

NOTES FROM LONDON

Radio and the King's Jubilee

B.B.C. Planning World-Wide Broadcast — National Thanksgiving Service From St. Paul's — England Prepares to Fight Competition From Germany

(Special to the "Radio Record": By Air Mail.)

This page was written specially for the "New Zealand Radio Record" by L. Marsland Gander, a well-known broadcasting writer in London.

London, February 14.

THE King's Silver Jubilee in May will provide British broadcasting with the greatest occasion in its history, and plans worthy of it are in preparation. Once again his Majesty is expected to speak to his world-wide family; on this occasion not only in affectionate regard for his subjects in all lands, but also in heartfelt gratitude for the blessings of his reign. Empire listeners will hear a week of special programmes. Again it is hoped to link Empire countries in an impressive "hook-up" of radio round the globe; the Dominion Premiers in London will come to the microphone; the Royal reviews of army, navy and R.A.F. will be covered either by running commentaries or eye-witness accounts; the B.B.C. drama department is giving a special review of the chief events of his Majesty's reign.

Special arrangements are being made

for the relay from St. Paul's Cathedral of the national thanksgiving service. St. Paul's, because of its famous "whispering gallery," has always presented a difficult acoustical problem. Underneath the dome there is a complete "black-out" from the point of view of broadcasting. But good results are expected from a revision of the existing arrangements. Incidentally the appointment to St. Paul's of Canon H. R. L. Shepherd, who was the first radio preacher, has made the task of the B.B.C. outside broadcasting department easier.

THIS is to be an Empire year for the B.B.C., not only because of the Jubilee broadcasts, but also because the B.B.C. is determined to expand and improve this service. The circumstances are especially favourable. Revenue is increasing as the total of license figures creeps upward toward the 7,000,000 mark. The expiration of the charter, which runs for ten years, from 1926, is at hand, and inquiry by the Government Select Committee into the affairs of the corporation is expected. It is more important than ever that the B.B.C. should demonstrate that it has not failed in its trust.

And it so happens that the acting controller of the programmes at the B.B.C. is deeply interested in the Empire. He is a broad-minded Imperialist, an Imperialist in the most liberal interpretation of the word. Director of Public Relations at the B.B.C., Mr. Gladstone Murray is acting as programme controller during the absence on prolonged sick leave of Col. Darnay. Mr. Murray tells me that he wants the Empire programmes to be simpler and more emotional. In other words (my own) there must be less high-browism and more heart appeal. Mr. Gladstone Murray (he got that Christian name from parents who admired the Grand Old Man) is a Canadian himself and came to Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. He understands the wide open spaces and their peoples.

And a third reason why the Empire service is going forward is technical. The Daventry site is being cleared for action. Already Britain's long-wave station has been moved from Daventry to Droitwich. The other home station on the site, Midland regional, is to be removed to Droitwich next month. The empty buildings, and, what is more important, the giant 500 feet masts, already used to some extent, will be wholly available for the Empire transmissions. The problem of the Empire short-wave broadcast has resolved itself largely into a problem of aerials.

This year the B.B.C. must and will

leave the short-wave stations of the Continent far in the rear. At Broadcasting House the new German short-wave "Empire service" is regarded as a direct challenge. It will be answered.

I ASKED Mr. Henry Hall, Director of the B.B.C. dance orchestra, what parts of the Empire sent most "fan-mail" to him. He said that India and Africa headed the list, and next in order came Canada and Australia and New Zealand. Actually he broadcasts more for the Empire than any other B.B.C. orchestra. He told me a curious fact. Not one of his Empire correspondents had ever shown himself able to distinguish between an actual first transmission and a recorded version. They also give a second lease of life to tunes which are slightly demode in England. For instance, it appears that "Love in Bloom" is extremely popular overseas now.

He gets the most letters from the "home-sick exile" type of Briton. Overseas broadcasters, listeners, and dance-band enthusiasts are all interested in the composition of his band because of the remarkable reception which they sometimes experience. Actually it is the smallest of the major dance bands on the air. It has only fourteen members compared with the usual twenty or more.

It comprises four brass and four rhythm instruments, four saxophones, violin and a vocalist. Don Donovan is the principal vocalist, another is Len Bermon, the drummer; there is also a vocal trio, and the second trumpet sings occasionally, making a fourth change. There are no less than five arrangers in the band.

"I still get a genuine thrill when I know that my band is broadcasting to the Empire," Mr. Hall said to me. I believe him, for he has certainly never lost the "first fine careless rapture." "Henry," as he is universally known at Broadcasting House, has attained that degree of fame in Britain which was once the sole prerogative of Hollywood film stars. On holiday he may arrive at a hotel unknown. When he goes the guests have massed on the lawn and chant "Here's to the next time." But this adulation has in no sense spoiled our Henry. Nor does he intend to give up broadcasting to grasp some of the glittering prizes of the music-halls as so many others have done when once made by broadcasting.

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