

Elegant Beau Brummell

WHEN George Bryan Brummell died in a charitable asylum in France in 1840, few Englishmen noted his passing. Yet today, when their names are forgotten, Beau Brummell's lives on in history as the symbol of that extravagant Georgian period, and in the English language as a synonym for male elegance and manners.

The dandies of other ages have taken Beau Brummell's name, but none have matched his leadership in male fashions. Although today the comparative drabness of male attire seems so far removed from the faultless magnificence of the great Beau, it was he who set many of the sartorial styles that still exist. Yet the man who taught the Prince of Wales to dress in the fashions he had set, who was reputed to have changed three times a day, died penniless and poorly dressed. This is the story, and this the man, featured in the dramatic biography written by Dick Cross of the BBC and produced in the Auckland studios of the NZBS by William Austin, who also plays the leading role. It will be heard from 1YC at 9.49 p.m. on Saturday, February 9, and later from other stations.

To some, Brummell's life may be a black mark against English society, but even they will admit that his biography is a colourful one. And if "fine feathers make fine birds," Beau Brummell was surely the eagle of English social history. His dress, wit and manners, symbolised all that was considered most estimable in Georgian society. For these things he is remembered. And perhaps, for the "starched cravat" he made fashionable, he is sometimes cursed. There is much more, however, to George Brummell's story, and in this BBC production he tells his own tale of rise and fall. A secret love affair with a Duchess, an argument with his Royal patron, a short period of service in a Guards regiment. . . . "And once in a while, to remind us of the rigours of our profession, a general to inspect us." . . . these were incidents in the life of a typical young Englishman of the times, and stepping-stones to fame for Beau Brummell.

But the very extravagance and wit by which he won his title, also brought him ruin. He slighted his patron, the Prince of Wales, and gambled away the fortune his father had left him. Thus began a decline he was never to recover from, and in the end, to escape his creditors, he moved to France. There, further debts, imprisonment and ill-health that culminated in partial paralysis, stripped him of social position and self-respect.

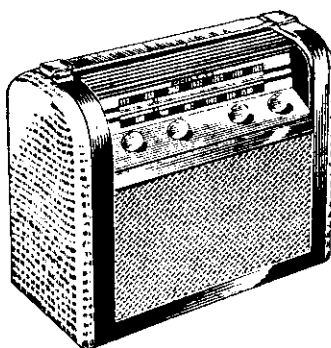
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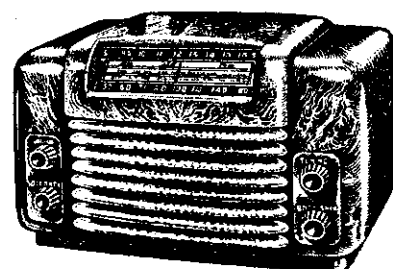
N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 1, 1952.



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