems to fit the amused, con-
fident face of the childhood photos. The
Duchess's life has centred on people and
places, rather than on ideas. Her life-
long appetite for parties, picnics and

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 8, 1957.