

RED-HAIRED GENIUS

NEW ZEALAND listeners have not heard much about the doings of Ted Kavanagh since the good old days of "ITMA," but there is hardly a top-ranking BBC variety show which does not owe something to him, or in which he has not at least a little finger; and he is already a figure of some importance in the world of television. The article on this page, written by IAN COSTER, another New Zealander resident in London, should give listeners some idea of the present scope of Kavanagh's activities—and of the amount of fun which they still owe directly or indirectly to him.

THAT red-haired genius with the hang-dog look. Ted Kavanagh, from Auckland, is as prominent as ever in the news. He has recently devised a bright new idea for English television, a puppet show with human voices, called *It's a Small World*, which is to make its bow in the New Year. BBC Television chiefs are putting it forward as one of the main offerings in their new 1952 programmes.



SAM WILLIAMS

The puppets are being made by Sam Williams, another New Zealander, well known in Wellington, who has won TV renown with his puppet characters. Peter Rabbit, Porridge the Parrot and caricatures in the Terry Thomas show.

Ted has been auditioning 50 or 60 voices to speak the lines in this topical, fortnightly show—the first time that anything of the kind has been attempted. Ted is no newcomer to Television. He wrote the first TV pantomime back in 1936, and since the war has had five successful series on the TV screen as well as supplying TV material to America.

Three-quarters of an hour's recording of *ITMA*, the classic show which has not been forgotten over here, was broadcast before the King's speech on Christmas Day, and that was the fourth excerpt from the show broadcast in 1951.

Never a man to rest on his laurels Ted goes on trying out ideas. Another new radio series is coming from him in 1952. This show, *Quids Inn*, he describes as a "rowdy, patriotic piece with a strong Dominion flavour," in which he will use brass bands rather than slick comedians and gagging. One of his ideas in this is the use an Antipodean who comes over to "colonise" England.



JOHNNY CHUCK AND PETER RABBIT, two of the glove puppets created for BBC Television by Sam Williams, formerly of Wellington

Like every other innovator, his ideas are not always successful. He firmly believed and still believes that *The Great Gilhooly* was the best show he ever wrote, and he fervently hoped that it would be heard in New Zealand, where its accent on sport would, he thinks, have been appreciated. Just as it was steadily gaining in public favour, it was whisked off the air; but the man who played Gilhooly, the Dublin comedian Noel Purcell (a protégé of Ted's), has gone from strength to strength in films and on the stage ever since.

As you probably know, Ted has offices in Mayfair with the imposing notice "Ted Kavanagh Associated" on the door. In this stable are Frank Muir and Denis Norden, the writers of the big success, *Take It From Here*, who were his discoveries, and both of whom are associated with him in the firm which is managed by his eldest son Kevin. Other writers associated with him are George Wadmore (*The Ted Ray Show*), Sid Colin (*Educating Archie*), Carey Edwards (*Vic Oliver Half-hour*), Michael Bishop, Talbot Rothwell (Murdoch and Horne), Ronnie Hanbury (Jewell and Warriss), and the ex BBC producers, John Watt, Roy Plomley and Gordon Crier.

Ted is one of the founders and deputy-chairman of the Radiowriters' Association (which has 320 members), and he is regarded as the "daddy" of the craft. Some shows, such as *It's a Small World* and *Quids Inn*, he writes entirely by himself, as he did *ITMA*. He feels, however, that the day of the solo radio writer is over, and that it needs a team of writers to carry the weekly burden of a radio series.

There are indeed other shows which he edits. One of these was a commercial show from Radio Luxembourg, *The Ted Kavanagh Show*, which ran for 40 weeks. Another one was *Radio Ruffles*, a travelling pierrot show which has come in for some criticism in New Zealand, where it ran under a different name. This concert party production—the first of its kind in England—had considerable success, being revived three times and achieving the record (for the Midland service) of 66 performances. Ted edited but did not write

it, the material being contributed by the best of Britain's radio writers and played by an all star cast. It had a topical appeal but was apparently unsuitable for export. Some of the New Zealand Press criticisms, "that he was no good without Handley," etc., have been disproved by the fact that he has written—and still writes—for many other comedians, and by his recent excellent work.

Ted makes it clear that he thinks that New Zealand writers ought to devise their own shows for their own audiences, and is prepared to help them in every way, just as he has helped and encouraged new writers in England. He always extends a warm welcome to Australian and New Zealand writers and artists, most of whom make his office their first port of call when arriving in London.

Outside broadcasting and television Ted has many interests. He is writing two books; the first, *The Memoirs of Colonel Chinstrap*, based on the famous *ITMA* character who prefers alcohol, about 50,000 words, should now be in the publishers' hands, but he is still polishing it up. The other is his autobiography *Twenty-five Years of Broadcasting*, which records his adventures from the day he went timidly to the BBC, then in Savoy Hill, and suggested he might be able to provide some ideas.

Then there are his articles for the Press—he can write seriously on occa-

sion and has retained his early interest in medical matters. He is chairman of the Catholic Stage Guild, a member of many clubs and associations and greatly in demand as an after-dinner speaker.

The Irish Catholic Stage Guild paid him the highest honour in 1951. He was invited to Dublin to receive the radio "oscar," a bronze statuette, along with Gigli the tenor, ballet producer Ninette de Valois, John Ford, the film director, and the French writer Paul Claudel, who were all being honoured similarly for their achievements in their various branches of art.

Recently he undertook a lecture tour of Scotland, the North country and the Midlands on the theme, "Making Millions Laugh." With gramophone records to demonstrate his points he entertained thousands in clubs, town halls and theatres.

His great friend Tommy Handley, about whom he wrote a book, is still a precious memory to him. That is why he is delighted to talk about Tommy on a new series being broadcast from the Midlands, *They Found Fame*—where he traces Tommy's career from office boy to radio star.

Handley gave Ted his first chance when he broadcast a script which mixed up the Grand National, the Boat Race

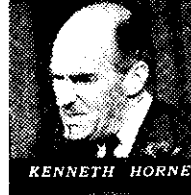
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JACK TRAIN



RICHARD MURDOCH



KENNETH HORNE



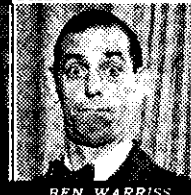
KITTY BLUETT



TED RAY



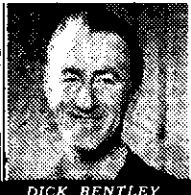
VIC OLIVER



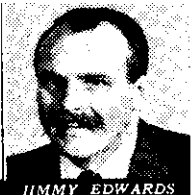
BEN WARRISS



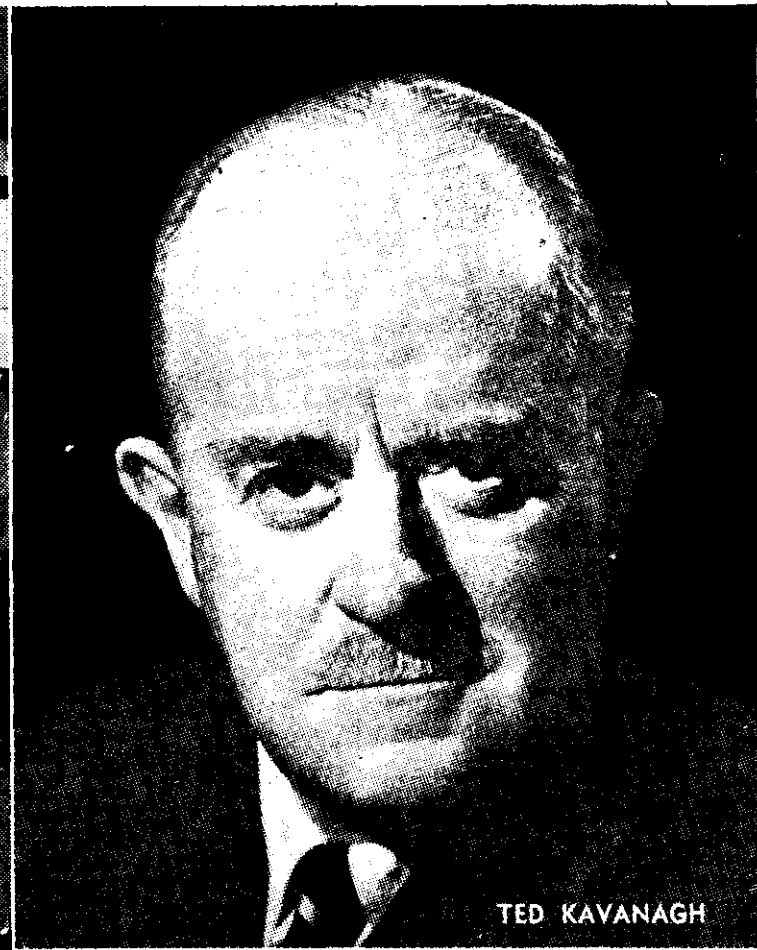
JOY NICHOLS



DICK BENTLEY



JIMMY EDWARDS



TED KAVANAGH