



THE LYONS in the living room of their London home—hard at work, as usual

IT'S THAT FAMILY AGAIN By A. M. ROSS

MAYBE you already know, since *The Listener* kindly printed an article of mine a year or two ago, that I am a New Zealander assisting in writing the script for *Life With the Lyons*, and as it is written in the Lyons' own home, I have become well acquainted with this famous and much-loved American family. I wonder, perhaps, whether you'd like to know if their real characters are anything like those they portray on radio? Would you? Well, here is some "inside" information.

Take Barbara. Do I hear male readers say "Yes, please"? Well, you're too late, chums. Last year she married BBC Television Producer Russell Turner. Barbara is nice looking, gay and witty, and her singing improves with each recording. She gets her melodious singing voice from her parent, and if you've ever heard Ben's record of "Three Little Fishes" you'll know that I mean Bebe.

Now for Richard. He is not at all as tight with his money as the radio suggests. But, like most of us, he likes to make a little on the side, so within a week of being told that there can be gain in a quick turnover of goods, he tried it in his car, and now does not look on the advice as being at all profitable. Seriously, though, he had a rather unlucky car accident a year or two ago and at times still feels the effects of the concussion he received.

I doubt if Robin could equal the enormous amount of food he is said to eat in the radio series, but I've lost count of the number of times Aggie has told him, "Master Robin, get out of my pantry!" By that time he has usually "got outside" most of the pantry's contents! His animal friends are occasionally a nuisance, too. Bebe sometimes says his pet mice have driven her scatterbrained . . . but, who would know?

Ben is not vain. The general public admits he's still good-looking, his family admit he's still good-looking, and Ben admits he's good-looking. He rules the Lyon household with a rod of iron, and none of the family would dream of disobeying him in anything, unless, of course, his orders go against their own wishes. Like many very masculine men, Ben is an excellent cook, and to assist him he has built up a very fine collection of the loveliest little frilly cooking aprons.

And the subject of cooking naturally brings one to Bebe. The radio mother Lyon cannot even make hash without—in a word—making a hash of it, but when the real Bebe enters the kitchen, she is speed and energy personified. Then everything proceeds at breakneck pace. The ingredients will have been flung into a bowl, briskly stirred, and be in the oven long before anyone has managed to clear away the layer of flour, milk and congealed egg yolk, mixed with margarine, baking powder

and glacé cherries, which she somehow contrives to spatter all over the kitchen table and floor. Bebe will by then have returned to her scriptwriting, and as she alone knows how long the mixture should remain in the oven, all one can do is to return to the kitchen every ten minutes or so in the hope of being present to turn off the gas at the first sign of smoke issuing from the oven door. I feel sure that the result of Bebe's cooking would be excellent, if only she could remember to remove the mixture from the oven. Alternatively, all she needs is one of the latest ovens, like electric toasters, which pop out the contents as soon as they are ready.

When you know that Bebe is the chief scriptwriter, you will readily understand that her vagueness and absentmindedness are merely adopted for the sake of

comedy. Oddly enough, she writes few of the fictional Bebe's lines, for most of them are included in the script by her writers. They always have a pencil ready whenever Bebe is in conversation, and unobtrusively write them down. Perhaps the following scrap of salvaged dialogue will show you how easy it is:

Bebe: What day is it?

Me: It's Thursday.

Bebe: No wonder I'm hungry. What time's lunch?

Me (gently): Miss

Daniels, you've had it.

Bebe: What's that?

Me: You've had it.

Bebe: Say that again and you're fired! Have you got that red book? (She asks for a red book; that sounds clear enough, but it so happens she owns over a hundred red books containing comedy material, jokes, and gags, any one of which may be the one she needs.)

Me: I don't think so, Miss Daniels.

Bebe: Well, get it for me will you? (And the next moment she is immersed in her work again, and there is nothing for me to do but go and look for it. I return after a few minutes with what I hope is a likely choice.)

No, that's not it. It's one of the others. (I turn to go but she calls after me.) It's not a gag book. I gave it to Jean a few months ago. (I ask Jean, the secretary, and after long thought and prolonged search, I return with a selection of red books, one of which turns out to be the one she wants.) If I had to wait this long for everything I needed I'd have turned 33 long ago. (She smiles.)

Me: Will that be all today, Mrs Lyon?

Bebe: How should I know? Why don't you ask her?

Me: But Miss Daniels, you are Mrs Lyon.

Bebe: Why, so I am (and she gives one of those delightful laughs). I'm sorry, I'm only half here.

(She said it, not me.)

Well, I hope that what I have been saying will have helped to clear up a misconception which some listeners to *Life With the Lyons* may have had—that the Lyons' day to day lives are similar to their radio lives. Perhaps from the information I have given, you will have a better idea of what this family is really like, and that now you'll know that their real characters are nothing at all like those they portray. Or will you?

("Life With the Lyons" is currently being heard from 1XH on Sunday afternoons and from 2ZA and 4ZA on Sunday evenings. It starts on Sunday evenings from the ZB stations on August 4.)

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