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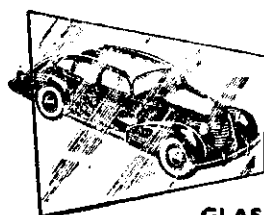
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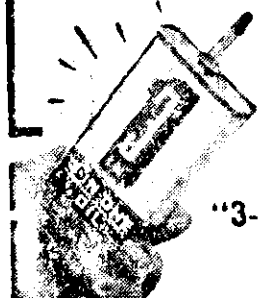
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NO IVORY TOWER MONARCH

Harold Nicolson's Talks
on George V

WHEN Harold Nicolson's official biography of King George V was published last year it was welcomed as a major addition to contemporary historical writing. In a leading article *The Times* said: "Foreigners as well as British subjects may learn from this biography something of how the Commonwealth functions in action. The core of it is a weighty reminder that, when every allowance has been made for the constitutional limits placed on the monarchy, Buckingham Palace remains no ivory tower."

In four programmes based upon the biography, which were first broadcast by the BBC and are now to be heard from YC stations of the NZBS, Mr. Nicolson surveys the major events of King George's reign, with special reference to the developments of significance to the Commonwealth. It was a period in which difficulties in Ireland reached their crisis and resolution; India took longer strides towards self-government; and the Statute of Westminster established the position and mutual relation of the countries forming the British Commonwealth.

The first talk, "Getting to Know the Commonwealth," covers the King's early years up to the time he ascended the Throne. Mr. Nicolson begins by explaining how the book came to be written. His task, he says, was to write the political or public history of the reign to follow the official personal memoir by John Gore which appeared in 1941. He was given full access to King George's diaries, private letters and official papers, and a room in Windsor Castle was set aside for his use. Both King George VI and Queen Mary read the proofs of the book. In fact, King George VI read and approved the final chapters barely a fortnight before his death. Listeners will be specially interested in Mr. Nicolson's description of working high up in the Round Tower at Windsor, looking out over the roofs of the town, in a room lined from floor



KING GEORGE V

"The probity of his nature . . . shamed the stratagems of more elaborate minds"

to ceiling with canvas boxes holding King George V's papers.

In his second talk Mr. Nicolson covers some of the constitutional and political problems that faced the King and shows how he met and solved them, guided by the strong simplicity of his principles and his beliefs. The question, What can a King of a modern democratic state actually do in the exercise of his functions? is answered in the third talk, which discusses the way in which King George V interpreted his constitutional functions, again with particular reference to the Commonwealth. The series ends with an assessment of the King's character and influence. This programme includes a recording of his voice. "Being a man in whom there was no guile," says Mr. Nicolson, "King George throughout his reign took it for granted that he would receive from successive Cabinets the same natural fidelity that he accorded to them. The candour of his approach, the probity of his nature, the straightness of his thoughts and actions, did more than create a last-

ing level of confidence; they shamed the stratagems of more elaborate minds." And he ends his talk and the series with these words: "I can assure you that in all the myriad documents that I have read, that in all those three and a half years in the Round Tower at Windsor, when I had spread before me every detail and every moment of that man's life and work, I never encountered even the shadow of a mean thought."

The Hon. Harold Nicolson brings to his writing a great knowledge of history and literature and a wide acquaintance with world affairs. Since he retired from the diplomatic service he has lived a very full life as Member of Parliament, author, journalist and broadcaster. It has been said of him that his success as a broadcaster has rested upon his ability to translate graceful and picturesque prose into easy conversational speech, and upon his instinctive respect and friendliness for the listener.

King George V: His Life and Reign will start from 2YC on Thursday, July 2, at 8.15 p.m., and from other YC stations later in the month.



BETH AND MR. LAURENCE
"A disturbing alternative"

WHO KILLED BETH MARCH?

WHO killed Beth March? If you have read, and remember, Louisa May Alcott's books *Little Women*, *Good Wives* and *Little Men*, the question may startle you a little—enough to make you want to hear an NZBS programme which both asks the question and gives an answer. This literary detective story *Little Murderesses*, will be heard from 3YC at 8.0 p.m. on Monday, June 29.

When *The Listener* asked G. C. A. (Arnold) Wall, who wrote *Little Murderesses*, what first aroused his suspicion he recalled a hectic Air Ministry conference at the time that flying bombs were falling in Britain. Then an R.A.F. officer, Mr. Wall was at that conference when a "very senior officer" quoted from *Little Women*. "He was capped by a very senior civil servant, and a delightful five minutes' discussion followed," he said. "The question was: What did Beth March die of? And no one knew. It was a time when one sought any-

thing as a distraction, so I bought the Louisa Alcott books to find out the cause of Beth's death and jotted down some notes. A few months ago I took them out—and *Little Murderesses* is the result."

Little Murderesses, which Alan Morris produced in the Christchurch Studios of the NZBS, takes the form of a court of inquiry in which the voices of the president, a narrator, a prosecutor, and various witnesses are heard. For listeners unfamiliar with the books or who have forgotten the details there is a short synopsis in which the March family—Mr. March, Marmee, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy—are introduced. Listeners are then taken as far as Beth's fatal illness in Chapter 17 of *Good Wives*. After that Miss Alcott's "hypothesis that Beth died from natural causes" is examined, a disturbing alternative is suggested, the suspects are lined up—and a verdict is returned.

N.Z. LISTENER, JUNE 26, 1953.