PROFITABLE SCRIPTWRITING

For TV and Radio

by
GALE PEDRICK

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PROFITABLE SCRIPTWRITING

Among the numerous programmes written by Gale Pedrick for television and radio are:

Drama

THE FINGERS OF PRIVATE SPIEGEL
DOUBLE EXIT
MR. BUTTERS WRITES A NOTICE
MR. PARABLE'S PIANO
THE BO'SUN KNEW A SONG
UGLY DUCKLING
COLORATURA
FAREWELL TO THE PEGASUS
EXCLUSIVE TO THE ARGUS
ONLY ONE MAN FOR THE PART
TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE
UNCLAIMED REWARD

Series

THIS IS YOUR LIFE
(the first thirty editions of the British version)
THE SPICE OF LIFE
THIS IS SHOW BUSINESS
THESE RADIO TIMES
THE LAUGHTERMAKERS
THE MUSIC MAKERS
PICK OF THE WEEK
NIGHTS OF GLADNESS
CLOSE-UP
MEET SIMON CHERRY
(series of short plays based on the popular clergyman-detective character)
FASHIONS IN FUN
A STAR REMEMBERS
DOLLY DOVE OF DOVER STREET
HAIL VARIETY!
ALL FOR PLEASURE
MONDAY BIRTHDAY PARTY

Documentary Programmes

THEY REACHED FOR THE SKY
(the story of powered flight)
BANGING THE BIG DRUM
SUCCESS STORY
MAD ABOUT THE BOY
(the story of fan-worship)
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE CHORUS
PICTURES IN THE SKY
THE ROYAL FAMILY OF GREASEPAINT

Biographies

THE JOHN MILLS STORY
THE MALCOLM SARGENT STORY
THE EILEEN JOYCE STORY
and radio portraits of
DIRK BOGARDE, AGATHA CHRISTIE
BEATRICE LILLIE, KENNETH MORE
CICELY COURTNEIDGE
TOMMY HANDLEY
BEBE DANIELS and BEN LYON
SIR CHARLES COCHRAN
THE CRAZY GANG, ADA REEVE
STANLEY HOLLOWAY, CAMPOLI
SEMPRINI, WILFRED PICKLES
GEORGE ROBEY, SID FIELD
TONY HANCOCK, HARRY SECOMBE
NORMAN WISDOM, etc.

Miscellaneous

THE COMIC AND THE CUSTOMER
DANTE GABRIEL'S GUARDIAN ANGEL
THE EAGER EYE OF MR. KING
THE FIRST DISC-JOCKEY
THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS ARE THE HARDEST

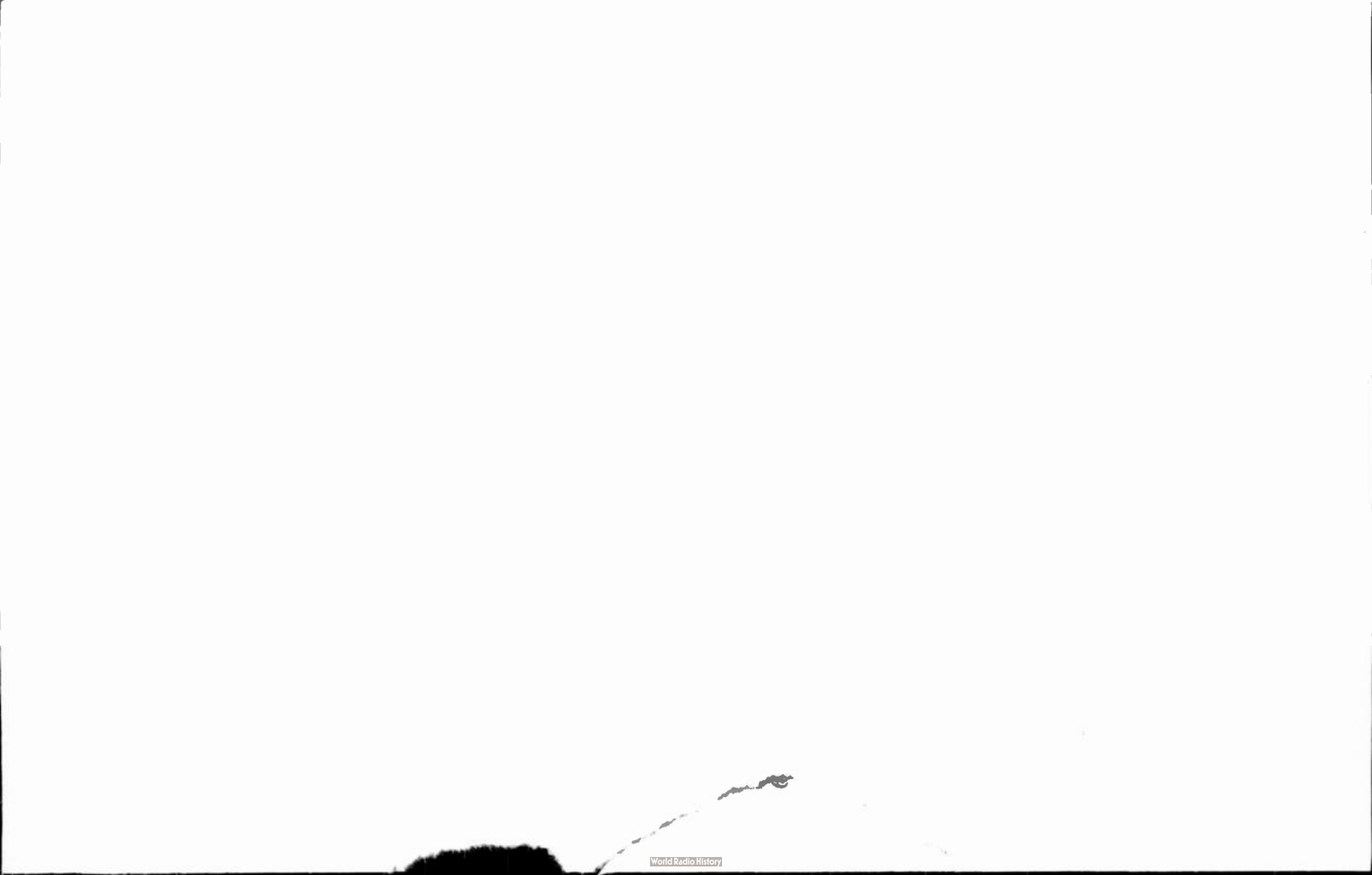
CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	YES, IT CAN BE DONE Sound Must Survive — The Elusive Idea	9
II.	FIRST CATCH YOUR IDEA Jack of All Trades — "Tunes of All Trades" — Meet the Rev. — These Radio Times — Overdraft — "Ballerina Story" — "Mad About the Boy" — "The Key of the Door" — "Ghost at my Elbow" — "Never Short of a Pound" — "By Royal Command" — "By Our Special Correspondent" — "My Day" — "It Occurs to Miss Bunce" — "Get Me Mayfair Ten Thousand" — "Announcers' Album"	20
III.	THE PLAY The B.B.C. — Associated TeleVision — Associated-Rediffusion — A.B.C. TV — Granada TV — Southern Television — T.W.W. — Anglia Television — The "Regions"	55
IV.	FASHIONS IN BROADCASTING The Length of a Television Play — Over-Writing — Type of Material — Characters and Sets — The Use of Film — "Sound" Ideas — Those Breaks	83
V.	THE AMERICAN INFLUENCE A "Heavy" Industry — Jive *v.* Grand Hotel — Accent on America — Laughter or Clap Hands	97
VI.	THE WRITING OF COMEDY Supply and Demand — The Jester's Art — "That Man" — "Bootsie and Snudge" — The Geography of Wit — Pickles *v.* Wightman — The Humour of the Home — "It Happened to Us" — Humanity—Not Malice — "The Larkins"	107

CHAPTER		PAGE
VII.	COLLABORATION Division of Labour — Philosophy of a Comic — Words by Frank and Denis — Writing to the Clock — Writing for Tony — Lyons in Their Den — Monkhouse and Goodwin — Sykes at Large	134
VIII.	ADAPTATIONS Fiction by Instalments — Adapting for Sound — Fiction—and Fact	152
IX.	THE BROADCAST SHORT STORY "Only One Man for the Part"	174
X.	THE BROADCAST TALK	184
XI.	IT'S WORTH TEN PER CENT The Function of the Agent — Nursing the Baby	194
XII.	SUMMING UP	190

From hacks and "ghost"-writers
And long-winded blighters,
And shows that go flop on the Light—
Good Lord deliver us.

The Planners' Prayer



CHAPTER ONE

YES, IT CAN BE DONE

When people talk to me about fame overnight, I always tell 'em that so far as I'm concerned it was a bloomin' long night.
Dave King
(interviewed in Gale Pedrick's series "The Laughtermakers")

WHATEVER else may be said about this book, I hope nobody will charge me with evading an issue or dodging the truth as I see it.

As my publishers could tell you if they would, I hesitated for a long time before agreeing to write what I would ask you to regard as a "friendly guide." Not, let me make it clear, that I didn't appreciate the compliment of being asked. On the contrary, I was much taken by the idea and attacked the task with an enthusiasm which surprised myself since I am by temperament disinclined to face any task involving more than ten thousand words at a time.

Then, just as everything seemed to be going splendidly, and I had totted up the first fifteen thousand, I developed a conscience. I developed a conscience (*a*) because it suddenly came to me that the art of writing cannot be taught like dancing can be taught; or poker-playing can be taught; (*b*) because the whole picture of broadcasting and television in this country was changing with every month which passed; and (*c*) because if I were to write a book I wanted it to be (so far as human frailty would permit) true and honest.

It would have been simple enough to produce a fairly fluent, fairly glib, even fairly useful account of how to set about the problem of selling one's work: and make this work saleable by suggesting that Britain's Radio City is paved with gold for the writer no less than for those old-fashioned and independent television millionaires. It wouldn't have been too daunting a task for someone whose own average output is round about that ten-thousand-words-a-week mark. But if I'd handed in some optimistic handbook, painting a glowing picture of wealth

earned in leisure and in ease, I should have been as insincere as the advertisements which proclaim "Win lifelong security with your pen," or which demand: "Why not earn easy money from the day-dream stories in your head?"

We read about—and some of us may help to support—the experts who claim to be able to make your fortune if you follow their methods on the Pools. Of course, people *do* win on the Pools. There are also thousands of men and women who make a comfortable livelihood by writing. My old school chum, Master Noël Coward (Clovelly Preparatory, Clapham), is wealthy: but I'm sure he didn't learn how to write plays from a correspondence course.

In the highly competitive worlds of television and broadcasting, Frank Muir and Denis Norden, Eric Sykes, Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, and Ted Willis have found the golden touch. But here is the sobering thought: big-money winners regularly float to the top of their own particular Pools every week. Not so these writing-chaps.

Having pondered all this I allowed myself to think again, and the picture suddenly became more hopeful. I remembered how two writers of peerless prose had written words of immense value to younger men: C. E. Montague with *A Writer's Notes on His Trade*, and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch with *The Art of Writing*. Next, I realised that when the proposition was first put to me both broadcasting and television were engaged in a desperate, urgent, bewildering battle to find their true level and that (off-putting as it was) this stormy period could not last. While as for the future of the writer in the truly exciting medium of television, well, there was bound to come a day when the profession would achieve a dignity of purpose all its own, with commensurate rewards.

I am trying to make my approach clear so that you will understand why besides being optimistic (as I most certainly shall be at times) I am equally determined to be frank. Where disappointments and set-backs are possible, if not probable, I shall not hesitate to say so, I trust, with your approval and understanding.

I have never believed it possible to *teach* the craft of author-

ship. But it would be foolish I suppose to say that anyone can afford to scorn the hand of a willing and more experienced guide: and there are many ways in which an old hand may grasp a new hand and teach it how to make the best use of instinct and talent.

By the very nature of things I have collected a great deal of useful information. I hope some of this may benefit writers who will be drawing royalties long after my own day-to-day work in radio and television has been forgotten.

A journalist's work so often lingers only as a faded, yellowing rectangle of print in an old album. The broadcaster's art is even more short-lived—a pleasant echo, perhaps, born on some breeze of memory. Well, *is* there a silver lining to this business, and if so, how do we go about finding the opportunities which really justify a book like this?

To begin with, we can point to the example of many men and women who have made a go of it in a more than satisfactory way. The radio- and television-writers belong to an important and potentially powerful profession.

In recent years some markets have dwindled, some doors have closed. That is true. On the other hand new markets have come in sight, new doors are opening. Not all the advertisements are catchpenny. Some have more than an element of truth. If you're lucky, or if you have a flair for writing comedy lines and inventing comedy situations, you may, indeed, earn good money. Values change so quickly that one hesitates to mention figures: wealth today may be a comparatively modest sum tomorrow. But one can say that a number of writers for broadcasting and television are earning approximately three hundred pounds a week, with additional cheques for film-rights, stage-rights, overseas transmissions and so on. There are many more in what one might call the "comfortable" income-bracket. There has also been an increase in the number of authors who have been given a writing-contract by certain companies.

With respect to those in this top flight, there has frequently been that "little bit of luck" to act as a spring-board and to compensate for all the blood, tears, toil and sweat involved, to say nothing of the demoralising sparetime occupation, hanging

around. This means the ability to be in the right place at the right time, talking to the right people and giving them just that idea they've been looking for. If you are the kind of person with a flair for suggesting that it is they, and not you, who have fathered this brain-child, don't bother to read on. You can get there without books.

I said some markets are dwindling. I refer principally to sound radio (although there are welcome signs of a revival) and to a certain curtailment—one hopes it is temporary—in native plays for television in favour of imported conveyor-belt contributions from America. To give us heart, let me point out that we can turn to:

B.B.C. Television (and, B.B.C., for all thy faults I love thee still);
The Independent Television Companies;
The expanding regional organisations coming under the wing of all these parent bodies;
The prospect of another television channel—though which way the wind will carry that new venture, isn't at present clear;
And the possibility, much discussed, of commercial radio.

SOUND MUST SURVIVE

This is something to be cheerful about even after one has allowed for an instinctive shudder at the thought of trans-atlantic infiltration. Unhappily, we have had to face on sound radio the possible sacrifice of one wavelength to background music and more or less nothing-else-but (although quite recently there have been welcome doubts about this).

In defence of sound radio there is still time for a fight. I deplore defeatism on this subject. Handled with imagination and a certain amount of amiable obstinacy "sound" has more than a chance to survive.

It must survive. At the time of writing proof has been given that at least twenty million people, possibly more, listen to sound radio at some time during every day. Programmes which in the Home Service, the Light Programme and the Third are

in opposition to some popular show on TV obviously don't stand a chance of collecting a fraction of the support they did before the arrival of the "idiot's lantern," and their audiences have fallen away.

This was inevitable. In other times the most popular radio shows would command thirteen million customers. Nowadays their producers think they're doing well if they can rally a million loyal supporters. *At the same time, whatever happens there will always be many people who prefer to use their ears rather than their eyes when it comes to entertainment in the home.*

Men and women who are sincere and knowledgeable lovers of music prefer the splendid reception afforded by V.H.F. There are the blind, the hospital patients and the by no means inconsiderable number of people who don't like television on principle (or who distrust it). Should there ever remain only, shall we say, five million listeners sound radio would have to go on. That's a pretty good daily circulation by any standards. Today a national newspaper starting a campaign with the clarion cry "Don't let sound radio die" would rally millions and carry half the country along with it.

How, then, can I best help?

One answer seems to me to be by quoting from my own experience and from the experience of others who have spent half a lifetime wresting an income from this pleasant if fickle business. I shall not give you the hopeful description of some pipe-dream, but hard facts.

I will try to show you just what may happen from the birth of an idea to the moment the microphone and/or the cameras send it winging on its way.

Two warnings occur to me. I have heeded neither, and nobody knows better than I do that the spirit of this advice is in direct conflict with the writer's temperament.

"Temperament" was a word I hoped to avoid in these pages, but—well, "instinct" isn't quite right, either. Outlook or way of life hit off the point more clearly.

Anyhow, what I have to say is:

Don't procrastinate;
Don't dissipate the gifts you have.

Now these are profound and abiding temptations for those of us who seek to earn a living by first putting on a picture-show in our minds and then translating those pictures into words. To hit upon a brand-new idea is a thrill in itself, and I defy the most seasoned professional to deny it. To give imagination rein, to develop the idea while sitting, lounging, walking, eating, drinking or listening to the radio, is a most pleasurable exercise. You can't beat it.

When one thinks of writing it down—oh, that's when the pains begin. . . .

THE ELUSIVE IDEA

I beg you from the depths of grim experience not to lose a good idea or even a useful phrase because you are disinclined (I mean too lazy, of course) to write it down. Is there anything more maddening than to try and recall some flash of inspiration, only to find it eluding you?

One can lay awake for hours trying to grasp again these mental will-o'-the-wisps. How one begrudges the precious time lost as one stares at a too-hastily squiggled note on the back of an envelope, a visiting-card or a bus-ticket. A tiny effort of will and all that frustration would have been avoided.

No really good idea need ever be lost. Take the trouble, therefore, to make notes of every promising thought. You won't regret it. An opening phrase—a story outline—the subject for an entertaining talk. Don't lose them. More than that, having hatched out these themes and noted them down—act on them without delay.

"The trouble with you, you think there's all the time in the world." How often that phrase has come back to me over the years. Just let some reasonable measure of success come your way and, without discipline, the tendency to rest on one's modest laurels can be almost overwhelming. Unless you are one of the iron, thousand-words-a-day-come-hell-and-high-water characters.

If you want something done, get a busy man to do it.

There's a lot of truth in the old saying. You will find that most of the successful people in this world—and, incidentally,

those who seem to live longest—are those who keep alert and busy. It is not given to everyone to have the self-discipline of writers like Norman Collins, let's say, or Michael Gilbert, both of whom have the mental concentration to write during a train journey or at home after a busy day and who insist on a regular daily output. But to get down to work *is* essential. I know this besetting sin of putting-off so well: but it is that opening sentence or paragraph that does the trick. Often it is near agony to get it right, but once started—you're away.

Only the discipline of the deadline and the tyranny of edition-times on a London evening paper were my own salvation. When I was an editorial Jack of all trades on the London *Star* before the war I had to turn out between eight and twelve thousand words a week, whether I liked it or not. There were long interviews, gossip columns, feature articles, reviews, supplements, obituary notices, news stories. . . .

You see, I'm taking you into my confidence, because though I would like you to learn what I can tell you, I shall be happy if you will learn by my mistakes as well.

I have certainly blown a bridge or two just where I needed them most, and there may have been far too prodigal a spreading of the modest forces at my command. The Army handbooks teach us to conserve power and to avoid the danger of distributing one's assets over too wide an area. The same goes for the field of conflict where the pen is mightier . . .

It is useful, I suppose—compliments apart—to be regarded as a competent writer who can be relied on at short notice to write anything from a talk for children on church bells to a televised documentary on the story of powered flight. How much more satisfactory, some may think, to build a reputation as an expert in one special field. Good thriller-writers are scarce, for instance; while in a very different vein who, when thinking in terms of programmes about animal life, would trouble to look beyond the names of Peter Scott, David Attenborough, Armand and Michaela Denis, Hans Hass and his Lotte?

All the same, it is fun to range over a wide territory and to put out as much bait as possible. I have frequently had as

many as seventy or a hundred programme-suggestions floating about at the same time in various parts of Britain.

Common sense invites you to keep in mind the kind of people who will form your audience. There was a warning popular at one time among highly-placed producers and their chiefs at Broadcasting House. "Nothing wrong with this idea or that script in principle," they would say, "but you *must* think of how it would be received in the back kitchens of Bootle."

To judge from some of the programmes which have oozed their dreary way across the television screens of Britain in the past few years one would imagine that there is an insatiable public taste for violence, perversion, maladjusted marriages and juvenile delinquency. I can't believe this to be true.

Surely there are still many millions of people who enjoy the simple humours and humanities. All the same, this is a point to be watched. On my desk at this moment is a letter from an influential Controller of Programmes who recently returned an idea of which I thought quite highly. "If you do go on cudgelling your brains," he writes, "for Pete's sake, take into account the I.Q. of the public and keep it simple." Hard words, perhaps—but it's a hard world.

I'll end this chapter on a cheerful note. It's true that ever since radio entertainment began the script has always been the Eternal Alibi. That, indeed, should really be the title of any book on scriptwriting. If shows fail, artists and producer can always blame the writer. Don't imagine they will hesitate to do so because in private life they like you and enjoy chatting to you over a drink. The unsuccessful comic who is slapped down by the critics will say (like any other human bear with a sore head): "What could *I* do with a script like that?" The producer will not be slow to pass on these words of cheer.

Just now and again, one or two of the nice people—and it's the old story, the higher they get the nicer they are—are only too glad to give credit where it's due. But then they can afford to.

Have a look at the billings in the printed programmes and you will rarely see the authors' names in large type. Often you may not see them at all. Their credits are usually way

down in what is known in show-business as "the wines and spirits"—that is, at the bottom of the poster and in small letters. Yet the directors and stars are, unless they rewrite the whole thing, merely the interpreters of the author's creation.

Well, this is one of the little astringent comments I promised you, and things are not always as bad as that by any means. Still, it's a point worth noting, and I hope that if you do make good you will do everything in your power to promote the dignity and prestige of our craft.

Since we have entered this phase for fiercer competition the radio-writer has become an important man. With commercial television piling up its millions and a steady output not only from London but from the capital cities of the Midlands and the North, the demand is greater than it has ever been. (And never ignore Scotland, Wales and the West.)

Naturally, this must mean that the rewards are greater. When I first started writing for radio, radio-playwrights were paid—believe it or not—at the remarkable rate of a guinea an act. For a fifteen-minute talk one was glad to receive a cheque for one guinea. And if in the course of it you quoted from the Bible, or from Shakespeare, or from any published work, some copyright expert would gleefully count the lines and deduct the *pro rata* amount from your fee! Today there are many television and screen-writers earning more than five thousand a year and an élite but ever-growing corps of writers in the ten thousand–thirty thousand a year class.

It is true that we have reached the period when "unscripted, unrehearsed and spontaneous" speech is used in many programmes: one result of the revolution brought about by the tape-recorder. But in fact there must always be a market for the programme which is scripted. Plays, either on television or in sound broadcasting, still provide one of the most popular forms of entertainment. Comedy shows, documentaries and most gramophone programmes are still carefully prepared by their writers.

Even the kings of the *ad lib.* nod now and again. It is difficult for them to guard every word and inflexion. In a programme on the respective merits of the churchyard and the crematorium, the genial Richard Dimbleby summed up by saying: "For me,

cremation every time." In the correspondence columns of an evening paper next day there appeared the comment: "Surely, only once, Mr. Dimbleby." I am sure Mr. Dimbleby smiled wryly as he read it, for he is a perfectionist who slips but rarely.

That famous "never-say-die" programme "In Town Tonight" (now "In Town Today") used to come in for a good deal of leg-pulling because so many of the characters who had come to London "by land, sea and air" were very poor readers of the printed word. There were endless jokes about the laboured and painstaking speech which robbed many excellent items of any appearance of spontaneity. This was always specially marked when, with a deafening rustle of script, the page was turned and some veteran speaker would say; "There-was-what-you-might-call-a-chapter-of-accidents-and-it-began-when-I-dropped-over-board-my-hand (long pause and rustle) . . . kerchief."

Which reminds me of the classic wrong inflexion when an actor who had been recording three or four episodes of a fifteen-minute thriller in a single day came to the line, in his role as a police inspector: "What's that in the road ahead?" and it came out as: "What's that in the road—a head?" And there was Herman Darewski's classic advice to young actresses: "Be sure to rehearse your spontaneities, dear!"

So far as "In Town Today" is concerned, the typed script of tradition was thrown overboard some years ago, and now visitors are quizzed by friendly interviewers, after a preliminary talk. All the same, in many programmes correct timing is imperative—more so than ever with the rigid, box-like time-periods demanded by commercial television. Even interview programmes of the type of which "This Is Your Life" is an example, are scripted for rehearsal.

I hope I've said enough to convince you that although to the old sweat "fings ain't wot they used t'be" they may easily become very much better than they used to be in every way.

So go to it—and the best of luck.

* * *

To show you that the markets do exist—though there may be no royal road to them—I close this chapter with a picture which will show that scripts and ideas are still wanted, and by whom.

Someone has to fill up those hundreds of hours of broadcasting and television which jostle for position in space at every moment of the day. Why shouldn't it be you?

All television and broadcasting programmes can be given a place somewhere under these headings:

Children's Programmes; Drama; Features; Gramophone Programmes; Documentaries; Outside Broadcasts; Light Entertainment; Music Programmes; Talks; Current Affairs; School Broadcasting; Religious Broadcasting; Women's Programmes; News.

These divisions are those operated by the B.B.C., but the commercial companies have their own similar interests, even if they prefer submitted ideas and scripts mainly to be sent to their headquarters, where they will be diverted to the producers, editors and executives most likely to be interested.

The existing concerns which carry on the massive business of transmitting programmes in different parts of the country and for many hours of the day are:

The B.B.C.; A-R TV; ATV; A.B.C.; Granada; Southern Television; T.W.W.; Tyne-Tees Television; Anglia Television; Westward Television; Ulster Television.

CHAPTER TWO

FIRST CATCH YOUR IDEA

EVERY programme there has ever been started with an idea.

Plays, serials, documentaries, panel-games, all stir and grow from a passing thought, some flash of perception which may come at any moment among your waking hours. Some are fated to die almost at the moment of birth. A large proportion miscarry. None the less, ideas are the currency of progress in every trade and profession. They can be without price. Guard them well. If you don't possess one of those photographic memories write down your ideas, even if they come to you in the still watches of the night when even to scribble a line to aid your memory in the morning is an effort.

Many of these brain-children will not survive. *Others may come to life and bring a sense of achievement, plus hard cash.*

Consider the royalties which must still be drawn because one day many years ago that most prolific of authors, the late Edgar Wallace, suddenly hit upon a brilliant idea for a novel called *The Four Just Men.*

Wallace's famous quartet were entertaining an audience fabulous even by his standards, nearly thirty years after his death—on television.

How about the cheques which have been flowing week by week into the pockets of the people who thought what a good plan it would be to coax the viewing millions into playing "What's My Line?" "Twenty Questions," surely the simplest—but for that reason one of the most popular—of all nursery-games, has been the delight of a huge and faithful public for heaven knows how long. Imagine the rewards that have been earned by best-sellers of the air and of the television screen: "This Is Your Life," for example, and "Double Your Money," "Take Your Pick" and a long list of other unsubtle but diverting ideas.

Ted Willis must bless the moment when in that inventive mind of his ("Ideas go chasing themselves round my head like

little white mice," he once said to me) he saw the possibilities of that ordinary, unpromotable copper, P.C. George Dixon. And what of Godfrey Harrison's vague but appealing bachelor character, David Alexander Bliss? What of America's Brother Bart and Brother Bret, of "Maverick," of Matt Dillon and his drawling, likeable side-kick, Chester; "Bonanza"'s Ben Cartwright and a whole living library of other money-spinning characters?

Somebody had to think of them. Now that the air is crowded minute by minute in every part of the world where people have ears to hear with, eyes to see with, and thumb and forefinger to flick a control, creatures of fancy by the score are waiting to be called into being. And the demand is certain to increase rather than diminish.

It seems to me that if this book is to fulfil any useful purpose it must be built (to a certain extent, at least) on personal experience. As I pointed out earlier it would have been too easy to say "Think of an idea, send it to such-and-such an individual"—and hope for the best. I fancy it will be much more useful to cite a number of ideas and describe their fate.

I do not claim to have achieved more than, shall we say, a reasonable success, and an income which (while it compares more than favourably with some of the highest grades in the more orthodox professions) has not reached the standards of the highest paid television-writers. For this very reason I hope you may think, "Well, this at least is authentic—and the kind of thing which may happen to me." I have friends, some of whom came to me years ago for advice (and I am proud now to think that some of them followed that advice), who know what it is to command very big incomes.

As I said earlier, as a freelance writer and ideas-merchant I usually have anything between seventy and a hundred programme suggestions circulating in and around the offices and conference rooms of the B.B.C., and of those responsible for building the schedules of the various Independent Television companies. It may help if I tell you about some of these ventures: while later we will take a number of individual ideas and follow their course—sometimes to success. In this way you will come to understand something of what may happen to that flash of

inspiration which gives you the plot of a play, that sudden brainwave for a documentary programme, that happy thought which strikes you as being ideal as the basis for a feature programme, a panel-game, a domestic comedy, a thriller serial, a series of original interviews, a light-hearted story of some aspect of everyday life.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Anything to do with other people's jobs has always seemed to me to provide a fascinating theme for any programme. Others have thought the same, but about twenty years ago I persuaded John Watt, then the B.B.C.'s Director of Variety, to schedule a series called "Jack of All Trades." The idea was not strikingly original, but it appealed to me. I thought it would be a good plan to take different trades and occupations in turn and to present a light-hearted programme introducing the various types of entertainment associated with the occupations in question.

This seems rather a long-winded way of describing what happened, but it boils down to this. Let's take, for example, the hairdresser. It was clear from the beginning that one could build a varied, and as I thought an amusing programme by including "Largo Al Factotum," Figaro's famous aria from *The Barber of Seville*; a scene from *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*; a melody from the musical-comedy version of *Monsieur Beaucaire*; the famous music-hall song "Get Your Hair Cut"; the ballad "My Mother Bids Me Bind My Hair"; with "Softly Awakes My Heart", a rather saucy reminder from *Samson and Delilah* that the lady concerned was responsible for one of the most historic examples of hair-styling in history.

The policeman was another promising subject. There is that jolly duet "The Two Gendarmes" from *Genevieve de Brabant*; "If You Want to Know the Time Ask a Policeman," from vaudeville; the errand boy's delight, "The Policeman's Holiday"; another music-hall favourite "P.C. 49" (this was before the memorable character created by the late Alan Stranks, with Brian Reece as Archibald Berkeley-Willoughby).

Then there is the well-known chorus from *The Pirates of Penzance* which runs: "When a felon's not engaged in his employment"—to say nothing of music in the grand manner, with "Three Agents and a Closed Carriage" from *Tosca.*

There were other trades and professions, some no less promising: the schoolmasters, the tailors, the waiters, the factory-workers, the musicians, sailors and soldiers, innkeepers, street-vendors, showmen, actors and artists. There was even a good programme to be found in "The Farmer"—with items from opera, the ballet, the music-hall, the theatre and, in short, from nearly every form of entertainment.

I thought I was on a good thing here, but life was at that time even more unpredictable than usual. I found myself in the Army. Only three or four programmes were broadcast, and the idea went back into my files and wasn't pulled out again until I'd been demobbed and was again reviewing ideas past and present.

The Jack of All Trades theme once more proved very useful when I was asked to do a series of talks—with illustrations on records—for the B.B.C.'s General Overseas Service. Each week I engaged in conversation with an imaginary Sergeant Beadle, and this time the series ran nicely for fourteen weeks.

Television was getting into its stride again, and on the principle of "nothing venture" I decided to try my luck in this medium.

Accordingly, I drafted the following letter, which I quote in full as an example of a subject in which it is desirable to give detailed information.

"TUNES OF ALL TRADES"

This is an idea for a series of programmes with an orchestra, an original reason for bringing the viewer into the show, and a bustling, light-hearted, melodious setting in which one could use top-line artists and lesser-known performers. Each programme would be concerned with a different trade, industry or occupation.

This suggestion is inspired by the fact that almost every trade and occupation has a library of songs connected with it. Attached are lists showing that this is true of three selected professions—the Farmer, the Sailor, and the enormous number of people engaged in Transport.

This is the basic and important fact. When it comes to building a series of programmes under the title "Tunes of all Trades" a number of variations and opportunities for audience participation at once come to mind.

1. We would deal with each trade or occupation in turn.
2. A celebrity would keep the programme on an even keel, and he would be a famous personality of today who at one time had been a member of the trade we were dealing with.
   Example. If we were dealing with Milkmen, Benny Hill would be a good choice because he was once a milk roundsman (so was author Ted Willis). If it were the Civil Service, Askey would be a good choice because he was a clerk in the offices of the Liverpool Education Authority. If the subject were sport, let us choose Freddie Mills because he went straight from school to the fairground boxing booths. Trinder was a butcher's errand boy, Alfred Marks a street-vendor, Wilfred Pickles a builder, Tommy Steele and Ted Ray were once ship's stewards, and so on.
3. The audience would be composed entirely of members of the trade we were dealing with in one particular programme—in other words, they would all be bus-drivers and conductors, miners, shop assistants, doctors, schoolmasters, lawyers, fashion experts and so forth. Among the guests should be the President of the Association or Guild connected with the subject under review. If one could pack in a Lord Mayor of London or one of the big cities, so much the better. But most of the trades—from opticians to fishmongers—have their own Guilds or Association with some distinguished man at the head of it.
4. Most trades and professions have their own amateur operatic societies. If we were dealing with bankers, railwaymen or stockbrokers, one would have at least one musical item in the programme contributed by an outstanding performer. It is quite certain that with the whole country to draw upon we should find solicitors playing lead in *Oklahoma*, bank-managers playing the Lytton parts in the Savoy operas, and employees of British Railways singing the Welchman character in *Desert Song* or the Robeson role in *Showboat*—and in many cases the standard would be almost, if not quite, professional.
5. A skilful interviewer could bring out all kinds of fascinating information about famous people who, at one time or another, had been connected with the trade, occupation or profession under review. Anthony Trollope was in the Post Office, T. S. Eliot and W. W. Jacobs were in the Civil Service, Somerset

Maugham and A. J. Cronin were doctors, Dame Edith Evans was a milliner—the list is endless.

6. The whole atmosphere of the programme would be calculated to be a friendly one, about "the man and woman next door," but if necessary one could bring in so many different angles of entertainment—extracts from plays, sketches, brief readings from famous classics by well-known people. If our subjects were hairdressers then one would not only have Raymonde, but an amusing extract from *Sweeney Todd—the Demon Barber of Fleet Street.*
7. I feel that by presenting a series of trades and occupations, with music interest and entertainment all the way, one would be putting on a picture of everyday life with an amusing twist. I can see people looking forward each week to seeing what fun could be had from the next occupation on the list—and in fact the whole thing could be a diverting bit of social and domestic nonsense.
8. Apart from the examples attached, research has been done into the following trades and occupations: the Schoolmaster; the Tailor; Workers in the big stores; the Waiter; the Factory Worker; the Musician; the Soldier; the Innkeeper; the Street-Vendor; Showmen; the Actor; Artists.

Here are some suggested items, together with appropriate existing recordings:

The Farmer

(1) "A Farmer's Boy"
(2) "Tally Ho!" as sung by Nellie Wallace
(3) "John Peel"
(4) "Farmyard Symphony"—from sound track of Disney film
(5) "Down Upon the Farm"
(6) "Leanin' " (Ballad)
(7) *A Country Girl* (Musical Comedy)
(8) Symphony No. 6 in F ("Pastoral"), by Beethoven
(9) *La Traviata*—"From Fair Provence," by Verdi
(10) *The Bartered Bride*—Finale, by Smetana

The Sailor

(1) Fantasia on British Sea Songs—Hornpipe
(2) "Barnacle Bill the Sailor"

(3) "The Engineer," as presented by the late Scottish character comedian, Will Fyffe
(4) "The Fishermen of England"
(5) "I'm Pop-Eye the Sailor Man"
(6) "We Saw the Sea" (*Follow the Fleet*)
(7) "The Sailor with the Navy Blue Eyes"
(8) *A Country Girl*—"Yo Ho, Little Girls, Yo Ho"
(9) "Jolly Roger"
(10) "Matelot," by Noel Coward
(11) *Madam Butterfly*—Lieut. Pinkerton.
(12) "The Triumph of Neptune" (Polka)
(13) *The Flying Dutchman*—"Sailors' Chorus"

Transport

(1) "The Trolley Song"
(2) "On the 5.15"
(3) "Daisy Bell," as sung by Florrie Forde
(4) "Motoring," as performed by Harry Tate and Company
(5) "The Railway Guard," a Will Fyffe sketch
(6) "Keep Your Seats, Please," from a George Formby film
(7) "Daybreak Express"
(8) "Gondoliera Veneziana"
(9) "Funiculi-Funicula"
(10) "Pacific 231"
(11) "Le Fiacre," Jean Sablon's famous clippety-clop song

This heart-cry I dispatched to the Light Entertainment Department of B.B.C. Television (by the way, I had forgotten to tell you that I had already approached the Home Service and Light Programme, but the Programme Heads were unimpressed). The Television Centre returned my outline politely—and promptly. (Really, I thought, some people can't see a good idea when it's offered to them on a plate.)

The Midland Region of the B.B.C. appeared to me often ready to take a gamble on an idea and off went the programme-suggestion, which I now called "Tunes of all Trades," to Broadcasting House, Carpenter Road, Birmingham 15. When the Head of Programmes wrote to say he was sorry that the idea "did not find favour" the thought crossed my mind for one fleeting second that I was causing too many planners too many

regrets, but such conclusions are unworthy of the writer who is prepared to tilt a lance on any favourable terms, and away went my "Tunes of all Trades" to Granada.

Alas—the greatest courtesy, but no takers. My next target was Television House and Associated-Rediffusion. Here the reaction was a little warmer, but shortage of space, that ancient editorial excuse, was the militating factor. I realised for the first time something I should have understood before—namely, that when one has totted up all the hours absorbed by plays, news bulletins, documentaries, interviews, magazine programmes, importations from America and so on, there are periods during a given year when there is not much time to spare for the particular type of programme I was trying to sell.

All right, then—if London was hard to convince I would have another bash at the provinces. I remembered Bryan Michie from the comparatively early days of broadcasting. By now Bryan had been appointed Programme Manager of T.W.W. (Independent Television for South Wales and the West of England).

At the cost of a threepenny stamp and a few well-chosen words to the genial and massive Mr. Michie my "Tunes of all Trades" went winging off to Cardiff. I didn't mind when Bryan's letter of rejection arrived. I was getting used to it and, had I not held an almost fanatical belief that no good idea is ever lost for good, I have no doubt this was the stage at which I should have abandoned the struggle.

Bryan Michie could not have been kinder. He wrote: "I think your idea is excellent. I am only afraid it may be a little too ambitious for us to tackle. However, if you would let me keep it for a week or two I will present the idea to our Programme Planning Committee and see what they think."

The Programme Planning Committee was not to be cajoled and I was informed that it was quite impossible to present "Tunes of all Trades" under the existing conditions. But my outline was returned with the encouraging comment that no doubt I would "like to try and place this very good idea elsewhere."

What, and who, was "elsewhere"?

Well, I hadn't tried Southern Television, or Tyneside, or,

for that matter, Scotland or the North. By this time it was being borne in upon me that my brain-child was not making the good impression I'd fondly hoped for. Before consigning "Tunes of all Trades" to the provinces I decided to make one more bid in London and approached Jack Hylton, who then had a contract to provide a certain period of light entertainment each week under the banner of Associated-Rediffusion.

Jack asked me to see him in Savile Row in the lofty and spacious room from which he directs his empire. Having exchanged some pleasant memories, the hard-headed lad from Bolton proceeded to advance all the arguments I'd already heard against "Tunes of all Trades," adding a few more of his own. But he would, perhaps, do a trial programme—say, the one about the Barbers.

This, I felt, was a considerable advance on anything which had happened hitherto, but I pointed out as amiably as I could that to present a single programme in what was intrinsically a series would really prove nothing. With a noticeable lack of enthusiasm Hylton agreed to put on three programmes, with the option of another three. A few months later a series of six programmes was launched, this time under the title "All For Pleasure." Why this change, since "Tunes of all Trades" seemed to me to meet the case fairly well, I never discovered. By now I was past arguing and unfeignedly thankful to get an audience of any kind.

With some clever drawings by cartoonist David Langdon the series went out on Tuesday evenings at 10.15 p.m., and to my amazement collected a substantial rating. "Sweeney Todd" got there after all—played, with immense gusto, by Sir Donald Wolfit.

As it turned out, there was not a great deal of script to be written. All the really hard work I had done had been more in my capacity as a literary commercial traveller than as an author. But I collected something like twelve hundred pounds—and was grateful.

I tell this story to underline my belief that you can't keep a good idea down. If you go on pegging away something will happen—one day.

The first draft script opened like this:

STANDARD INTRODUCTION FOR ALL PROGRAMMES IN SERIES:

MUSIC:

[*Suggest a special orchestration of the familiar theme from Walt Disney's* Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs—"*Sing Hey, Sing Ho, As Off to Work We Go.*"]

[IVOR EMMANUEL *lies relaxed in a barber's chair with back to camera. All we can see of* IVOR *is the top of his head. He is being attended by three glamorous girl barbers. One holds scissors and comb: one is manicuring his hand; a third holds an ornamental mirror so that he can see if he approves of the treatment.*]

[IVOR *suddenly swings round in the chair, showing his face. He throws towel to the floor and speaks:*]

IVOR: Hullo, everybody. Now may I just ask you something? Where do you think all the great composers, all the great painters, all the great writers, get their ideas? I'll tell you. They get their inspiration for books, pictures, music, from everyday life, from the people they see, people like you and me, and from the things that are going on around them. It's as simple as that. . . . Every trade in the wide world has its own pictures, music and literature—but never mind—let's not go into all that. Far better to *show* you what I mean. We started in a barber's shop tonight. So here we go—

MUSIC:

[JOSEPH WARD *in costume, as Figaro, sings "Largo Al Factotum," from* The Barber of Seville.]

[*Mix from authentic "Figaro" to comedy spot. Burlesque of* Barber *aria by* BERNARD BROTHERS.]

[NOTE: Wherever possible, by drawings or reproductions of pictures, we never allow the fact that HAIRDRESSING is the theme to be obscured.]

[*Comedy spot ends and* IVOR *takes over.*]

[*If required,* IVOR *gags with actor stage-hands as they change set: or new speech to suit actual circumstances on the floor.*]

IVOR: Well, you see what I mean. By the way, did you know you can get your hair cut by a woman barber? . . .

Even then there were alterations and half the artists on the original list were unavailable for one reason and another, but this is what the running order eventually looked like—

"ALL FOR PLEASURE"

(*Running Order*)

(1) Opening Caption Routine

(2) IVOR intro. and MICHAEL MOORE
(3) JOSEPH WARD "Barber of Seville" song
(4) IVOR link
(5) IVOR sings "Jeannie With the Light Brown Hair"
(6) IVOR statistics (Cartoons)
(7) IVOR intro. to Music Hall
(8) BILLY RUSSELL "Get Your Hair Cut" song
(9) *Caption:* End of Part One

(10) *Caption:* Part Two
(11) IVOR intro. to RAYMONDE
(12) RAYMONDE and Girls
(13) IVOR and Men's Hair (Photo cap)
(14) Barber Shop Quartet
(15) IVOR "Wind and the Rain in Your Hair" song
(16) IVOR poetry item, and intro. to:
(17) SWEENEY TODD sketch
(18) IVOR to wind up
(19) End Captions with Girls

MEET THE REV.

One more example of an idea with long-term value.

At school during the golden period when one's leisure reading was confined to *Sexton Blake*, *Chums*, *The Magnet*, *The Gem* and *The Boy's Own Paper*, there was a master known to us all as "The Rev." The nickname, for some reason or other, always stayed in my mind. Not long after I had won a penknife from *Tit-Bits* and earned half a guinea from the *Western Weekly News* for an article about Dartmoor—thus banishing any thought of entering any other profession than that of journalism—I thought it would be a good plan to write some stories about a fighting parson.

Thinking, however, isn't doing, and although at intervals in the strenuous work-and-play business of becoming a provincial reporter the idea cropped up again I never got down to tapping out even the first sentence.

It wasn't until the late 1940s that I officially put forward the idea to the B.B.C. I had a letter—from the B.B.C. Drama Department—turning the suggestion down flat. Remembering stories told me by more than one of my actor friends who had failed a Drama audition only to be booked within a day or two

by Variety, and vice versa, I tried my "Rev." on what is now the Light Entertainment Department. This time there was a bite, and half a dozen short plays based on my character were commissioned. They were to be a new feature in an already successful magazine programme for hospital patients called "Here's Wishing You Well Again." The producer—Audrey Cameron, whose drive and personality have set their seal on a number of memorable series.

A versatile actor, Hugh Morton (who is a cousin of Sir Anthony Eden), was cast as my clergyman hero, Simon Cherry, and Roy Plomley—his own non-stop series "Desert Island Discs" can certainly qualify as a brainwave which became an income—was Charlie Banks, The Rev.'s partner in adventure.

Cherry, who had lingered in very cold storage for more than twenty years, paid off at last. The listening audiences took to him in a most gratifying manner, with the result that the original half-dozen programmes became a dozen, the dozen became three dozen, and by the time "The Rev." had a well-earned rest I'd written scores of scripts for him.

There followed a television series, and eventually a film company bought the rights of a novel which featured the character, and Zena Marshall and Hugh Moxey starred in a screen version.

Well, at least I'd heard the starter's gun in the race for recognition as a scenario-writer, but if you think I now became in demand in this field you flatter me. There were many vague promises, but Exclusive Films, the company concerned, had more ambitious plans and a future to be made immensely wealthy and secure by the brilliant exploitation of the macabre.

As a successor to Simon Cherry I hit on the character of "Dolly Dove of Dover Street." Dolly was a London flower-seller with a North Country accent and one favourite expression which became a catch-phrase—"Well, I'll go to sea!" Dolly, who by a strange chance became involved in a new queer tale each week, was played by Ruth Dunning, later to become so widely known as Mrs. Grove of the Grove Family. As a character Dolly didn't achieve quite the popularity of The Rev., but she earned her keep handsomely for many months.

I still think there's a future for the fighting parson idea and periodically I press its claims to be considered as a TV character, and he may yet come to life again. Who can tell? He is currently being considered by an American film company.

THESE RADIO TIMES

Long-cherished ideas don't *always* pay off. I remember suggesting that a parish hall might be a promising setting for a variety series. It seemed to me that a meeting-place of this kind or a Corn Exchange in a small town, or club rooms, perhaps, often became the centre of the social life of a district.

Such a rendezvous would provide the ideal excuse for presenting plays, amateur talent—which was then having a tremendous vogue—music, visiting stars and all the rest of it. I could find nobody to share my enthusiasm for what might now, I agree, be regarded as a somewhat hackneyed project, but was then, I thought, not too bad at all. A few months later the B.B.C. launched "Old Town Hall"—very much on the lines of my idea—and this ran for a long, long time. It's the old story—there's no copyright in an idea, and there was nothing that could be done about it.

One learns in our trade that a kind of law of compensation operates: or, to use the old cliché, when one door closes another will open. It appeared to me that people had an abounding interest and curiosity in the men and women who devote their lives to entertainment, and out of this thought grew my own longest-running series to date: "These Radio Times."

The idea was simple enough. In each programme I persuaded five or six celebrated broadcasters to tell their best stories and to talk about their jobs. The old formula of getting the actor to step out of character and be himself or herself worked like a charm. It almost invariably does.

In a single programme I might have a commentator—let us say, Raymond Glendenning; a musician, Sir Malcolm Sargent; a comedian, Arthur Askey; a gardening expert, Fred Streeter; a former announcer and presentation expert, John Snagge; and a concert artist, Eileen Joyce.

This series rolled along happily for several years (1951–6),

and there was a different version specially for overseas listeners. During that time I interviewed no fewer than 350 people, and with encores (i.e. repeats) at home and overseas, "These Radio Times" provided a useful basic livelihood.

The programme fell a victim to Listener Research. While the Appreciation Index remained consistently high—showing that the audience liked it better than scores of other weekly features—the actual total of millions switching on to hear it did fall away to a certain extent—and down flashed the axe. There were many hundreds of first-class names which could still have figured in such a series. Thus here was one more argument to support my own opinion that all broadcasting organisations should more frequently remember the pleasure of the minorities and not allow themselves to become slaves to the tyranny of the "listening figure."

You will probably have gathered that to earn a living in this trade it is almost more important to be a salesman than to know your English grammar (reviewers please note). Yes, undoubtedly you have to cry your wares as did the 'prentices of old. If the luck comes—and holds—the plums may drop into your lap. That's fine, when it happens, but remember I am writing in the hope of helping those with enough common sense to realise that not everyone can earn a fortune. You can also find contentment along the middle road of success.

Out of all the thousands of scripts I have written I can't think of more than half a dozen occasions on which I was definitely invited to contribute to programmes.

So many years have passed since its production that I hope I can now say that my play *The Fingers of Private Spiegel* did make rather more impression than most broadcasts of the post-war days. It was repeated again and again, and revived years later in the "Curtain-Up" series, but I was never asked on the strength of it to follow it with another play. You might think that those concerned would say: "We've rung a bell with this. Let's ask the chap who wrote it—what's his name?—to have a go at something else for us." Not on your life. That's not at all the way things work out.

True, after a lot of persuasion, the B.B.C. did present

Mr. Parable's Piano and *The Bo'sun Knew a Song*—both with delightful music by Alan Paul—but not before the old commercial traveller had put on his bicycle clips again and trotted round with a satchel full of scripts.

In fact, the only instances that come to mind in which I was officially asked to write, without any prompting on my part, have been the British version of "This Is Your Life" (for which I was the first scriptwriter and for which I churned out the first thirty programmes); and "Pick of the Week," the radio digest programmes which present in miniature a picture of each previous seven days' broadcasting.

So you see how necessary it is to keep up a fairly relentless flow of ideas, some examples of which I am doing my best to describe to you in this chapter. I have told you about several ideas which after a good deal of obstinacy actually came to life, but just as a mild corrective let me tell you about two which have not, so far, had any results whatever, though I still think they may do so.

OVERDRAFT

It might have been the raw November wind blowing icily round my legs and which matched my sombre thoughts as I walked from a historic banking-hall on to the grey pavements of Fleet Street. It may have been that prodding letter couched in terms which reminded me of the old music-hall catch-phrase: "It's not what he says, it's the nasty way he says it." It may have been the fact that on Monday morning I had rejoiced to receive a cheque for a hundred guineas, only to be plunged in gloom by what in the circumstances seemed to be a gloating dispatch from the Bank to say that the interest on my loan amounted to £156 4s. 8d., and was due.

Whatever the reason, I decided in a flash of melancholy inspiration that there was only one thing for it. I would write a programme called "Overdraft." The bait remains to be taken, but if I have to start my own transmitting-station I am determined that this programme will one day be produced. No, don't smile—I am in deadly earnest about this!

Anyhow, this is the letter which I sent first to one of the big

Independent TV concerns, then to the B.B.C. and, as a third shot, to one of the Regional Television companies.

"OVERDRAFT"

A documentary programme in which practically every adult viewer would take a personal interest.

Even those who haven't got an overdraft at the moment will have had one in the past, and will in all probability have one again. The subject would, I think, prove irresistible to most.

The programme would be dealt with in a light-hearted way, although every fact would be accurate.

Everybody may know nowadays that it is possible to obtain an overdraft so long as the sum is secured; but only a fraction know what goes on in the Board Room, in the Manager's office and in the Chief Clerk's office; or how, for instance, it is someone's revolting duty to examine the balances at the close of the day's business and to bring certain cases to the Manager's notice.

How much margin can the customer be allowed before he receives one of those stern letters which give the impression that one is about to be thrown into the Fleet Prison for debt, but which, in fact, are circular letters? When is the decision taken to return cheques to drawer? How much do the personal habits of the customer weigh when such decisions are taken? Who says, and in what terms, how long, heedless of his fate, the victim may be allowed to play?

One might begin with the familiar sign of Lombardy, reminding us that for all the dignity and trappings of the modern Bank, the practice of lending money is as old as usury itself.

I suggest that the programme tells the story—both sides of the story—of a young commercial artist, who is doing quite well but is probably pretty thriftless and whose Bank Manager is at heart convinced that he is constitutionally incapable of living within his income. Luckily, or unluckily for him, he has always been able to keep his head above water by earning just that little bit more each year. In the course of time he has been left the odd small legacy and possibly a couple of Victorian dwellings in an industrial area which always require money spending on drains, fireplaces, and so on.

This character should be played by an actor who can suggest a sense of humour, because it is a story of the ups and downs, the solvency and insolvency, the sudden ray of hope, the equally sudden dashing of the same.

We see the granting of the first overdraft, when all is sweetness and light within the Manager's office. We follow—by means of our

hero's reactions at home and at business, and by the official workings of the Bank—the life of this character from the moment he is caught up in the overdraft business. At one moment he is optimistic, with a Micawber type of optimism—the next he is cast down. There is the familiar pattern of the lucrative commission—two hundred pounds to spend!—and the next morning the income tax demand for twice that amount.

There are the lectures in the Manager's office, kindly at first, gradually becoming firmer and less pleasant. Anything but a business man, our character is puzzled by the fact that he is no longer offered a sherry in a private room, but is interviewed in the waiting-room.

We hear the case as it would be discussed by the Bank officials. There is one moment when he receives a letter telling him that the bank is "so perturbed" that they have to request him not to draw any more cheques. Panic in the home—how to raise money for current expenses and so on.

The whole position must, of course, eventually be resolved. Possibly the artist forms himself into a Limited Company and really pulls off a good three-year contract—so that once more, as a sign of grace, he is offered a sherry in the sanctum.

The whole story to be told by believable characters who could make the thing live and present an entertaining tale with a moral.

The London-based Independent Television people liked the idea and, in fact, hung on to it for some months, until they explained that "there was no convenient hole into which it could be popped." The Regional Programme Controller I wrote to was taken with the suggestion, but pointed out that a documentary on these lines could cost—with actors' fees, rehearsals, film shots and so on—anything up to two thousand pounds: and that as he could write a cheque for a hundred guineas, thereby obtaining the right to repeat a half-hour American thriller, my proposal, interesting as it was, was not "on." The B.B.C.'s view was merely that "it was intriguing, but too particular to be a documentary" (whatever that meant).

You may be asking yourself why, when I have to report this kind of reception, I have the nerve to set myself up as an authority on how to beat the Planners' Panel. Well, misses and near-misses there may be—but remember, the final record does show more than a fair proportion of hits, and these personal failures are all part of the picture. Also "Overdraft" is still on

its travels at the time of going to press, and, moreover, if it has not been put on by the time, let us say, that Prince Andrew is five years old I will undertake to contribute fifty Premium Bonds to the Authors' Benevolent Fund.

Another one of my foundlings, my waif ideas, still looking for a home, is a series to be called "National Gallery of the Air."

Over and over again while preparing "These Radio Times," "The Laughtermakers" and other reminiscent programmes, I would be frustrated by the discovery that certain invaluable recordings had not been retained. I realise that when such a huge amount of material is written and broadcast it must be quite difficult to decide which recordings to keep for the archives and which tapes could be justifiably "wiped"—in other words, washed out of existence.

It's no secret that there have been, since the war, certain historic recordings made from programmes that have been presented on the air, and with despair I have found from time to time that some of these no longer exist. I believe the position has been tightened considerably in the last year or so, but it was unbelievable to find that there were so few recordings, let's say, of Robert Donat: and when it came to writing memorial programmes for artists of the stamp of Noel Gay, Carroll Gibbons, George Robey, C. B. Cochran and even Ivor Novello, there were extraordinary gaps. I am glad now that after I had been to see Donat some time before his death he recorded some verse specially for a Christmas programme I was writing. I told those concerned that whatever happened these examples of Donat's beautiful speaking voice should be preserved—and I understand they were. Fortunately, Mr. Donat's son John later brought to light the fact that his father had made a number of recordings at home, and these were fashioned into most moving and interesting programmes.

Anyhow, it seemed to me that it would be a far-sighted thing for some important organisation to build up, sometimes for current use, but mainly for the future and for posterity, a library of interviews with celebrities in every field. It could be called "Radio National Gallery," and surely such a venture could

only add to the prestige of the people concerned, to say nothing of the practical value it would also have.

Could not one form this gallery, this "National Gallery," of interviews in which to begin with, shall we say, fifty celebrated people give in ten minutes a sort of testament (which none the less could be light hearted when necessary) of their own way of life and their approach to their work? They would deliberately speak with the knowledge that what they were saying would be listened to by people long after they were themselves dead. I can imagine an extraordinarily interesting collection being made with names like Sybil Thorndike, John Gielgud, Edith Evans, Malcolm Sargent, William Walton, the Sitwells and so on. One would certainly not neglect the great sportsmen, or for that matter the comedians—the really great ones—and outstanding performers like Gracie Fields. In fact, the test would be whether their names (and what they would have to say) would be of potential interest in fifty years' time.

Here you would have a kind of national collection on which various radio and television bodies could draw (and, more important, pay for).

This suggestion, I fear, found no favour: principally, I imagine, because since this sort of thing has to be done by the "book," the accountants' yardstick, there was no appropriate fund which could pay for such programmes.

Part of my reason for telling you all this is to show how a single author may concern himself with many different types of programme-suggestion. All these examples I quote sprang from the kind of casual thought which occurs to one at the wheel of a car, walking along a track in the hollow of the South Downs or, for that matter, watching while tempered steel measures and cuts through the finest saddle of mutton at Simpson's in the Strand. And if "National Gallery of the Air" isn't in being one of these days, then it should be!

"BALLERINA STORY"

This was one of the few series in which I enjoyed a happy collaboration. It was, I feel sure, over a couple—or it might have been three—gin-and-Dubonnets taken with a dash of

astringent wit from the late John Watt, that the plot to write "Ballerina Story" was hatched.

I had always wanted to try blending real-life happenings with the adventures of an invented character. In other words, it seemed to me much less rigid an idea to tell the story of musical comedy with all the genuine tunes and background, as seen through the eyes of a Gaiety Girl, an imaginary character who became a star. By chance, John had a similar idea at the back of his mind and had been thinking in terms of telling the story of a girl—now an old woman—who had gone through every phase of a ballet-dancer's career. The character was pure fiction, but many of the other people in the story—Diaghilev himself, for instance—had lived and influenced art, while the story itself gave a most natural excuse for using all the glorious music in the whole library of ballet music.

This example from the script may show you what I mean.

The heroine, Millie, who adopts the name Adèle Lenotre, meets a Swedish impresario called Hagenquist, who is ambitious to become the greatest producer of ballet in the world.

HAGENQUIST: There couldn't be a better time. Diaghilev is finished. All his dancers come from the Maryinsky Theatre and they've had to return to Russia. He himself is in Switzerland or Italy. He has no company—just one young man, Massine, who is as yet untried. Now is the time, I think, to take over his empire.

MILLIE: And you want *me*?

HAGENQUIST: I want young dancers who are trained and enthusiastic. And you, I hear, are both.

FATHER: I've made some inquiries, young lady. You can't fool the old 'un.

HAGENQUIST: Think it over, Miss Adèle; and come and see me again.

MILLIE: I don't have to think. I know . . .

HAGENQUIST: Nevertheless, Miss Adèle, think it over.

CONCERT ORCH.: [*Fade up: "The Swan" Theme—Fade out.*]

ADÈLE: I don't think I slept very much that night. I was too excited. I dreamed of all the wonderful roles I would dance. Dreams, dreams! First I would be Giselle, the most difficult of all classical ballet roles. I saw myself as the peasant girl in Gautier's romantic story, dancing by the Rhine in vintage time.

CONCERT ORCH.: [*Fade in: "Giselle."*]

ADÈLE: And then I saw myself as the Polovtsian Maiden in *Prince*

Igor with the warriors' camp glowing behind me in the amber light of the camp-fires as I led that wild dance.

CONCERT ORCH.: ["*Polovtsian Dance*" (*Prince Igor*).]

ADÈLE: Or again I would be the Sugar Plum Fairy in the *Casse Noisette*, and when the nutcracker and his lover are transported to the Fairyland of Sweets I would dance the Grand Pas de Deux with my cavalier.

CONCERT ORCH: ["*Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*"—*fade out.*]

Of course, this is a somewhat mannered script approach, but suitable for certain types of programmes with a romantic, musically flavoured story-line.

"MAD ABOUT THE BOY"

"Mad About The Boy" was one of the programmes I most enjoyed writing.

It was about the fascinating subject of fan-worship. I mention it because again here is an example of the kind of theme which might occur to anybody. As it happened, I was intrigued by this extraordinary and unruly business of fan-worship—and I am writing now about a time long before we heard of Frankie Vaughan, Tommy Steele, Johnny Ray, Cliff Richard and the dozens of lesser stars who rocketed upwards with the speed of light.

Every day seems to bring some new subject to the fore. As I write I recall reading a few hours ago about a new series based on famous women aviators. Well, that's a cast-iron sort of subject. I wish I'd thought of it myself. You must have some hobby-horse or topic which is so near to your heart that you haven't even thought of it in terms of a radio or television programme.

There is a documentary to be written about "in-laws"; about the problem of the elderly relative; or about the tunnels under London streets; or the free vintners who can sell wine all day and all night if they want to; about steeplejacks and spidermen. Spidermen! Surely here is a promising subject for a play. Look at the ingredients you can employ—immense skill, an unusual and dangerous job, sudden death, injury, the romance behind the city's changing skyline, the heavy pay-

packet which is the reward of precision work and nerves of steel. Add a dash of romance and there you are. All you have to do now is to write it!

The title? Well, how about "Don't Look Down!"?

To return to "Mad About the Boy." I have had some first-hand experience of the stage-door mob hysteria which was later to be exploited by the publicity experts. I had read of the extraordinary scenes at the funeral of "The Great Lover," Rudolph Valentino. The newspapers described it as "rivalling even the funerals of the leading gangsters. Thousands upon thousands of people—more than half of them women—hero-worshippers at the feet of the film idol, stood in the pouring rain to watch the passing of the silver and bronze coffin. Fifteen hundred police officers lined the route."

Years afterwards it was stated that the obsequies had been "handled" by more than forty press and publicity agents.

I had also seen the astonishing reception given to Ramon Navarro when he came to London. Here again I quote from an evening newspaper reporting what happened at the stage-door of the London Palladium: "Hundreds of women fought, kicked and scratched their way to the stage-door. They tore the door from its hinges, then firemen turned the hoses on them. Some went home injured: many more went home wet."

When I went into the subject more closely I was intrigued to find that it was in Britain that the first manifestations of fan-worship really took on an organised form. In late Victorian and Edwardian times the actors remained remote from their audiences—deliberately. But the first example of a fan-club was founded in honour of a British actor—handsome and romantic Lewis Waller. The "K.O.W.s" was formed—and these initials stood for "The Keen Order of Wallerites" (not "Keen-on-Waller" as is sometimes stated).

This adoration was kept severely in check. Irving, Tree, Alexander, Wyndham, Bancroft, would have been shocked to the core by the fantastic scenes that were to be recorded in the 1920s and onwards. Waller himself was far from pleased, and it was made quite clear to the members of the "Order" that they must never approach the great man personally.

The secretary of the club was the only link. But all the

Wallerites wore a badge, in the form of his favourite flower—a pansy. It was worn as a brooch which on one side showed the head of Mr. Waller with powdered wig as Monsieur Beaucaire, while on the other side there was a device showing an arrow to represent Robin Hood, a rose for Beaucaire, a fleur-de-lys for Henry V, and a pansy.

The club colours were mauve and blue—Lewis Waller's racing colours. It was understood that the entire membership turned up in force at the first night of every play, and whenever possible some were "on duty" at every performance. There was, in fact, a counter-society called "The-True-to-Trees," but this was quite outshone by the "K.O.W.s." Waller himself, who died in Nottingham from pneumonia in 1915, accepted the existence of his fan club with more resignation than enthusiasm. I have talked about this rather at length because it is a typical example of a subject which did appeal to a radio-writer early in his career and which was eventually broadcast many years later and with some success. In a shorter form it was one of several feature programmes I wrote just before the war, but the material seemed to me far too good to waste and only a year or two ago I submitted it again to the Features Department of the B.B.C. I wrote a fairly detailed outline of how I envisaged the final script. It was accepted, and I had the great pleasure of working with that most imaginative producer, Francis Dillon.

(The following is, I make clear, an example from a sound radio production. It has been selected deliberately, since most actors of renown, Peter Finch and Peter Sellers, for example, achieved much of their later skill thanks to the radio, and the same may be said of certain celebrated writers for television and the screen. Without visual aid it is, indeed, more difficult to gauge the attention of an audience. Practically every lesson learnt in sound can be applied to vision.)

This is how I set out the running order:

(1) A montage designed to attract attention and indicate quickly the nature of the subject, e.g.:

GRAMS: [*Brief extract from* Mad About The Boy *by Noël Coward: merging into effect of hysterical mob greeting a star.*]

VOICE 1 [*Over screams*]: You're wonderful!

VOICE 2: Johnny, I love you!

[*Peak background.*]

POLICEMAN: Gangway! Now then, *please*!

VOICE 1: Sing "Little White Cloud"!

VOICE 2: Sing to us, Johnny.

VOICE 3: Oh, Johnny, I love you!

[*Peak background.*]

VOICE 1: I *touched* him!

MALE VOICE: If you don't mind! [*Wearily.*]

VOICE 1: I *touched* him!

This method of opening can still be extremely effective.

It gets you into the story quickly, and gives some indication of what the programme is about. It paves the way for the artist who is going to introduce the programme.

Here, with the effects of the shouting voices, we had at once an arresting start to the programme. Even people who had no intention of listening to the programme might find their attention caught. "What on earth is all that about?" they might ask—and be curious enough to wait and see.

Far better, you may agree, than a cold explanation by the announcer. I used this type of opening in a Christmas Day (1960) programme called "Family of Stars."

Instead of having Richard Attenborough, our narrator, explaining exactly what we were trying to do we opened with the voices of those concerned in a montage, or picture in sound. Listeners heard the voice of John Mills in a line from a play, *Men in Shadow*, which had been written by his wife, Mary Hayley Bell. Then came the voice of Juliet Mills speaking lines from her West End and Broadway success, *Five Finger Exercise*, and finally the voice of Hayley Mills, in an extract from her picture, *Pollyanna*. It was then clear to everybody that this was to be a programme about the British Family Mills!

But to get back to "Mad About the Boy" . . .

[*Peak up background and away.*]

ANNOUNCER: "Mad About the Boy." A light-hearted investigation into the history and the present activities of the fan-atics. Conducted by . . .

NARRATOR: I find this a most exasperating subject. Just as I'm about to take it seriously—and tell you, for example, my idea of

how the word "fan" came into the language at all—by the way, I personally don't think it's an abbreviation of the word "fanatic" at all: do you?—I'm distracted by . . .

GRAMS: [*Fade up end of popular song by* LAURIE LONDON *with frenzied applause.*]

NARRATOR: And, believe me, I do find that sort of thing distracting to a degree. The truth is that here is a subject that has got itself quite out of hand. Perhaps it really is a good thing that this investigation is to be "light-hearted." If we took it seriously we might find ourselves climbing up the first really convenient wall . . .

GRAMS: [*Fade up very brief mob-hysteria effect.*]

NOTE: All these interruptions have a purpose: They are there to *underline a point*, and also to break up sequences of speech, which would not be welcome at such an early point in the programme.)

NARRATOR: You see how important it is when trying to concentrate on this unruly business of fan-worship—and how difficult it is—to get one's thoughts in order. Nevertheless, somehow or other I shall insist on saying it's *my* belief that the word "fan" originated from the fact that bullfight and other devotees of such duels in the sun kept themselves cool by fluttering their fans. As it happens, I am an actor: and—in the most modest way, for I am no Elvis Presley—I have seen this strange manifestation at fairly close quarters. I've learnt something about fan-clubs: I've listened to so many actors talking about their fans . . . [*Fade.*]

[The narrator in this case was Robert Eddison, and his lines were written specially for his dry, sardonic and astringent style. As you will discover, it is immensely helpful to know the artists for whom one is writing. Normally this is difficult, especially in drama, where the beginner sells his play first and has it cast later.

Even then, although much can be done at rehearsal one can—in fact, one must—change certain lines to suit the personality of the actor. (Lines which fall easily from, let us say, the lips of Laurence Harvey, might not sound right when spoken by another leading man, and vice versa.)

There is a definite purpose in the following sequence. In a Third Programme discussion, or even for that matter in a potted debate in "Any Questions?", the speakers have time to develop

their arguments and present their own ideas on the subject. Here—in a very short time—we hear, through the mouths of our speakers, what actors think on the subject (some are for and some are against the fan), how the whole thing is viewed by the man in the street, not forgetting the inflexible, out-of-touch character who just doesn't understand it, and has no intention of trying to do so. Thus, before the programme is more than three or four minutes old, fan-worship has already been presented as a controversial and fascinating subject.]

ACTOR 1: I can put up with the silly fans, old boy. But Heaven protect me from the dippy ones.

ACTOR 2: Quite frankly, they scare me. When I slink out of the stage-door with my hat over my eyes and my overcoat collar up I only wish I had the guts to say: "Oh . . . [*Pregnant pause*] push off, won't you?"

ACTOR 3: Be your age, chum. When they don't want to cut buttons off your pants—that's the time to start worrying. [*Fade.*]

NARRATOR: These are points of view. But through whichever end of the glass you care to examine the matter, the fan and his ways are fascinating. It doesn't mean they can't be frightening, too. There are a hundred implications. We all have our own points of view. What does Mr. Everyman think? Is it commercial? Up to a point—I don't think there can be any doubt of that. Is it unhealthy?

MAN 1 [*crusty*]: They're a menace. The whole thing is disgusting and unhealthy.

WOMAN [*fortyish, single*]: It makes one feel ashamed of one's sex. It says in the paper: "A near thing for Antony. Teenage girls in a frenzy ripped their idol's jacket, whipped off his tie, tore his collar. One speculates with some concern as to what the object of this affection might have suffered had not a section of mounted police intervened."

MAN 2 [*easy-going*]: Nothing new about that, old dear. What about the gels who used to sit round the guillotine knitting? Didn't they scratch each other's eyes out fighting for scraps of an aristocrat's breeches?

WOMAN: That's hardly the same thing. In any case, you're making that up.

MAN 2: I saw a picture the other day of those girls waiting to give that nice quiet welcome to Bill Haley. Half of them were knitting jumpers—or something . . .!

MAN 3 [*in Sid Field manner*]: Yes—but what a carry-on!

MAN 1: You'll never convince me it isn't all a highly-organised business . . . and a pretty sordid business it is.

MAN 2: Dash it all, when the girls even mob old Foxhunter and start pulling hairs from his tail—by God, it's time to call a halt!

NARRATOR: Who knows? I suppose it's true that there was always some sort of fan-worship, to use that highly unsatisfactory phrase. No doubt the virgins of Rome collected medallions bearing the profile of their favourite pin-up boys of the moment, with the inscription: "See you later—gladiator." Did their publicity-men keep a store of autographed players for distribution to the faithful?

(2) Part of a recording of Lewis Waller declaiming "Once More Into the Breach"—from *Henry V*.

(3) Extracts from authentic dramatic criticisms about Waller's performances.

(4) An imaginary scene at a committee meeting of the "K.O.W.s."

[These three items illustrate, quite vividly, all that has to be said about Waller.]

(5) A scene depicting the first theatrical garden party where, for the first time, keen playgoers spent shillings recklessly and rubbed shoulders with the great ones of the theatre (this shows Lady Tree in full sail, Miss Constance Collier dispensing champagne, Miss Gaby Deslys and so on, to show how the stays of propriety were noticeably loosened).

(6) References to Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Edna May, Ellaline Terriss, Lily Elsie, Gladys Cooper, Phyllis Dare, etc.

(7) A brief section dealing with the picture-postcard craze and the matinée idols—Henry Ainley, Godfrey Tearle, Seymour Hicks, Harry Welchman, etc.

(8) A section about Rudolph Valentino, and an interview with the Honorary Secretary of the Valentino Association, which still flourishes.

[This brought reality to the subject: a person, not a performer.]

(9) Recording of "The Pagan Love Song" by Ramon Navarro and into dramatisation of songs during his first London visit.

(10) How fans took to imitating the hair-styles and clothes worn by film stars—e.g. Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Crawford, Claudette Colbert, etc.

(11) Recording of "Little White Gardenia" as sung by the late Carl Brisson, plus an example of the lengths to which his fans would go (e.g. A woman fan sent him a leaden coffin lid. With it, according to Press reports, came an urgent plea that he would stencil upon it his autograph so that this grim souvenir could go with her to her grave).

(12) Bring the story up to date with reference to the fact that in America current prices paid for autographs of the stars were printed daily like stock-exchange prices and became a kind of barometer of popularity.

(13) Recording of Cab Calloway's "Minnie the Moocher." (One woman after fighting her way through the mob offered him her wedding-ring in exchange for the baton with which he conducts his band.)

(14) Descriptions of reception given to Robert Taylor, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy and others.

(15) Recording of Danny Kaye singing "Ballin' the Jack," followed by references to Frank Sinatra, Johnny Ray, Liberace, Dickie Valentine, Ruby Murray, Alma Cogan, Tommy Steele and so on.

(16) Interview with Dirk Bogarde.

(17) Interview with Frankie Vaughan.

(18) Finish with recording of noisy scenes at last night of the Proms and summing up by narrator.

This, then, is one example of an idea which was accepted, and produced to general satisfaction, as a result of the outline I have set out.

For television purposes, the approach, and the development of the subject, would be almost identical. Certain scenes—notably those at the stage-door—would come to life with a greater impact on the screen, because one could use newsreel shots and show many people as they looked; Valentino, for instance, Ramon Navarro and Carl Brisson. Your material is there; it would depend on the wit (and experience) of the television producer how best to employ it..

I've told you how, in my opinion, it is wise for the radio-writer who is not in a position to sit back and wait for commissions to spread plenty of bait in the form of ideas, programme suggestions, outlines and synopses. There is an added advantage in doing this, inasmuch as by getting the thing down in black

and white—with a date—you have proof that the idea has crystallised in your mind, and then been forwarded to a possible purchaser.

You may be wondering what kind of ideas I am talking about, and how far they range. Well, I'll do my best to answer that, and from a practical point of view.

I have looked through my file of suggestions and here are some I have picked at random and which are now on their travels.

"THE KEY OF THE DOOR"

A programme in which celebrities in every walk of life talk to young people who are at the beginning of the same careers and who have just reached the age of twenty-one. In the realm of sport, Freddie Mills would meet a young boxer; Sir Gordon Richards or Fred Winter might talk to an up-and-coming jockey. Ted Ray or Harry Secombe would chat with a young comedian who had just come of age. The same procedure to apply to a ballet-dancer, a playwright, a sports commentator, a film-star, a public relations expert, and so on. Once the thing were launched it could continue for months.

"GHOST AT MY ELBOW"

A series in which well-known personalities of all kinds would talk—where possible with recorded illustrations—about the men and women who have had some lasting influence on their own careers. Variations on this have been exploited in programmes like "It Happened to Me": but here we would introduce a different approach. With every turning-point in a successful career there are men and women who have been concerned, and each subject—a politician, a sculptor, a dress-designer—would speak either with that person or with a member of that person's family.

"NEVER SHORT OF A POUND"

Stories of famous theatrical and film productions: but told not in the conventional he-was-absolutely-marvellous style of

the star reminiscence, but by the men and women who have spent their lives in the theatre and the film studios, never being out of work, but seeing the same incidents, the same triumphs and heartbreaks as the stars. The probability is they could speak with more sincerity. They could certainly give much more graphic and penetrating descriptions of the leading men and leading ladies in the shows they described. The people I have in mind—a dresser, an electrician, a stage-hand, a carpenter, a property-master, a box-office manager, and assistant stage-manager—the whole range of people behind the scenes.

"BY ROYAL COMMAND"

Here I must say I thought I had a reasonably acceptable idea for television. It had a good selling point by reason of its association with royalty: but it was also potentially good entertainment. This was how I put forward the suggestion:

"BY ROYAL COMMAND"

A really magnificent show—which could most appropriately be attended by some member of the royal family—called "By Royal Command," and bringing to life some of the great productions of the past which were attended by royalty.

I don't mean a plug for old-timers, but a really gay spectacular reconstruction of performances given before royalty. It would not be necessary to go back to Shakespeare, who was one of the Queen's players, and was commanded to perform before Elizabeth I. But it would show artists being brought to the private rooms of Edward VII (when Prince of Wales) to entertain his guests after supper. It could show Mendelssohn performing (as I believe he did) before the Court: and also the young Chopin playing at a special concert in a mansion near Eaton-square.

There would be the special performances given before Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle, with Willie Clarkson (the renowned wig-maker and theatrical costumier) in charge of the make-up.

There would be flashbacks to the dramatic performances given by Irving, Tree and so on—which led to the first theatrical knighthoods. Then one would, of course, recall Pavlova dancing before royalty, and research would, I know, bring to light a number of occasions from which a choice of items could be made. Eventually, of course, one could come to modern times and the Royal Variety

Shows, rounding the whole thing off with a boost for television and showing at the end, say, a film of the arrival of your royal guest at the show in question an hour or two earlier.

This nearly got somewhere at the first attempt. The Programme Controller of the company concerned wrote to me saying that "the idea appeals to me very much. Please get in touch with Mr. ——," here mentioning the name of the head man in his Light Entertainment Department.

Alas—a week or two later when at last I managed to run this gentleman to earth he told me that the proposal had been abandoned. The reason? That in a programme of this kind lasting at least an hour there would have to be, naturally enough, breaks for advertisements, and someone had remembered a ruling that there must be no advertising in any programme associated with the royal family or in which royalty appears. This was an unexpected set-back, but it seemed to me too promising a venture to jettison and I have other plans for it. Whether an adjusted version of this will ever find a home I don't know—but here's hoping.

"BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT"

This subject could, I fancy, make an entertaining series. It would deal in turn with the specialised writers in modern journalism, and each type of writer would have a programme to himself. We would deal with the dramatic critic, the film critic, the television and radio critic, the foreign correspondent, the city editor, the racing correspondent, the boxing expert, the gossip columnist, the cartoonist, the descriptive writer, the court reporter—and so on. One would describe the work of each, with plenty of recorded illustrations showing the background and difficulties and recent improvements in each particular form of journalism.

"MY DAY"

At the end of a day's television or broadcasting, some experienced man or woman would give an account of his or her day. This differs from the usual feature programme about

different occupations—because it would tell what really had happened during that particular day: and one would introduce in turn a probation officer, a solicitor, a doctor, a bus-conductor, a train-driver, a policeman on the beat, an estate agent, a sewer-man, a head waiter, a journalist—the field is as wide as you like.

"IT OCCURS TO MISS BUNCE"

This is a series of programmes in which mysteries are solved, not by policemen, private eyes or similar characters, but by an ordinary Laburnum Grove type of family, who never take any credit for anything they may do, but regard the solution of crime as others regard a crossword puzzle, and work anonymously.

I thought it would be amusing and quite original to meet this family every week. They would discuss some mystery—entirely as a hobby.

The father, a fairly successful City man, would take some striking incident from the news of the day and they would try to build up their own solution of it.

It all started, let us say, with a rather sparkling bit of deduction by the head of the family who hit on the real secret of a murder. His family insisted that he told the police, but he's very sensitive about letting anyone—particularly his business associates—know that he has this rather strange hobby, and he used the name Bunce—that of an elderly cousin who keeps a sweetshop in Cornwall.

His brainwave proves most acceptable to the police, it is acted upon and the case is solved.

The twist would be that father, mother, son and daughter each have a go at the problem in question, and we could see on the screen what really happened and then what each particular member of the family thinks happened.

Other shots can include any personal sleuthing which is done, say, by the daughter, who spends an hour looking at the scene of the crime on her way home from business in the City, and so forth.

The weekly climax depends on the fact that towards the end

of the programme father rings up Scotland Yard and says: "This is Miss Bunce speaking—it occurs to me . . .", and then he diffidently presents the authorities with a valuable clue.

The police, by the time the series opens, have come to have a healthy respect for "Miss Bunce."

In other words, there comes a time in the programme when somebody at the Yard, or at a district headquarters, says half seriously: "Well, I just can't see daylight. If only Miss Bunce would give us a call." There is the sound of a telephone bell. It is "Miss Bunce speaking."

"GET ME MAYFAIR TEN THOUSAND"

The chief character is an ageing piece of Old England. At all events, he has been in his day a celebrity, a man of wealth and of the world.

But he has always been a man of habit. In his youth and in his prime the days varied little. A visit to the City, where his firm has been established for centuries; a call at his club; lunch at a famous restaurant; afternoon tea, or a walk in the Park with an aristocratic mistress; a theatre.

In his bedridden old age he clings to the routine—but it can only be done with the aid of the telephone. This story wants skilful handling, but it might be worth the trouble. The ring of the telephone bell is the asterisk between the paragraphs of the old boy's life.

He telephones his office, and speaks to the elderly confidential clerk. They exchange a reminiscence—perhaps it is an anniversary—and we fade into an exciting episode of our hero's youth. This ends, and he telephones—his club. The porter knew the old man in his prime, and once again they get chatting —about some famous race, perhaps, and again we slip into the past. Then he picks up the phone again, and it is "Get Me Mayfair . . .", and he is talking to the Duchess of X. We hear the old couple greeting each other, and a chance remark sends their thoughts winging back to their secret romance of fifty years ago. It is all fragrant, charming, amusing.

Finally, he rings up some old crony of the theatre. He might, indeed, have been a theatre-owner who still makes his nightly

inquiry about the takings, and the gossip of the day. The stage-door keeper might be one of his old retainers, and here again the conversation glides naturally into a flashback of some romantic incident.

Each episode can have a musical twist, some reason for the musical accompaniment to the story. The old chap can, indeed, have been a musician—either a very successful professional one, or a gifted amateur like the late Lord Berners.

Or, if required, one could write a more sinister end, and have the old boy actually influencing people's lives—without their knowledge—just by his conversations on the telephone.

"ANNOUNCERS' ALBUM"

There was a time when announcers and news-readers carried out their valuable work anonymously, or with the minimum of publicity. The policy changed as the years went by. During the war, as you may remember, the news-readers gave their names —so that had the enemy ever been in a position to spread false and confusing information by means of broadcasting, listeners could readily recognise the names and voices of our leading news broadcasters, and believe them and only them. Eventually, announcers came to take part in series programmes, and even became indispensable characters in comedy shows—for example, "Much-Binding" (Philip Slessor), the Braden shows (Ronald Fletcher), "The Goon Show" (the late Wallace Greenslade), and so on. All the experienced announcers have a wealth of stories to tell—and it seemed to me to be a reasonable idea to let them spin their best stories, dramatising some of the incidents and illustrating others by means of recordings.

Now and again, I confess, when some of my pet suggestions have failed to impress anyone at all I have been tempted—especially after listening to certain rather oddly-conceived programmes—to hit upon something so abysmally appalling that by its very awfulness it might succeed in finding a home. What, I wonder, would be the reception given, let us say, to a programme called "First Words"—in which some cosy, elderly actress would be District Nurse Merryweather, visiting hospitals

and homes and becoming lyrical over the first recorded sentences of "Today's Toddlers"? With the parents choosing, of course, "our tune," and recalling some sickening incident during their courtship or honeymoon. Or how about "The Smile Behind the Pile," the stories of famous or notorious buildings, with appropriate music?

In what are, thank goodness, rare moods of cynicism, I sometimes tell myself I should never be surprised to read some such announcements in the programme-billings, or that if they did so appear the shows would run for years.

Well—those are some of the kites I'm flying. Maybe, you think you can do better. I'm sure I hope so. There are at least sixty others in in-trays and pending files up and down the land. Some, no doubt, have been forgotten; or, adorned by teacup rings, have been clipped in error to some other documents and filed under that all-embracing "M" for Miscellaneous.

But, potentially, they may be worth tens of thousands of lovely guineas. Even if only a couple are accepted—especially if they become series—it will mean freedom for a while, freedom to develop some more ideas to add to the list of possibles.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLAY

INTERVIEWER: I hear you're going to write a play. What do you find most difficult about this?
MR. STEELE: Thinking up fings for the characters to say.
Reported interview with Tommy Steele, March 1961

YOUR play has nine lives.

It may have even more. A reasonably encouraging thought with which to open this section.

I shall discuss this subject—The Play—in considerable detail because (and this is a fact all my readers will have to face) it is only Drama which offers a wide and constant market for the *unsolicited* script. By this I mean that plays lasting an hour or an hour and a half (the demand for the script lasting thirty minutes is variable) are accepted from unknown writers, provided they fulfil the demands of the companies responsible for putting programmes on the screen.

I am not saying, far from it, that sympathetic attention will not be given to sketches and material for comedy programmes, panel-games, documentaries and so on; but as the position stands the basic idea for programmes in these categories is to quite a large extent originated by controllers, planners and producers with, maybe, some coaxing by the stars concerned. There is no question about it: from the point of view of opportunity for the freelance writer, the play's the thing.

What do I mean by saying that a play may have nine lives? Well, it wasn't just a flippant comment. I mean that there are a number of possible markets, and if one fails then the practical procedure is to pass on undismayed to another, and then to another, and finally (no offence intended to the art of "pure" radio) to sound broadcasting—until all the possibilities are exhausted.

It seems to me that I can best help by taking an idea and following it through from the moment when the basic theme hits you until it eventually finds a home—or else is unlucky enough to please nobody.

When we have followed this first play stage by stage I will try to give in the chapters which follow some more detailed advice on the routine points of length, treatment, layout and so forth.

I know I have been deliberately cautious up to this point, but now we can consider the field in which there really is wide scope and a genuine chance of making a reputation and enjoying—if the luck goes your way—a worthwhile reward.

It is possible even for a short play (which may originally have been written for sound radio only) to become a property of some value. In the first place a radio drama may reasonably merit an encore—or to use the more familiar phrase, a repeat, in one or both of the Services (Light and Home) and also in the General Overseas Service. It doesn't necessarily end there.

Broadcasting is a worldwide industry and many of my own efforts have been broadcast in Australia, South Africa, Canada, the West Indies and from various stations on the Continent. Now and again through the post has come, quite unheralded, a cheque from Rhodesia, British Honduras, Nairobi, Stuttgart, Munich, Hong Kong.

There is no rule which prevents you from translating into terms of television a play which you originally wrote for sound. In many cases you may find that by adapting the plot to appeal to the eye as well as to the ear the original may be improved.

A play which has made any kind of mark on the television screen has a further potential value. It may find other audiences throughout the Commonwealth and, in fact, wherever a television service exists.

Again, I have sold plays—which have originally been televised in Britain—to Canada, Australia and to Continental services. Naturally enough, the organisations in this country are well aware of the possible interest which may be shown abroad, and this is something on which they will advise you when the time comes to sign a contract.

The position (until recently) has been, in general, that one

receives a fee for the first production. Thereafter, one could do what one liked in the way of disposing of the work elsewhere. There were, so far as the B.B.C. was concerned, provisos about repeats. With the coming of ITV, authors found themselves with proposals to purchase outright. But this is an important question which (since there are other valuable assets to be considered—film rights, for one) is being closely watched by all agents of repute and by that most important organisation whose purpose is to safeguard the interests of the writer—The Screen Writers' Guild. I shall have more to say about this subject later.

We can't all become celebrated and sought-after authors, but perhaps I have said enough to make it clear that from a single idea may—and I underline *may*—spring a substantial and gratifying income.

Now for our play—and the idea for which you will, of course, substitute your own theme and plot. I choose, for the purpose, a thriller, because this type of play would appear to have a more or less permanent appeal, but don't be put off if your own pet idea is a light comedy or a more serious study of social or domestic life. The procedure is, to all intents and purposes, the same.

On a journey by train I have settled myself in the corner seat. My thoughts roam quite freely, their direction controlled maybe by the headlines in the evening newspaper. As a journalist I would say that in any edition you'll find in a paragraph somewhere the spark which leads to that well-known exciting flash of thought. A husband and wife, outwardly contented enough, haven't spoken to each other for fifteen years; two children are killed, while travelling alone, in a rail-crash, and nobody comes forward to identify them; a tramp-cum-pavement-artist leaves a fortune.

In my case I am reading, rather idly, a story to the effect that a famous peer has died and has stipulated that the final volume of his autobiography shall not be published until he's been dead for at least twenty-five years. This, of course, is a not uncommon situation, since some celebrities, more sensitive than others, are thoughtful enough to spare the feelings of

relatives, maybe, or other people concerned in their recollections who are still alive.

I muse for a moment—and the idea is born. Twenty-five—no, fifty years sounds better. *Fifty Years After My Death*—well, there's a title anyway, and not, I say to myself, a bad one.

Surely, it seems to me, as the countryside unwinds outside the window, there is a theme for a play here. All kinds of situations could develop from such a basic idea. Who would be most affected? Might there not be people to whom even a period of fifty years would be too short—if their families could be affected by revelations in the book? Is it possible for the widow to have such a testament set aside, so as to benefit earlier from the royalties? How long have people to be dead before the law of libel no longer applies?

The theme begins to appeal more and more. Very well, we must do something about this. Let's be commercial: and since I am personally not a highbrow writer with leanings towards the Third Programme, I come to the conclusion that I'll settle for a thriller. All right, then—who would be the most intriguing character, the person whose decision to tell the whole truth would be likely to have far-reaching results?

A politician? Perhaps; but that might involve too much detailed research, and one has to be realistic in a profession where time is money. A celebrated actor or actress? H'm—perhaps, but I would say there have been enough plays about theatre people, and there is a slight feeling that it is all too easy when dealing with theatrical characters to become "pro-y"—too professional. There are tremendous pitfalls inherent in the choice of this setting—unless one can write a play like *The Royal Family of Broadway* or *Evensong*.

Well, then, how about a gossip columnist? Not bad—the only difficulty here is that such a character, whose art is short-lived, would in real life be very unlikely to collect inside-stories which would believably cause a sensation if they were published so long after he'd been dead and forgotten. (There's a slight by-product of an idea here, in a story based upon a modern Pepys, whose diaries are discovered decades after they'd been written: but here, to succeed, one would have to be, I think, light-hearted, gay and intimate. And beware of such

thoughts, anyway. How many times have I seen some phrase in a submitted script, like "Here follow ten hilarious minutes with some famous comedian"? Fine. But who is going to guarantee the ten minutes of hilarity? A top-line funny man would cheerfully fork out a hundred pounds for them.)

To get back to the point. Which is the most likely character for our purpose? A policeman? A detective? A doctor? Ah—we're getting warmer now. I've got it—a police-surgeon.

I allow the idea to simmer for a while, and gradually a story takes shape. It might well be within the bounds of possibility that a police-surgeon could leave behind him proof that a crime had been committed by someone who, for one reason or another, he wished to protect; and if this could be linked in such a way as to involve people living today, then there was really something more than a germ of a plot.

Fair enough—we have our theme. What do we do now? The procedure may vary slightly with each of the big organisations (including the B.B.C.), but there is no doubt that the next important step is to write an outline of the proposed story and give it a working title.

One thing I must make clear right away. Yes, a play may be commissioned on the strength of a synopsis, but as a rule this happens only in the case of a writer who may be regarded as "established." At the same time, however, no conscientious script editor will reject a really splendid or original idea just because it has only been set down in a comparatively brief outline.

If such an official were impressed, he or she would undoubtedly write to the author and invite him to discuss the proposition. It is obviously the most sensible thing to do—for one's own sake—to write in a few hundred words a neat summing-up of the story.

The next stage then is to summarise our idea, and this, I suggest, is how it might reasonably be done.

A title in this case is not hard to come by, and I suggest *Fifty Years After My Death.* I type this at the top of a page, and carry on as follows:

"FIFTY YEARS AFTER MY DEATH"

FLETCHER COBB is asked by MONICA BURLEY to help her in a frightening situation which has arisen because of the imminent publication—fifty years after his death—of the memoirs of her grandfather, a noted police-surgeon of the 1880s.

MONICA and her family have lived for several generations in a big house overlooking a rather desolate open space—something like Blackheath. Next door, also for generations, have lived members of the MULYARD FAMILY. She is engaged to DESMOND MULYARD, whose health and general attitude have been giving her great anxiety.

In every generation—that is, at intervals of twenty-five or thirty years, there have been a series of unsolved murders on the Heath—rather of the Jack the Ripper variety. There has been another attempted murder of this kind only recently.

MONICA has discovered that DESMOND is being blackmailed, and the threat of her grandfather's *Recollections of a Police Surgeon* is being held over his head.

The blackmailer says he has had access to the Diary, and it is perfectly clear from what old DOCTOR BURLEY has written that the original outbreak in the 1880s and 1890s was the work of the then head of the MULYARD FAMILY—DESMOND's grandfather.

This points not only to the fact that the second outcrop of unsolved murders was the work of DESMOND's late father, a distinguished barrister, but also hints that DESMOND must have inherited this taint of insanity and is responsible for the latest 1958 attack—which only just failed.

MONICA understands at once that DESMOND's attitude is due to the fact that he half believes the story, and fears that he may indeed have this unhappy legacy—and loves her far too much to take the risk of marriage.

Other members of the BURLEY FAMILY are introduced, including OLIVER KENDALL, who is a cousin by marriage and is an admirer of MONICA.

FLETCHER COBB visits the impressive but old-fashioned BURLEY house and agrees to help.

MONICA is the only child of her generation, and since her father is an invalid happens to be holding the key of the safe in which the Diary is kept. The Diary itself, of course, was locked and had only recently been kept in the safekeeping of a firm of solicitors. But the old doctor's will said that the Diary had to be unlocked in the

presence of certain people, including MONICA, and the book had, as the surviving member of her family, been returned to her in preparation for this formal ceremony.

The blackmailer has told DESMOND that he has in some way been in possession of the Diary for a short time and actually encloses sentences in old-fashioned script which he claims have come from the book.

FLETCHER COBB keeps watch and sees OLIVER opening the safe, unlocking the Diary and reading the contents. Following him, FLETCHER COBB later observes him copying another blackmailing letter and painstakingly imitating the writing of DOCTOR BURLEY.

FLETCHER COBB has a feeling that there will be another attempt —on the life of MONICA herself. He is in the living-room where, above the mantelpiece, has been displayed for many, many years a pattern of unusual weapons. Tonight the pattern is uneven. One of the weapons—exactly the kind of weapon, he realises, which might have been used to do the murders—is missing.

He goes out on to the Heath and is just in time to save MONICA, who has been called out by some false message of alarm. The contents of old man BURLEY's Diary—although they record enough inside recollections of celebrity cases to become a best-seller—are, in fact, perfectly innocent and contain no references at all to any connection between the MULYARDS and the Heath murders: and, of course, the blackmailer is unmasked and must stand his own trial.

Now it is time to decide which organisation shall first have a chance to study this effort.

We can choose from the B.B.C., Associated Television, Associated-Rediffusion, A.B.C. TV, Granada, the Regional Television companies—and sound radio. Before making up your mind on the point of departure it will be a good plan to put in a bit more homework and really examine the programme-billing pages of the *Radio Times* and the *TV Times*: and I don't mean for a single week, but over a month or so.

I wish I could undertake this analysis for you—but tastes and policies change drastically from time to time and the requirements vary accordingly.

It will repay you before sending off your idea to make a list of the plays transmitted in a period of several months by each concern. You may find that Associated Television, for example, will have been concentrating on dramas of suspense, while A.B.C. TV, having given us a generous helping of powerful,

down-to-earth material, may (for a while) be more receptive to themes of a lighter kind. It may appear that Associated-Rediffusion is presenting a long series of plays in a certain definite category and, from the fact that the names of different writers appear under each week's instalment, you may take it that suggestions for single productions may be welcome. I have in mind a series called "Inside Story," which Ted Willis edited (in fact, for A.B.C.).

Perhaps you have leanings towards one particular company: this is a personal matter on which you can please yourself.

As a compliment to the oldest television institution I suggest we start with the B.B.C. Your simple research into programme-planning may have shown you that there appears to be a market for a thriller of the kind outlined above, and if you are convinced it could live up to a production lasting an hour, then we go ahead.

I think it is fair to say that whether it's acceptance or rejection, you will receive courtesy from the men and women in charge of the various script departments. In the first place, whatever happens eventually, you should get a prompt acknowledgment. This small politeness was not, I regret to say, always the recognised procedure that it is now.

It is not fair to blame the B.B.C. (which had been desperately overworked and had done a positively superhuman job in morale-boosting during the war), but when I was asked to launch the Corporation's first modest unit to deal with scripts, and nothing else but scripts, I took over the task of judging thousands, only a proportion of which had been acknowledged.

They came in stacks from loaded in-trays and from desk-drawers crammed with papers—the accumulation of a year or two when production staffs had worked themselves almost to a standstill. Once the war was over, hundreds of men and women with time on their hands thought they would "have a go" at writing for radio. There just wasn't the time, nor was there any planned method to deal with the problem—and one can understand the exasperation of enthusiastic authors whose hopes faded as week by week and month by month no reply was forthcoming.

I remember sympathising with one frustrated and would-be contributor who wrote thanking me for the return of the script of a play. He referred somewhat ruefully to the "teacup rings" on the top page of his beautiful script, and returned "Mr. ——'s wine-bill from the vaults of the Goose and Swan Hotel," which had been found between pages 22 and 23!

I saw to it so far as I could that all this was rapidly changed in Sound Broadcasting.

As television began to feel secure and responsible, steps were taken to see that every communication which had to do with scripts was politely, if formally, acknowledged. Today, as we shall see, the reaction to such communications sometimes goes considerably further than mere acknowledgment.

At the same time I must give a mild warning. I am not saying that you will not sometimes receive news of a prompt decision—one way or the other: but it is unwise to ignore the fact that decisions may sometimes take what appear to be an unconscionable time.

This may be due to a number of causes. I fretted for two months, wondering what had happened to a script which really looked like getting somewhere. Then came an apologetic message: the script editor had been ill with jaundice! It is not for me to apologise on behalf of the official script-buyers, but one must face a situation in which hundreds of ideas, suggestions, outlines and fully-written programmes and plays are received by each of the organisations every week. I do not intend to give you a picture showing script and story editors bowed down and weary-eyed as they yawn their way through masses of material, most of it unusable, in the desperate hope of finding some flash of genius which will illumine the dull day.

All the same, these officials *are* extremely hard-working, much put-upon people, who have to spend a considerable part of their time engaged in that curse of modern administration, the conference and the meeting. If you are the type of person who by temperament itches for action these agenda-ridden pow-wows are maddening.

Then, should a submitted script glow even with the faintest promise, it is sent to some member or members of a panel of readers, and here again the operation takes time. I am making

these points only in a cautionary way. It is no good being disappointed if you don't receive an immediate decision. Sometimes delay can be a good sign.

I speak feelingly about this, because over the years I have suffered as much as most. Indeed, as I write this paragraph I have had a play with one of the Independent Television companies for nearly a year. There is not much I can do about it. I could, it is true, ask for the script back and send it elsewhere: but it had a fairly cordial reception. Two readers (I was told) had sent in favourable reports, and it was only a question of finding a suitable date. In the circumstances I prefer to let them keep it until they make up their minds one way or the other, and in the meantime to think out two or three more ideas and send them into the unknown with a prayer.

There is, of course, no reason on earth why you shouldn't send a copy of your idea, or script, to every organisation at once: but this to my mind is not a particularly tidy way of going about it.

THE B.B.C.

Well, let's consider what may be the fate of a play if we choose to give the B.B.C. the chance of being the first to leave its fingerprints (or teacup rings) on our virgin typescript.

Fortunately for us the procedure so far as B.B.C. Television is concerned is beautifully simple. The Corporation (as in so many other directions) was able to draw on a wealth of experience—this time in the handling of scripts: and the best method (so it was decided) was to allow one well-organised department to deal with the majority of submitted material. It was a determined effort to avoid that abominable complaint from which large organisations of all kinds tend to suffer, the situation in which the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.

By making certain that the major proportion of submitted ideas, scripts and suggestions is filtered through one official sieve, an enormous amount of trouble and confusion has, I am sure, been saved.

The thing to do is to type your outline and send it to the

Script Supervisor, Television, B.B.C. Television Centre, Wood Lane, London, W.12. With it enclose a letter, keeping this as brief as possible. I suggest something on these lines:

Dear Sir,

I send you an outline of a play which I hope may interest you, and which I have provisionally called *Fifty Years After My Death* [here give the title you have selected for your own story].

I should be glad if you will kindly read this and let me know whether you think the idea has possibilities. If you consider it worthwhile taking the suggestion a stage further, I shall be happy to hear from you and would be glad to discuss it at a time convenient to you.

Yours faithfully,

If you have had experience as a writer—even if in some other field—it would be advisable to add a few lines giving some details of your work.

Your letter and the outline will reach the office of the Script Supervisor. If your contribution is seen to be the work of an experienced writer who knows what he or she is talking about, it will be sent with the minimum of delay to a member (or members) of a readers' panel.

These readers have (in the B.B.C.'s own words) "been appointed because of their experience and sound judgment, their impartiality and knowledge of the game." It is pretty safe to say that everything which reaches the Script Department, apart from any communication from a writer in the first flight—shall we say Rattigan, Sherriff, Priestley, McCormick, and others of similar standing—will go to members of this panel for a completely unbiased report.

It is possible that *Fifty Years After My Death* will be read sympathetically by a reader who sees in it the basis of a potential television play.

If so it will go back to the Script Supervisor with a recommendation.

This will ensure that the outline (or the full script, of course, where this has been written) will be read for second opinion by another reader, or by one of the B.B.C.'s script editors.

If the first reader's view is endorsed we reach another stage.

There has been a second recommendation, and this means that the outline or script will find its way to the production line.

By this I mean that it will be seen by a producer—or by the Head of a Department.

If the script is not in a production-worthy condition it can then be put on a different train and shunted towards a rehabilitation centre. In other words, it will be put into the hands of one of the script editors.

A number of these editors are employed by the B.B.C. Part of their job is to lick scripts into shape and to advise on various technical points which cannot possibly be within the knowledge of a writer who is new to the television medium. These are men and women who have not only had work of their own televised, but who have made a study of the special problems involved.

It may be that even if reports have been promising, the editor concerned may not feel justified in telling his chief that here is something which *must* be put on the screen. Even so, he may still report that this was a worthy effort and that the writer concerned should be encouraged.

Should this happen the outline or script will be returned—but always with a personal letter. If it is decided, bearing in mind the reader's reports and the editor's own considered opinion, that the material shows talent and promise, the letter will say in effect: "This is not quite what is wanted. At the same time it shows promise—so why not write something else?"

I was asked at the Television Centre to stress one point. "*Please make it clear to young and hopeful writers that nothing they send will be killed outright by one reader. Nearly* EVERYTHING *is looked at more than twice.*"

If the story outline does find favour, then a letter will tell you to go ahead, and a full script may be commissioned.

Before a final decision is reached many different points are considered by those whose job it is to divide the wheat from the chaff and to send the successful contributions on their way to the studio floor.

It is best to give some idea of how you see your story being treated. Without this it is difficult for readers, even with goodwill, to be helpful about the chances of an idea.

It is possible, too, that you may send in a suggestion which may have quite a lot to commend it, but which must fail because of some policy involved. Let me explain. There are times, for example, when certain themes based on colour prejudice, disease or industrial unrest, may not be exploited for entertainment on the grounds of expediency or taste.

Established writers with a play in mind which they wish to write are not expected in the opening stages to furnish the Corporation with anything more than a synopsis.

This is just the way life goes, and there is no need for new writers to be discouraged by it—because there is no reason why in good time they should not become established themselves. Once an author has reached a certain standing, and his work is known, he will probably have his own point of contact among the producers and editors. Ideas and suggestions can then be thrashed out in the friendliest and most effective way. I mean "contact" in the best sense.

Although disappointed writers have hinted that one can only succeed by cultivating certain producers, I must say that in a long experience I have never come across any unfairness or any evidence of pressure either one way or the other. I suppose that, as someone who has worked on both sides of the fence, I know as many producers personally as most people, but I can truthfully say this has not had any startling results. On the contrary I have found that to be friendly with producers is to invite more criticism than a stranger would receive—and if this criticism is constructive I've never complained. But as for any suggestion of favouritism, put it right out of your mind. Quality, or what those concerned regard as quality—and I don't say we can agree with every decision—is what matters.

One more point I must make while dealing with the B.B.C. methods. So far as television plays are concerned there's a very close link between the Regions and London. I am not suggesting that the people who run the Regions are under an obligation to present anything they don't wish to present, but from the writers' angle a great deal of time can be saved by dealing direct with the Headquarters in London. In other words, anything intended for the national network might just as well go first to the Script Department in Shepherd's Bush.

The chief exceptions are the Scottish and Welsh Regions of the B.B.C. In Glasgow and Cardiff they do encourage authors to write scripts in local dialect for the limited Regional audiences. The North Region, again, might from time to time be interested in plays with a Lancashire or Yorkshire background. But, generally speaking, the ultimate pattern of programmes is discussed by the Regions with the executives in London.

In brief, then, the procedure is:

(*a*) once a suggestion has been accepted, the script will be prepared in readiness for a producer;

(*b*) the producer will eventually be given a date for production;

(*c*) the editor concerned will then come back into the picture, and pilot the play through the studios. Among his duties will be to see that facts are checked, that research is correct, that the canons of good taste are observed, that unintentional "advertising" is avoided, and so on.

You will have seen from the foregoing that much time and perhaps some headaches and heartaches will be saved if one is confident enough to send in a full script. At the same time, I repeat that there is and must be goodwill for the truly original story outline. But once the initial interest has been aroused the most satisfactory step will be to meet and talk with a representative of the Script Department, who will answer questions and give advice and guidance. He will do it willingly. It is part of his job.

One of the senior editors said to me with patent sincerity: "Our brief is to look after the interests of the professional author."

Do study the programme billings and notes in the *Radio Times*. Read them with care and you cannot fail to get an idea of the kind of material which has gone through the mill and satisfied the men and women who are paid to use their judgment and experience to this end. As a guide to the kind of work which has been televised with success in recent times I recall some successful B.B.C. Drama productions:

Titles	*Author*
THE DRIVING FORCE	A. C. Thomas
ALL YOU YOUNG LOVERS	Jack Pulman
A GLIMPSE OF THE SEA	Willis Hall
NEVER DIE	John Elliot and Geoffrey Bush
DAVID AND BROCCOLI	John Mortimer
SOLDIER, SOLDIER	John Arden
A MASK FOR ALEXIS	Lindsay Hardy
THE WIDOW OF BATH	Margot Bennett
NO WREATH FOR THE GENERAL	Donald Wilson

We have been living in and out of the pleasant make-believe world of Scripts Accepted—and very nice, too. But we are facing realities, and we must therefore foresee the possibility that our play will fail to kindle the necessary enthusiasm at the White City. Let us suppose that our outline is returned with (if I know the B.B.C.), a letter breaking the news as painlessly as possible. Courage—there are still eight lives left. You look down your list of possible purchasers and you choose, let us say, Associated TeleVision.

ASSOCIATED TELEVISION

The attitude adopted towards playwrights by Associated TeleVision can be summarised in this way.

If a writer has had experience and some success he need do no more than send a story-outline, a detailed synopsis, giving a clear plan of the way he sees the plot developing. He should add enough to indicate the type of characters involved and give some information as to the sets which would be required.

If the Script Organiser thinks highly of the proposal, then, with approval from the Deputy Productions Controller, the author will be commissioned to write the play.

The author who is lesser-known, or who may have no previous experience, will find that it still pays to send in his idea in a similarly brief form. So off to the *Script Organiser, Associated TeleVision, ATV House, 17 Great Cumberland Place, London, W.1*, goes our outline. "Fifty Years After My Death."

The Organiser will read the outline. If this is deemed to be completely unsuitable it will be returned without delay.

It is possible, on the other hand, that the reaction may be "Yes, fine, we like the idea. But we don't know anything about your ability as a writer, and there's only one thing for it: if you feel confident and would like to write the play, then go ahead."

There is just a possibility that if the idea is so original and so exciting that it can't be overlooked, then, with the author's permission, a highly professional writer might be asked to complete the work.

But we are concerned with what is most likely to happen, so let's assume we've been told that the basic idea is a good one and that it will not be time wasted if we complete the play.

I think the view taken at Associated TeleVision is that if an author wants to write for the small screen it is taken for granted that he has watched television plays in an analytical and independent way. Most certainly, my advice is to watch regularly what goes on. Then, almost automatically, one comes to understand what television can do and what it cannot do. (I will try to help a little later on by giving some simple and, I hope, useful tips.)

Let us say that you have written your play and sent it to the Script Organiser. If it is thought to have merit the next stage is for it to be sent out to readers who will write a further report. If the summing-up is good the script will again be sympathetically considered in detail in the Script Department. Should there still remain some doubt as to whether or not the play is worth buying, it may be sent to a third reader. If this additional report is favourable, then the play goes to a producer, some thought having first been given as to which of Associated TeleVision's thirty-six producers (this number includes trainees) would be most likely to show interest in the particular style of play.

Producers can, of course, be detailed to undertake an assignment, but the day is half won if a producer can be found who likes the theme and the style and is keen to go ahead with the job.

As in the section dealing with the B.B.C. I quote the titles

and some details of plays which have, within a recent period, been regarded as successful ATV productions.

Title	*Author*	*Transmission date*
SUNDAY OUT OF SEASON	Peter Draper	13/3/59
THE ESSAY PRIZE	John Bowen	17/11/60
THE PETS	Robert Shaw	10/10/60
PARAGUAYAN HARP	Peter Draper	13/2/59
THE BARBER OF STAMFORD HILL	Ronald Harwood	28/7/60
NANNIE	Paul Lee	26/1/61
OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES	Tad Mosel	15/1/60
NIGHT RUN TO THE WEST	G. C. Brown	30/6/60
THE TIP OFF	Arnold Yarrow	28/2/61
PAYMENT IN FULL	Ilona Ference	8/5/60
THE DEVIL MAKES SUNDAY	Bruce Stewart	31/7/60
THE GOLD INSIDE	Jacques Gillies	24/9/60

ASSOCIATED-REDIFFUSION

Associated-Rediffusion, occupying the massive building which every airman, erk or air vice-marshal, knew as the Headquarters of the Royal Air Force, has saved the life of many a play.

You can, I think, be sure that your script will be fairly and carefully judged. You will send your equivalent of "Fifty Years After My Death" to *The Head of Drama, Associated-Rediffusion Limited, Television House, London, W.C.2.*

Generally speaking, this organisation has taken a firmer stand than the rest on the question of buying only plays which are fully written. This was stressed more than once in talks I had with their representatives. In other words, "Ideas are not bought," they say, "because our great need is not so much for ideas, but quality in writing, of which there is such a deplorable paucity. Our policy is to tell would-be writers that we are looking for full-length plays of sixty or ninety minutes duration."

This means that when a synopsis is sent in and those who read it agree it has promise, then the outline will be sent back with the suggestion that if the author believes in his story enough to complete the job it would be read sympathetically.

Scripts of this kind will reach the Drama Department and

will be circulated to readers (of whom there are at present ten). At least two opinions will be sought, and these will be from experts who have no contact with each other and whose views will thus be quite impartial.

Although A-R TV have found it impracticable to accept outlines or synopses, this does not mean that they don't set out to encourage writers. If a full-length script is found to be unusable but yet shows promise, then faults may be pointed out and the writer shown where (in the opinion of this company, at any rate) he has gone wrong. It may be that characterisation is weak, that the pace is too slow or the construction too woolly.

If the completed play finds favour then you, the author, will be asked to call at Television House, a producer will be appointed and your effort will move happily on its way towards the studio floor. If, on the other hand, you're unlucky, the door is still open and you would do well to read a booklet by Patrick Campbell, who was for some time Head of Script Services, A-R TV, and called *You Want to Write for Television.* This is a crisp summing-up of the position, and I know that the radio and television correspondent of one leading national newspaper keeps a stock to send to readers who ask his advice on how to become a TV writer.

I have said that the plays submitted to Television House are reported on by at least two readers. In fact, they may well be read by three or four, and in general it is a case, within limits, of no news is good news, because the more favourably received a manuscript may be the longer it takes to reach a final decision. By the way, it is as well to note that Associated-Rediffusion provides television programmes for London and the Home Counties from Monday to Friday. Scripts which are thought to be more suitable for showing at the weekend or in the Regions should go direct to Associated TeleVision, Granada or A.B.C. Television.

A.B.C TV

A.B.C. TV, with its celebrated "Armchair Theatre," prides itself—and not without reason—on being a go-ahead organisation which has always paid special attention to the production of television drama.

Certainly no one can say that A.B.C. is not daring enough to experiment, and although some of the experiments have escaped being wildly successful, how much better to try something new than always to play for safety!

Because this Company obviously has a market for the unusual play it is the target of a great number of authors—the majority of them inexperienced. The Story Department of A.B.C. (*Teddington Studios, Broom Road, Teddington, Middlesex*) has therefore learnt to be wary of the unsolicited script—approximately fifty of these being received every week. Most of these are, if not completely unacceptable, at least in such a form as to make any sort of decision extremely difficult.

This is why when sending in an idea for a play one should make quite sure that there is a full synopsis and that the reader can see almost at a glance who are the principal characters, and how many sets will be required.

A letter suggesting this procedure is sent immediately to the author who has submitted a script without, perhaps, observing these points. Incidentally, I asked the Story Editor of A.B.C. what is the principal fault in the work submitted by new writers.

"Over and over again," he replied, "we have to tell authors that if they hope to get their play accepted by television they simply must realise it is a *visual* art."

The point is, however, that if the author has been at pains to make the nature of his story, his characters and his settings uncompromisingly clear, then it will be dealt with by a reader who will give a yes or a no. If this first reader thinks the idea has no possibilities whatever, it still goes on to a second reader (who doesn't know the result of the first report). It may be that both will give a no: but even so, if there is the slightest hint of promise (if there is anything at all to hang on to), it doesn't necessarily mean that the decision is final.

There is a different procedure for the script which is submitted by a well-known agent or which arrives at A.B.C. headquarters with a recommendation by someone whose opinion is valued.

These plays find their way at once to a reader, and he puts in a report about them. The Story Editor then passes the manuscript on to reader number two (and again it is stressed

that these individuals may not even know each other and certainly have no idea of how the other reacted): so the opinions are unbiased. Should it be a case of a double no, the idea—and the comments—will be studied by a member of the Script Management (a small section of the Script Department). He knows that the readers are men of experience and, generally speaking, is likely to agree with them: and the script will have failed to make the grade.

On the other hand, he may bring in a third reader. Then, if it is a treble turn-down—three noes—then the play is definitely counted out and the writer gets his script back plus a note of explanation.

Should the result be two negatives and one affirmative, then the script will be scrutinised again with particular care. Favourable reports mean that the play will go to the Chief Story Editor—but here again there is another check. Should the editor decide that it is not the type of play he cares for himself and his own opinion may therefore be suspect, he may send it to another individual of equal standing—so, all the way down the line, everything is done to ensure that the submitted script gets fair treatment.

If the editor is impressed, he will pass the play on to his chief, Sydney Newman, the well-known author-producer, who came to A.B.C. TV from Canada. So at last, after long processes of gold-panning, it reaches the top. Just as soon as the script is accepted the responsibility passes from Script Management to the Production Department—and since all producers must be enthusiasts a good deal of excitement is generated. The word may go out: "Get cracking in three weeks from now!"—and the operation of launching the play begins.

First of all the script must be duplicated, for at least ninety people will want to see it. There are many men and women sitting in their offices at headquarters who will have some hand in the production and its exploitation—those who deal with publicity, designing, lighting, planning, copyright—to say nothing of anything up to thirty people who may be in the cast. (The same applies, of course, in the case of other organisations.)

And what of cuts, "improvements," and so on—the changes which will make an author's day, or break his heart? Well, the

real work of adjusting the lines and making minor alterations in the script will be carried out on the studio floor. The director may demand "Change this line or that." A leading player may complain: "I can't say a line like this—can I change it please, to . . .?" If the author is present—and some producers devoutly hope he isn't—then he is, of course, consulted. But the Editor who first sponsored the play will stay with the production all the way, right to the moment when the live show goes out or the tele-recording begins.

GRANADA TV

Although Granada by no means disdains the broadest of comedy—consider "The Army Game" and "Bootsie and Snudge"—it has a well-deserved reputation for its concern with a far more serious output of discussion programmes, documentaries and plays.

By the spring of 1960, Granada had presented seventy-five plays—varying from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, to Somerset Maugham's *Sheppey* and Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. The list of authors, impressive as it is, includes brilliant newcomers who have mastered the medium—notably Clive Exton (*No Fixed Abode* and *The Silk Purse*). An audience of thirteen million people has been claimed and probably surpassed for some of the Granada play productions.

Granada would not, I think, pretend that every play it puts on must have a "message": but it is true that some of the drama output has been devoted to airing essential problems. (This is true also in a larger or lesser degree of the other companies, but some of these are inclined now and again to sacrifice entertainment for some deeper purpose which is not always apparent.)

This famous TV network certainly seems to have covered a wide field in its choice of plays, and for the benefit of authors the official view taken is that Granada likes every kind of play, provided only that the play shows a real attempt to be a good one of its kind. Kreisler said much the same thing about music when asked why he sometimes played the light hotel-lounge-at-teatime type of composition.

One thing, however, does emerge, and it is that Granada is anxious to give a lift to new playwrights. On their list we see, besides the name of Clive Exton, those of Alexander Baron, Peter Nichols and Donald Howarth. So my younger readers can try to sell their work to Granada with confidence, and can reflect also that most of the usable classics and most of the existing plays by celebrated dramatists have been done somewhere or other on television. It stands to reason that a tremendous amount of new material must, somehow or other, be found in the next few years—and unless the new writer is given a chance, how is this problem to be solved?

Again, the advice is to send your play, if not already written, then with as much detail regarding plot, characters and settings as possible, to *The Story Department, Granada Television, 36 Golden Square, London, W.1.*

By the way, this department, I am told, acts as a clearing-house or filter for all other ideas, so that documentaries, panel-game ideas, comedy shows, talks, and indeed all types of programme ideas, can be sent to the same address with the knowledge that if promising they will be forwarded to the producers most likely to be interested.

The following list of plays produced by Granada speaks for itself:

Title	*Author*
ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST	Lillian Hellman
AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE	Henrik Ibsen
SALOON BAR	Frank Harvey
THE GLASS CAGE	J. B. Priestley
ROPE	Patrick Hamilton
THE GUINEA PIG	Warren Chetham-Strode
PICK-UP GIRL	Elsa Shelley
DON'T LISTEN LADIES	Sacha Guitry
THE BROWNING VERSION	Terence Rattigan
MARY BROOME	Allan Monkhouse
THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH	Thornton Wilder
SUGAR IN THE MORNING	Donald Howarth
THE YOUNGER GENERATION	Stanley Houghton
THE BLOOD FIGHT	Alexander Baron
SHADOW OF SUBSTANCE	Paul Vincent Carroll
IN SEARCH OF HAPPINESS	Viktor Rozov

SOUTHERN TELEVISION

I have said enough earlier, I imagine, to show you that a decision taken in London is not the beginning and the end of your play's chances.

Since we've been discussing Independent Television, shall we stay on this track for a while? The picture changes constantly, so don't expect this section to be anything but fairly general in character. The tips I give have a round-the-country application, and if some Region is omitted you can take it for granted that any rules I quote are those of common sense, and can be observed in dealing with all. There is no need to be discouraged by any great lack of detail here, for the market is being expanded rather than diminished—don't forget the 1961 appearance of Westward Television, while with the promise of fewer imported programmes the market for us at home should be brighter than ever. Let me say a word or two about Southern Television.

This Company has the advantage of a Controller of Programmes—Roy Rich—who knows the world of entertainment as few men do. When I first met him, Roy Rich was Productions Manager to the late George Black. He knew his theatre, and as the years went by he gained experience as a writer, a critic, a theatre producer and as a planner of television programmes. His advice may be regarded as highly professional.

He told me: "I believe in one yardstick and one yardstick only, whether it be light entertainment, drama or books: Is it good? If it is, irrespective of its length, or its potential budget, I always try to make room for it."

The Programme Controller of Southern Television has two rigid rules from which he never departs. He is a busy man and he will never interview somebody who has an "idea" for a programme until that somebody has first submitted it in writing. ("If it's good then I welcome them with open arms.")

Secondly, Mr. Rich tells me he will not accept a play except through an accredited agency. "It's just barely possible that I might be losing myself an epic," he admits, "but in three years with British Lion and in two years with this Company such a mischance has not yet taken place."

He emphasises two points which writers must never forget—

TV's constant use of close-up, and its implicit visual quality. Too many writers ignore these two primary facts. Don't forget that this is a medium to catch the eye and is not, like radio, for the ear alone.

The address? *The Southern Television Centre, Northam, Southampton.*

T.W.W.

So far as T.W.W. is concerned (Independent Television for South Wales and the West of England) this is a market which offers a comparatively limited scope to the writer who doesn't know his Wales.

In thinking of the Regions in terms of television it is important to remember that only a percentage of the programmes are originated locally. And in Wales opportunities for the free-lance writer are perhaps even less than elsewhere. T.W.W. has its own special preoccupation with the language and culture of Wales, with Welsh youth and, of course, with sport.

They like, in short, to run their own show: and they quote the words of an old Welshman who in the twelfth century was brought before King Henry II. He told the King:

> "No other Nation than this of Wales,
> or any other language,
> whatever hereafter may come to pass shall,
> in the day of Judgement
> before the Supreme Judge,
> answer for this corner of the Earth."

T.W.W.'s Programme Controller is the affable and vastly experienced Bryan Michie. He is too courteous to ignore scripts and ideas, and too far-sighted not to recognise a clever suggestion. So my advice is—Welshmen, forward into battle with any good plan or brainwave with a national flavour: for the rest, hold your horses and, unless circumstances are exceptional, aim your English arrows elsewhere.

Address: *187–193 Oxford Street, London, W.1*: and *Pont Canna Studios, Cardiff.*

ANGLIA TELEVISION

Anglia Television has made its mark in the past year or two (with its headquarters at Anglia House in Norwich) but once more, the amount of programme material originated here is restricted.

The time will come, I have no doubt, when East Anglia's Programme Controller, Stephen McCormack, will be able to experiment and launch far more programmes than at the moment of writing. The plays so far presented by Anglia TV have been cordially received by the public and by the critics. Scripts sent in the hope of presentation by this Company are read by professional writers and produced in London. Have a go by all means, sending your scripts to the *Drama Department, East Anglia Television, Brook House, Park Lane, London, W.1*— but remember that in this market competition is particularly keen.

THE "REGIONS"

To return now to the B.B.C. and its Regional opportunities.

Regional interests (I am speaking of Drama) are covered in London: but authors who live in the provinces are by no means discouraged from sending their work to local headquarters, and most Regions do in fact present plays for local consumption only.

B.B.C. TV Drama in Wales, for example, offers a more hopeful outlook than does Independent Television. There is a market, as the following information I collected in Cardiff shows quite clearly.

"What we are looking for primarily is a good play," I was told. Fitting the play to television requirements is something which can quite easily be done after acceptance.

If an author has an idea for an exciting plot he can first of all submit a synopsis for consideration. This synopsis is examined, and if it is liked the author will be asked to give a more detailed treatment and a few sample pages of dialogue.

When the initial promise is still borne out, the writer may then be asked to go ahead and write the final version of the play. I must add here that if the author is inexperienced he will be asked to complete the script on the understanding that the

Corporation would not be bound in any way to accept the final version.

It is possible (so the Drama Department goes on) for an author to be invited to work out his final version of the play "in co-operation with and under the guidance of one of the Script Supervisors who would keep an eye on the play as it develops. This indeed often happens with experienced writers whose knowledge of television techniques is perhaps limited."

Both the North Region of the B.B.C. with its Headquarters at *Broadcasting House, Piccadilly, Manchester*), and the Midland Region (*Broadcasting House, 52 Carpenter Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, 15*) have a long and admirable tradition stretching back to the early days of broadcasting.

Although the fact is forgotten or overlooked, the Birmingham and Manchester stations opened the day after the launching of 2LO in London in November 1922—and that's a long time ago, when Mr. John Reith was building (better than he knew, perhaps) an organisation which was to be unmatched.

Manchester and Birmingham set a pattern for Regional broadcasting which was to cover the country—Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the West. It's interesting to note that today Scotland and Wales operate under the wing of National Broadcasting Councils which are responsible for policy and for the contents of the programmes.

The Regions, both in Sound and Television reflect life in their own particular part of the country, and also contribute sound and vision programmes to the National Networks. In fact, the contribution to the National Networks amounts to something like forty-five hours a week to the Home, Light, Third and Network Three programmes—and about ten hours a week to Television.

You can imagine that with a sturdy independence of thought, the Regions dislike the idea of being subservient to London, and in every way they still show initiative and a fondness for backing their fancy.

North Region encourages scripts of all kinds for Sound and Television.

"They come to us sometimes unsolicited from the writer himself or his agent," I was told, "and sometimes as a result of such a venture as our Play Competition. This was launched four or five years ago, every Region following suit; and sometimes by directly commissioning the writer to provide us with a feature or a play, or to take part in the scripting of a light entertainment show.

"Talks material comes in the same way. Now and again someone will send us a script for consideration about a particular aspect of life that they know well; or, on the other hand, we may get in touch with an expert to give us material for a special programme—an anniversary, for instance, or some specialist subject."

Not long ago the Midland Region sponsored a B.B.C. Play Competition in conjunction with the Cheltenham Literary Festival. For this contest Michael Barry, Head of B.B.C.'s Television Drama, contributed some valuable hints, and we may profit from them.

Many plays, he pointed out, fail *not* because the writer was without "some mysterious television technique": the reason for failure was often because he didn't employ sensibly the fundamental factors—story consideration and dialogue.

Mr. Barry had this to say about construction:

"*A theatre play, speaking very generally, builds to a picture at the end of the first act. The second act develops and builds to a much bigger peak. the third act explains, tidies up or may curve to another peak as a surprise. The play for the screen follows a different pattern—a succession of small climaxes leading to a major one or a gradual upward curve all the way, sustained by carefully graded suspense to a final peak at sixty minutes.*"

He underlines what I said earlier—that the best thing to do is to study films and television plays, and see for yourself how it's done.

The opening of a television play is vitally important, and it can come with a much greater impact and more quickly than the opening of a stage play. In the theatre one often has to take a little time in setting the scene and creating atmosphere—but in TV one can start right away with action which compels the attention of the audience.

Finally, some words about sound radio.

It would be ungenerous and also inaccurate to suggest that while sound radio may provide your play's ninth life, it is in any way second best. On the contrary, its reputation is remarkable, its quality frequently exceptional and, in many cases, the influence of sound radio is limited only by the figures of the listening audiences which have inevitably diminished in the past few years.

Even now, faced with crushing competition, the Drama Department presents nearly four hundred plays a year. This is an impressive output by any standards—especially when one considers that from the authors' point of view the first production is not necessarily the last. Many writers who have tasted success are still happy to write for sound radio—among the names that spring to mind are those of Francis Durbridge, Giles Cooper, Bill Naughton and Berkeley Mather.

Everywhere you will find a core of listeners who will tell you that they find greater satisfaction listening to plays on the radio—because one has to rely on one's own imagination, one's own mental picture of a character's appearance and of the setting in which the story is unfolded.

Serials are still popular, and at least twenty-five of these are broadcast on sound radio each year. Don't be put off by the fact that between two and three hundred scripts are sent to the B.B.C. Drama (Sound) Department each month. There is an extremely efficient Script Unit, and I can say from experience that no script is rejected without at least two expert opinions having been studied.

CHAPTER FOUR

FASHIONS IN BROADCASTING

One had as good be out of the world, as out of the fashion.
COLLEY CIBBER—*Love's Last Shift*

I WON'T argue too profoundly the fundamental differences of opinion and politics which may divide the B.B.C. and its competitors.

We all know that by reason of its background and the ideals for which it has striven since entertainment by broadcasting began, the Corporation has a more uncomplicated objective. It is not—or should not be—troubled by a compulsion to please at all costs the greatest number of people for the longest period of time.

Commercial radio and television, on the other hand, have by the very reason of their existence a less altruistic approach.

Their target has been, to quote an American slogan: "To please the advertiser's wife." Wealthy clients have had to be kept happy, and the yardstick of the sponsor (who, when all is said and done, pays the piper) is based on circulation figures—the numbers of people who not only listen or view but can be coaxed or bludgeoned into remaining loyal to the programmes in question.

I am not saying that our friends of the B.B.C. do not from time to time display a lively sense of competition: but so far as they are concerned the guardians of quality and taste are the radio and television critics. These ladies and gentlemen are concerned (as most are) with the public interest and the excellence of the fare which is offered. The drawing-power of an advertisement is something which mercifully need not sway Broadcasting House policy one way or the other.

At the same time it is not for the men or women who seek a livelihood to worry too much about the ethical approach of the rival markets. The author's overriding incentive is to hear or see his work—that is to have it published on the air. Whether the B.B.C. or "commercial" is to present his work is not of

immense importance, except in relation to the fee which ultimately finds its way into his pocket.

It is true that for years the B.B.C. had a reputation for being niggardly when it came to paying for scripts. It was a gibe that stuck—sometimes rather unfairly. The fact is that in the years since Independent Television arrived the Copyright Department of the B.B.C. has had to do some pretty deep thinking on the question of payment. Certain old ideas have been very considerably readjusted.

At the time of writing there is not such a gulf in these matters between the B.B.C. and its rivals as many people imagine. The Screen Writers' Guild (and the Radio-writers Association) have seen to this, and the Corporation has not closed its eyes to changing conditions.

So far as the potential value of a play or an idea goes the opportunities are there, whether one's work is accepted by the B.B.C. or by any other organisation. In other words, the film-makers and their agents watch all channels impartially, and the lucky ones are just as likely to sell their work to a film company, to have their plays produced in the West End (as, say, *Jeannie* in the halcyon days of Sound, and *Dial M for Murder* in television times), or to collect long-term royalties from overseas.

The B.B.C.'s policy for as long as I can remember was merely to buy the rights for a single performance—so that the writer may collect "any to come" from these other fields. Repeats are in the lap of the gods and often subject to a whim, or to the decision of some official one has never met or even heard of. At the same time there are few more welcome or heart-warming experiences than to open an envelope to find an unexpected cheque, small though it may be, in payment for the production of some play or programme which may have been almost forgotten. Guineas (or their equivalent in other currencies) are good for you, and it is pleasant to find that some sketch or play has been translated into German, Hindustani or French, and that here is payment for same.

The other day, I was informed that a play of mine had been sold in Yugo-Slavia for 8,000 dinas (about £75). I received the news with modified rapture—since no money

may be sent out of the country. Problem—how to get my dinas? I suppose one could take payment in bottles of Riesling?

The writer must obviously keep in mind certain rules which apply equally whether his work is seen on Channel I or any other Channel. I shall deal now with a number of simple but vital points. I have sorted them out after long talks with those most concerned at the White City Television Centre, at Television House, in Kingsway and elsewhere.

THE LENGTH OF A TELEVISION PLAY

Even when one is dealing with the B.B.C. and the tyranny of the clock is not quite so oppressive, it is obvious that plays should be restricted to a convenient length—thirty, sixty, seventy-five and ninety minutes—and, very occasionally forty-five.

In commercial television the finished scripts work out at something less than these times, for the simple reason that advertisements have to be slotted in.

This is not a point which need bother a writer unduly in the first stages, although the professional learns to bear it firmly in mind.

By instinct and experience the successful author knows that every work of fiction has its "peaks," its carefully placed moments of suspense, surprise, emotion. The final timing is ultimately the responsibility of the producer: and, indeed, the times deducted for "the commercials" vary.

OVER-WRITING

As an old hand I have always tended to over-write—that is to say, to give the producers rather more than they need. This has always seemed to me to be common sense, acting on the principle that it is very much easier to cut than to write-in. It is an interesting point that longer plays are in shorter supply than others. One has only to be a regular viewer to realise that while there is much to be said for the play lasting ninety minutes, the quality (to say the least of it) is often inconsistent. At the

same time, it stands to reason that better plays would be put on if only they could be found.

If the standard has frequently been unimpressive, one reason is that to write a ninety-minute play for television can be a major literary operation, and experienced writers are disinclined to embark on such a venture (to achieve what may be a single performance).

TYPE OF MATERIAL

Broadly speaking, television is directed to the family audience.

It is agreed that from time to time some very strange, not to say fantastic programmes do reach the screen. The primary aim of some producers and authors seems to be to shock us into attention. Such offerings usually evoke drastic comment from viewers and the Press, and are occasionally publicised far more widely than they deserve to be. With the emergence of *avant-garde* writers, the "realistic school," we must expect more of these bleak offerings.

The most open market (affording the widest scope for authors) must always remain that which requires the human story with its dash of sentiment, romance and adventure. Trial and error, and long experience, have proved to those much-abused characters, the Planners, that certain plots and situations remain steadfast whatever superficial changes in taste may occur from year to year.

There will always *be* such changes. There was the cult of the space serial. This flourished in a mild form, then almost disappeared for a while, only to reappear in an even more sensational guise.

For several years we were taken by the throat week after week and given regular doses of horror. The "family" writers went into business early in the story of television and are still doing nicely.

As I write the Western still leads the field, and the prairies echo to the thudding hooves and the crackle of pistol-shots fired by gunmen who, prodigal as they are with ammunition, so rarely appear to hit what they're aiming at.

Fashions come and go on the cinema and television screens

no less surely than they do in the salons of Stiebel or Hartnell. But in broadcast fiction—whether sound or television—there is a hard core of successful writing based on humanity, courage and comedy: sometimes ennobled by a note of tragedy and high drama.

I won't overdevelop this theme: its application may be observed somewhere on the airwaves every day of our lives. But you will agree that this is a Walter Mitty age, in which many people lead a humdrum, regimented existence from which true escape can only be found in the boundless world of imagination. That is why the author is on a sure thing when he can create characters (a little larger than life, perhaps) about whom the everyday viewer can say: "I might have been like that myself."

In other words, make your characters into people with whom Mr. and Mrs. Everyman can identify themselves. Serve with intriguing, unusual (but, on the whole, believable) situations, and the battle is half won.

The French have observed that the more things change the more they remain the same. Why should Lord Rank and his lieutenants decide to make, a year or two ago, yet another faithful version of *A Tale of Two Cities*? The character of Sydney Carton has thrilled and exalted the public for generations. Our parents never tired of seeing the late Sir John Martin-Harvey portraying the part of Carton with such grace and nobility. Ronald Colman starred in a film of the *Tale* with handsome nonchalance and anguish.

Did the story, something like a century later, have to be tailormade for that sensitive actor Dirk Bogarde? Not at all. In an age of rockets, missiles and ark-niks scarcely a situation was altered, and sophisticated customers cried as heartily as did their ancestors when reading *A Tale of Two Cities* in Queen Victoria's glorious reign.

Even comedy, which is alleged to alter with the passing years, has a strangely constant appeal. For one thing, how do we account for the fact that Tony Hancock, a man completely of the radio age, was eminently successful acting in Gogol's *The Government Inspector*?

True, Gogol's little masterpiece provides a ripe plum for the truly comic actor. Others besides Mr. Hancock—notably Danny

Kaye—have enjoyed the part, and we've shared their enjoyment. *The Government Inspector* is another of those mistaken-identity situations.

Gogol has (I believe) been dead for a century, but Hancock thinks so highly of his sense of comedy that he feels Gogol would have enjoyed trying his hand at a script for "Hancock's Half Hour."

The morning after *The Government Inspector* had been televised, Mr. Ramsden Greig, a shrewd and able critic said: "Gogol's comedy as adapted for TV could have passed as a 'Hancock's Half Hour' script by Galton and Simpson."

It must be galling for some of our brightest sparks to find that enormous audiences are available at the drop of a hat when television presents a version of, say, *Pride and Prejudice*, or on a somewhat spicier level, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

And it cannot be gainsaid that the old tricks are still in many ways the safest. It is hard to improve upon the character who does what he thinks is right against all odds, is despised, rejected and misunderstood—but who in the closing minutes of your play is triumphantly justified.

These may strike you as random, non-textbook comments, but at least they may set you thinking. It is just that I am still fascinated by the fact that it is the simple, straightforward, uncomplicated fiction that pays off best, and that masters long since dead can reach out from immortality to prove the point.

Of course, story editors will tell you that they are interested in plays with an up-to-date setting—plays about modern men and women. Such works can be divided into a number of categories, among them the following:

Dramatic, high-powered plots, with plenty of action;
Plays in which drama and comedy are plentiful;
High comedy (very difficult);
Thrillers of unrelieved drama and suspense;
Thrillers with light relief;
Plays with an authentic domestic background;
Romantic stories with character studies of the kind Noël Coward sketched so brilliantly in *Brief Encounter*.

My advice, on reflection, would be to leave the realm of fantasy where it stands. There is little room for the charm of gentle fantasy. This has lost its appeal in the electronic age, although some will applaud its escapist value. But few of the men and women who spend their employers' money on scripts have any time for this sort of thing at present, so to woo them with such material can only be regarded at the moment as a praiseworthy attempt to convert them. The B.B.C. states quite firmly:

"*We are much more interested in plays with contemporary themes and settings than in fantasy or costume plays.*"

Farce, too, is such a highly specialised form of entertainment that it is best to leave it in the skilled hands of Mr. Brian Rix, who works his Whitehall wonders with such a dexterous touch.

As a licence-holder and citizen I would also implore you to avoid violence for the sake of violence. I've just seen a study of adolescent depravity, complete with the murder of a policeman, an assault on an elderly woman and the terrifying of a child, which would have been unthinkable as entertainment even if the production had been well-handled and the dialogue credible.

You may disagree with me—and I will defend your right to do so—but tales of mentally retarded young thugs frightening people with firearms sicken me. I believe it is true to say that television drama is most likely to ring the bell when a play deals with problems in the lives of real people. Take one strong, *possible* situation which can occur in the life of a shop assistant, a steel-erector, an engine-driver, a window-cleaner or a solicitor's clerk, and build your story round this situation. Do this and you've made a promising start. Then it is up to you to develop the theme, tell the story with economy of dialogue and a singleminded purpose which takes you from an arresting opening sequence to the appointed end.

Here are some notes which will, I hope, prove helpful.

I shouldn't spend too much time on thinking out productions which one might call spectacle on the grand scale. It is true, of course, that—notably at the White City and also at the A-R TV studios at Wembley Park—there are truly remarkable

facilities for this mammoth type of broadcast. If you should have some splendid brainwave on how to use vast areas of studio space don't let me dissuade you from putting them forward. But often when, at enormous expense, lavish productions have been presented they have almost invariably failed to justify the preliminary ballyhoo—and you can be sure that, in any case, the best professional brains on the payrolls of the organisations concerned will already be directed towards finding some successful way of solving this particular problem.

CHARACTERS AND SETS

I'm quite prepared to believe that sleepless television tycoons count their millions instead of sheep, but it is quite wrong to imagine that the programme chiefs they employ have unlimited money to spend on day-to-day productions. It is difficult, I agree, to understand why Planners should so often have to be sparing in their allocations to individual producers.

Human nature being what it is (to say nothing of the artistic outlook), producers would like nothing better than to go on spending-sprees, and I suppose it is necessary to keep a pretty tight rein on expenditure. I mention this because it leads me to what is perhaps one of the most valuable tips of all.

Put up your ideas, write your outlines, prepare your treatments with all the care and foresight a Continental housewife brings to her housekeeping budget. Your chances of having a programme accepted are increased greatly if your demands are modest so far as cost and settings are concerned. Unless you are in the first flight of television authors it is useless to write for top-flight stars of the film world who are likely to cost the earth; or to include a profusion of elaborate settings; or a prodigal amount of filming. It is no good, unless you happen to be, shall we say, Simenon, to write: "Mix to a broad, sweeping avenue at Versailles in springtime." Set a sequence in a corner of a railway station waiting-room, and all may be well.

Don't think I am being cynical about this. It merely happens to be one of the facts of television life that the main action of a play should take place in a few built-up sets. When it is absolutely essential to have street corners, an office, or part of a flat,

then remember, too, the difficulty of moving actors back and forth in a confined space. Keep your characters for these scenes as small in number as is consistent with the smooth running of the plot.

These are points which are made by all producers, under whatever banner they may operate. To be successful, every television play must flow easily and continuously, and for this reason it is imperative to keep a firm hand and not to let your characters run away with you. You must know precisely what they are doing.

We see a girl talking to her falsely accused (of course) fiancé in prison; and the action then calls for a scene where she is describing her visit to someone else in a friend's home. Well, we're not in a film studio where there can be a break between scenes. By some means or other, the girl has to nip smartly from the jail interviewing-room to a sitting-room.

She mustn't commit the cardinal production sin of being seen by viewers—that is, coming within range of the cameras, and this can be tricky, when there may be cables and various odds and ends of props to be negotiated. It can also be quite a physical strain for the elderly performer (or the plump ones), and one doesn't want them to start a new scene panting and obviously short of breath.

How to overcome this? Well, by taking the change into account and writing some dialogue which can cover the period of time required.

Other points of this kind to be borne in mind are changes of costume—again a simple matter in the film studio—or changes in appearance (for example, it may be necessary to see a man at ease in his library and then almost immediately to see him in an outdoor scene complete with muffler, greatcoat and a hat).

You may say that by mentioning these items I am not crediting you with much common sense: but you'd be surprised how easy it is even for experienced writers to overlook these pitfalls.

THE USE OF FILM

It's clear that the development of a plot can be helped along tremendously by means of film. You see this frequently—

where open-air scenes are essential, or where, even in the case of certain comedy-situation programmes, the funny man must fall into a river or catch a train by the skin of his teeth.

But many a good television play has been rejected because the author has leaned far too heavily on this useful but expensive staff. This happened to me in the case of one commissioned script. The setting was on the river by the Tower of London, and carried away by enthusiasm I added a number of scenes on a pleasure-steamer, with crowds thronging the waterside, officials and boatmen all over the place, turnstiles clicking, and the rest of it, the whole making up a colourful scene enough. It was just too tall an order for the producer to take.

A scene showing the arms of Tower Bridge opening to admit a large vessel would have been in order. This sort of shot is available in the libraries. In fact, you can help to build up the atmosphere by shots of a busy bus depot, or of the Household Cavalry trotting down the Mall—because such shots are held in stock.

Film is used so often in television programmes that a newcomer to the trade might think he *has* to employ this method. On the contrary, as I've said, it's imperative to be sparing in its use. My advice on this point, therefore, is mainly to include only the kind of thing which you are fairly sure would exist in the newsreel library. Observant people will note that when film *is* used, there is very seldom any dialogue. This is something to be remembered, because speech in a filmed section increases the cost out of all proportion to its value. So—keep it down . . . or, better still, avoid it altogether.

"SOUND" IDEAS

Writing for the television screen is a fascinating business, and especially for those who have been brought up in the world of sound radio. Here, so much of the action has to be explained—explained with subtlety, perhaps, but none the less explained.

The skilful employment of sound effects helps immensely, but in sound the author must never for a moment forget that he

is writing for somebody who is using his imagination, not his eyes. This imposes great limitations and makes of sound broadcasting a true craft.

The effect of footsteps echoing along a corridor or of a rescue-party tapping messages during an attempt to reach trapped miners can be almost unbearably effective when it is directed to the air alone.

In television, on the other hand, drama and suspense can be enhanced by the *absence* of dialogue. A close-up showing an expression of amusement, anger, grief, terror, can tell the viewer all that he wants to know. That is why some of the most compelling scenes in television have been set in Courts of Law, where one can study the facial expressions of the cast, the witnesses, counsel, judge and members of the jury.

You may certainly indicate in your script, then, the emotions experienced by your characters. This does not mean it is necessary to give detailed instructions all the time as to what the camera sees at any given moment. This is production, and can be left to the producer. The choice of close-ups may depend on a number of factors which may not have arisen when you wrote your original script, and since all producers love to experiment with this shot and that—in short, to play about (intelligently) with their cameras—these are decisions which it is wise to let them make for themselves.

It is apparent, I think, that the camera can be a relentless master. I have heard scores of broadcasters talk about the value of sincerity on the screen. They usually repeat this statement whenever they are asked to account for their success—and there is a good deal in it.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that boredom or stage-fright always come through to viewers. But I do think that a discerning audience can tell instinctively when an actor's or actress's heart is not in it—or when the description of a product on commercial television is becoming a mechanical chore. All the same, you are writing not for a large theatre or cinema audience, which has distractions of various kinds, but for an audience of one or two people who, if their attention is really caught, are going to look fairly closely at every expression, every smile, every bat

of an eyelid—and they will soon separate the true from the synthetic.

THOSE BREAKS

While we're on the subject of commercial television—what about those "natural breaks"?

If you're writing for Independent Television, it is wise to accept the fact that they are there for good or ill. For ill because the perfectionist may resent these enforced intervals: for good, because if there were no advertisements there would be no play—and no play, no pay. (Also, of course, some of the commercials are amusing—intentionally or otherwise—and many people enjoy them.)

I should say here that the "natural break" has been a matter for heated argument ever since ITV arrived, and the weight of opinion is such that where plays are concerned, at any rate, the time may not be far off when advertisements will merely precede the production or follow it.

Well, these famous breaks now fall at the beginning of a programme or at the end of it, or at some time during the course of the presentation, when such an interruption (or this is the high-minded hope of those concerned) will not detract from one's enjoyment. It's more satisfying to be professional than otherwise, so the thing to do is to make allowances for a single break in the case of a thirty-minute play or for two breaks when you are writing a sixty-minute play. The idea, then, is to arrange matters so that you present the viewer with a moment of suspense—in the same way that you would bring down the curtain on the first and second acts of a stage play—leaving them, in other words, wanting more.

The break does mean that a sixty-minute play will, in fact, last only fifty-four minutes—and a thirty-minute script will in reality need only twenty-seven minutes' playing time.

Because I think you will be interested I print below the Sample Script Layout included in some notes—just two pages of them—"On Writing Plays for B.B.C. Television," issued by

the Corporation for the benefit of new authors. But don't be alarmed: read the paragraphs which follow this layout.

SAMPLE SCRIPT LAYOUT

SCENE 1. *INTERIOR: ROBSON'S LIVING-ROOM. STUDIO. NIGHT.*

(*CLOSE UP Telephone on small table TRACK BACK to include ROBSON waiting anxiously for phone to ring.*)

EFFECT: Telephone.

ROBSON: Yes? George here. (*Pause.*) I see. (*He smiles.*) Then I must dash for the train. (*He rings off and runs off.*)

CUT TO: TELECINE 1

SCENE 2. *EXTERIOR: STREET: NIGHT:* (ROBSON rushes from house door to waiting taxi, which starts down the road.)

MIX TO:

SCENE 3. *EXTERIOR: STATION: NIGHT:* (*Library Shot*)

B.R. Train entering station.

END: TELECINE 1

CUT:

SCENE 4. *EXTERIOR: RAILWAY CARRIAGE: STUDIO: NIGHT:*

(*MARCIA looking along platform. Waves.*)
EFFECTS: Train and station noises.
ROBSON: (*opening door hurriedly.*) Darling! Darling! I made it.
MARCIA: (*passionately.*) Darling! (*They embrace.*)

FADE OUT

The paragraphs I commend to your attention are these:

(1) *The B.B.C. says—*

We do not expect authors to write a detailed camera-script (the producer adds his camera directions later), nor give it a special layout. Dialogue should be set out in a way that makes it clearly distinguishable from sound and visual

effects, etc. Sample B.B.C. scripts cannot be sent to authors.

(2) *Associated-Rediffusion says—*

Don't worry about technical directions (e.g. camera angles, back projection, tracking, overlay, panning and so forth) when writing your play. Such matters are the concern of the director whose ideas will probably differ from yours in any case. Write a straightforward script in dialogue and visual action and leave the mechanics to the expert.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE AMERICAN INFLUENCE

THE American "invasion" of our television screens has been alarming in more senses than one.

There is the personal and very understandable attitude of the writer who is committed to earning his living in Britain, and there is the fear among educationalists and those who have at heart the interests of young people that our children will pick up a way of life that is foreign to us, to say nothing of language to match.

Every writer had a personal stake in the Government's decision to set up a Committee of Inquiry into the future of TV and radio. From now on our aims should come into even sharper focus.

More than ever the British author wants to know when he will be given a square deal in the land of his birth—or of his adoption.

American interests are known to be watching the situation, fortified by considerable influence and backing.

Any happening which makes us pause and take stock at this stage in our affairs is welcome, and news of the Committee of Inquiry is not merely an excuse, but a powerful reminder to do so.

Say the words "July 1964," and that time seems far enough away—but in this age of long-term planning a few years are soon devoured.

In three years there will be no more argument about a third—or fourth—TV channel.

That problem will have been resolved once and for all.

The committee will have made up its mind about Pay-TV and the future of commercial radio stations and colour in Britain.

No wonder farsighted executives in the States are on the ball and waiting to hear through their representatives the rustling of every straw in the wind.

The setting up of the Committee of Inquiry and the appointing of Sir Harry Pilkington as chairman had its share of comment in the National Press.

Once more we were treated to dissertations on the relative merits of the B.B.C. and the Independent Television Authority, the end of whose present term and the expiration of the B.B.C.'s Charter now coincide.

Inevitably the columnists and leader-writers thought it would be a good idea to give—with an occasional wrong emphasis—a picture of what Independent Television has accomplished. And by what means.

The picture turned out to be rather more favourable to ITA than is just.

Writers cannot be blamed if they are worried by the complacent assumption that the Authority has satisfactorily interpreted its duties and the spirit in which those duties were (many of us think, too vaguely) defined.

One leading national newspaper took the jolly, common-room view that on the whole Independent Television, while able to do better, had come out at the end of term pretty well.

But beware the ambiguous phrase, the facile supposition.

The plan, surely, was to create a bigger and better *British* television industry. This could only mean the employment and encouragement of native writers.

Yet what have we found? A sorrowful procession of old American films and seedy series which, to put it kindly, have seen better days.

Where are those original productions we were led to expect?

Even the B.B.C. has been timorous in its policy of transferring to the screen some of the tried and true old-timers of sound.

By any standards there is still on the TV screens far too much dramatised material from the States—material of a standard which could be matched, and surpassed, by equivalent teams in Britain without the least difficulty.

A television world in which British authors get a fair squeeze of the orange is surely not asking too much.

We think we are entitled to a fair and honourable percentage of air-space. Welcome the day when no television executive or

planner can contemptuously leave the writer out of his calculations.

Almost as long as I can remember, writers have been grumbling about the American influence on British broadcasting. They have been justifiably worried by the all too fathomable mass of plays, comedy shows and serials which have been inflicted on the eyes and ears of British viewers and listeners.

This is something the native writer should watch, while at the same time keeping a sense of proportion.

I do know that those whose self-appointed task it is to watch the interests of native writers have fought a frustrating battle with "authorities," and that among many executives there has been a singular lack of sympathy. "*Why did Shakespeare write 'Henry IV' in two Parts?*"

"*To allow for the commercials.*"

It is, I suppose, only natural that the phrase "American influence" should have haunted us over the years. To begin with, before the British Broadcasting Company was launched the British public were almost completely in the dark about what we came to know as "the wireless."

Those who read their newspapers were vaguely aware that there was something in America called "radio," but already, in papers like the *New York Morning Telegraph*, as much as two whole pages of radio programmes were being printed.

That remarkable journalist Hannen Swaffer was the first to draw our attention to this new and mighty force. The late Lord Northcliffe read an article by Hannen Swaffer in the *Daily Graphic*, and his three papers the *Daily Mail*, the *Evening News* and the *Weekly Dispatch* followed up the subject with vigour.

"Within a few weeks the British Broadcasting Company was born," Hannen Swaffer reminded me, "and John Reith had started on his great task of building up an organisation which remains a monument to his organising genius. He made British radio what, with all its limitations, it still is, the finest in the world."

Under Reith, with all his predilection for the old school tie, his rigid code and his quarter-deck discipline, the B.B.C. grew

up in an atmosphere that had something of the austerity of the classroom. But, to be just, there was the point of view that the B.B.C. was a lusty, venturesome infant who might, if given too much rope, prove difficult and refractory.

Art had to find a place in its programmes, and artists, as the world knows well, need discipline: if they don't get it they are inclined to kick over the traces and be what the Corporation has in principle frowned upon—Bohemian. The B.B.C. has indeed nourished its individualists over the years—men like the late Constant Lambert, and Gilbert Harding, Stephen Williams, C. B. Rees, Victor Smythe, among them—but considering the vast number of people who have been employed by the organisation in one capacity or another, the number of these striking personalities has been amazingly small, more's the pity.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly at first, the influence from across the Atlantic began to be felt. Before the Second World War few British listeners knew about (or, for that matter, cared about) American radio. I except the short-wave enthusiasts. But by the 1940s millions had become familiar with the broadcasts of Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Fred Allen and other stars. Their shows were broadcast wherever there were British listeners to hear them.

For British consumption the programmes were shorn of their commercial credits—those jingles and slogans which are now so much a part of our lives that they seem always to have been with us. Probably we are indebted for the first real impact of the slick, American-type comedy to our old friends Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon. They, with Vic Oliver—that rare bird, the slapstick comic who is also a man of culture—embarked upon their famous and to all appearances non-stop series "Hi Gang!" Here we had all the elements of a fast-moving American radio show—speed, slickness, polish and amazing efficiency.

Month after month, while the enemy poured his incendiaries on London and tried to raze London to the ground, we had the extraordinary spectacle of three Americans (for at that time Vic Oliver had not yet been naturalised) presenting practically the only comedy show that came from London itself.

While other famous series were also being produced under difficult conditions in the West Country, in North Wales and

in the Midlands, the "Hi Gang!" phrase "coming to you from the heart of London" was literally true.

Goebbels was furious, but the world found it difficult to believe his propaganda that Britain's capital lay in ruins when two or three times a week they could hear the gusty mirth of a London audience as they rocked with laughter at Vic Oliver's sallies or applauded Bebe Daniels after she had sung "Rio Rita," "Take an Apple Every Day," or "I Can't Love You Any More Than I do."

A "HEAVY" INDUSTRY

After the war some of the American-sponsored programmes disappeared. The B.B.C. concentrated on finding new shows for new stars. Some succeeded, some were resounding flops. But we *had* been given a glimpse of the vast radio industry in America, an industry which presented as a matter of course all its Hollywood and Broadway stars in sponsored broadcasts. As Mr. Norman Collins, a former Controller of the B.B.C.'s Light Programme once said, it is a "heavy" industry. People in the United States took it seriously—in other words, as a business. And nobody (in those days) could ever accuse the B.B.C. of being notably businesslike.

Although certain TV programmes cradled in America—Westerns, of which "Gun Law," "Wyatt Earp," "Outlaws" and "Wells Fargo" are examples—had a readymade public in Britain, there was often a wide gulf between reaction by audiences here and in the United States. This applied in the world of the cinema. The Marx Brothers collected a huge following, but theirs was to a large extent a specialised audience. In other words, it was the old story of extremes. One either adored the Marxian type of humour or found it completely incomprehensible.

Abbott and Costello built up their own public on this side of the Atlantic, but many people, of whom I was one, would never have dreamed of paying a pocketful of half-crowns to see them. Jack Benny's quiet, subtle approach appealed to a much larger British audience—but then, Benny is a master of mime, and he relied for his most telling effects upon visual gags, or in the case of sound radio on timing which (judged by any standards) was perfection.

We flocked to see Bob Hope's pictures and enjoyed his radio programmes, but it may be remembered that Mr. Hope was born in Eltham, Kent, and this implied some bond between this amiable character and ourselves. For years the quickfire Hollywood approach to comedy was an acquired taste.

We readily accepted it from the "Hi Gang!" principals, because they were already known to us and had enlisted our sympathy if not affections. And brisk and metallic as their comedy frankly was the entire approach was subtly anglicised. They would never have countenanced any gag or situation which would have been so frankly American that listeners would have been left bewildered or in any doubt as to the point of the joke.

JIVE *v.* GRAND HOTEL

At one period British radio became rather obsessed with the idea that everything which came out of America must be ideal for Britain, America's ally. When it came to comedy shows this wishful thinking foundered. I remember a clever and successful American writer being given a contract to write programmes for British listeners, but our idioms, our habit of understatement, and our somewhat specialised idea of what is funny left this gentleman completely at sea.

I had a unique opportunity of studying the American approach at first hand. After the Second World War had been in progress for the best part of two years I was posted to North Africa to establish the first Army Broadcasting Radio Station.

The reason for this was that our troops, ill-equipped with radio receivers, were listening in their off-duty moments only to American-sponsored programmes. The news bulletins they heard were declaimed in a loud, pleasantly aggressive manner and gave little indication that Britain was playing a major part in the war, or had achieved notable successes on its own account.

On the entertainment side the emphasis in the programmes available to our troops was on swing, jive and the theme-songs of Hollywood musicals. One couldn't blame the British soldier, or for that matter the British airman or the British seaman who happened to be within receiving distance, for getting completely

browned off. He wondered why, when the Americans could listen at all times of the day and night to Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Rita Hayworth, Sophie Tucker, *they* should not hear the orchestra from the Palm Court of "Grand Hotel" or the robust quips of "ITMA," "Garrison Theatre" or "Happidrome."

It is hardly necessary to say that when I touched down at Maison Blanche Airfield near Algiers and (on War Office instructions) made my way to General Eisenhower's Headquarters, no one had heard about our mission, or for that matter wanted to know. It was only by the most unorthodox methods, by coaxing and coercing and by breaking every rule in the book that I, with some loyal companions including Major Emlyn Griffiths and Major Philip Slessor, was able to get the first British Forces radio station on the air in North Africa on Christmas Day, 1943. It was in many ways a Heath Robinson outfit: but it had one blessing—it worked. Thanks especially to Capt. A. C. L. Bennett, M.B.E.

The equipment in that first studio was begged, or "won" from various sources. In fact, the names of seven different countries appeared on different parts of the gear, and since much of it had been captured in the desert the sand literally had to be blown out of some of the more delicate instruments.

Our job, although the War Office was never so indiscreet as to put it in so many words, was to set up a friendly opposition to the American Expeditionary Stations. The reason we were so far behind was that with typical businesslike efficiency the Americans had arranged for Army broadcasters to wade ashore with their equipment on every occasion when they effected a landing.

The result was that within a few hours of a force establishing itself on the North African coast the excited G.I.s were able to listen to melodies which appealed to their sentimental hearts and kept them in touch with their homeland.

Stations were already operating in Algiers, Oran, Casablanca, Tunis and a number of other centres, listening rapturously to the programmes I've already mentioned.

I'm happy to say that within a comparatively short time our first North African station had set the pattern for a network of

British Forces Stations which operated in the Central Mediterranean Forces area and served the Eighth Army and various concentrations of troops.

I had plenty of opportunities to analyse the difference between our own approach to comedy and that of the Americans. There was a fundamental difference, which it is difficult to define.

In the first place they took themselves very seriously. Discipline was considerably more lax than ours. At the same time, my opposite number in the American Army was extraordinarily embarrassed by the fact that his rank was one grade lower than mine and that this discrepancy applied throughout all officer ranks in the two units.

I do not mean to poke fun at our allies of those years, but merely to underline the fact that their whole approach was different. I am sure they rocked with laughter at situations and characters which would never have raised a smile among our own troops. The reverse applied.

Among my station commanders was that celebrated Shakespearean actor, William Devlin. After serving with the Wiltshire Yeomanry, Devlin had fought the good fight with the Eighth Army in the desert, and when I came across him he was an Assistant Provost-Marshal with the First Armoured Division.

I contrived to arrange the posting, and Devlin was among the happy band of brothers who helped us get going in those early days.

Once at Christmas we were planning an Anglo-American broadcast with the best talent available from the Services personnel of both countries. I was asked to recommend names which would make up the British contribution, and among them was that of William Devlin.

"Who's he?" asked my equivalent in the American Army. I explained that Devlin had adorned the British stage since he was a young man and was regarded as one of our greatest Shakespearean actors. I thought it would be a good idea if he were to deliver a famous speech from *Henry V*.

"What's his rank?" was the next question. A major, I said. My American colleague looked at me with a bewildered expression, and said with a shake of his head and an expression that I only

wish I could reproduce in print; "Christmas—Shakespeare—*and* a major! Uh-huh!"

ACCENT ON AMERICA

British television was released from its long sleep in 1946—and to tell the truth, the high echoing corridors and spaces of Alexandra Palace had a draughty, cobwebby, Rip Van Winkle atmosphere.

For a while British broadcasting in sound and vision was on its own again. Occasionally, we would welcome the American visitor, but it was not until commercial television was launched that the American influence returned and once again we felt the full impact—and this time complete with the advertisements. At first, it seemed that legislation would protect the native writer and that imported American television on film would be limited.

It soon became apparent that the position was likely to become more dangerous to the writer than we'd been led to expect, and soon there was indeed a prodigious amount of transatlantic material on the British screens.

We became acquainted with the engaging Lucille Ball and wondered no longer why Americans by the million said "I Love Lucy." We welcomed two old friends who had often appeared at the London Palladium and other British music halls—Burns and Allen.

The Westerns arrived by the stage-coach load, and huge and faithful audiences rallied to watch Roy Rogers, the legendary Wyatt Earp, the taciturn Marshal Dillon, and another hero with a charmed life—the handsome Jim Hardy, investigator for Wells Fargo. As if that were not enough "The Last of the Mohicans" made his appearance—and there was an almost non-stop stream of half-hour thrillers, some of which, even when sponsored by that mischievous hobgoblin from Hollywood, Alfred Hitchcock, were anything but world-shakers.

Many in fact were only fair to downright bad. In many cases the films had already gone the rounds in America and elsewhere. Costs had long since been paid for many times over.

It was inevitable that viewers, especially those in their teens,

would accept this portion of foreign matter as something to be expected—since they had known nothing else. To those whose livelihood depend to a great extent on the recognition of British authors the position seemed pitiful enough. To their minds there had already been far too many innovations which in aim and approach could be traced to the influence of New York and Hollywood.

LAUGH—OR CLAP HANDS

To me, one of the most extraordinary manifestations of the past twenty years has been the gradual change in the character of that sound most healing of all to the spirit—spontaneous and unrestrained laughter. This may be an impression of mine, an impression that others don't share with me. But where are those waves of laughter that almost took the roofs off the great variety houses where once the painted cherubs seemed to shake the ceilings with their fat chuckles?

Listen to a recording of "ITMA" and you will pick up an echo of what I mean. The Crazy Gang, those foolish kings, those knights of madness, can still command it. Now and again one heard the full-throated roar in a "Goon Show," when one of those happy clowns had perpetrated some devastating bit of idiocy, some notable example of verbal slapstick.

But gradually there came into being this remarkable and to me slightly inhuman habit of *applauding* a funny gag. Someone speaks a topical line, there follow two or three uncertain seconds of silence and then a studio audience breaks into a frenzy of applause. It is as though they are clapping the comedian concerned for being able to read the headlines in the evening papers.

This metallic tribute does not seem to me to be a recognition of talent or a sense of fun. But there it is: I personally can't understand it.

CHAPTER SIX

THE WRITING OF COMEDY

"How much for that rabbit?"
"Three pounds."
"That's a stiff price for a rabbit."
"It's a stiff rabbit."
Any pantomime, c. 1900

"I'm going to buy a car."
"Really? Whatever for?"
"I've just found a parking-space."
Any comedy radio show, 1961

SOMEWHERE there's a moral in the fact that these gags span more than half a century of laughter.

It is rather the thing these days to be casual about enjoyment, but the truth is that however hard the shell of cynicism in which some people seem to encase their true selves, we laugh at much the same jokes today as our parents and grandparents did. When, for example, the stooge, feed or straight man announces with pride, "My grandfather fell at Waterloo," the comic has but to ask, "Which platform?" and the day is won.

When in pantomime First Ugly Sister complains that she can't get her foot into the crystal slipper, Second Ugly Sister is on a sure thing when she replies, "Clarice, my dear, you couldn't get it into Wembley Stadium!" In 1904 she said Crystal Palace, but the thought behind it is the same, if you see what I mean.

However much we like to play grown-up, it is the rudiments of humour that make us laugh loudest. Ponder for a moment the dilemma of Norman Wisdom. Norman, it is said, and I think truly, has in him something of the magic essence of Charlie Chaplin and Sid Field—distilled from a mixture of charm, pathos and subtlety. But do the customers insist on these things? No. Let him but fall flat on his face—the lowest common denominator of clowning—and they are transported.

I've heard it said that we've lost the art of laughter. I don't believe it, but there is, perhaps, a little superficial evidence to that effect. All I know is that it mustn't happen.

Jerry Desmonde, off whom Bob Hope, Sid Field, Arthur Askey and Norman Wisdom have sparked in turn, once told me how he would stand on the stage of the Prince of Wales's Theatre with Field and hear every night "wave after wave of that wonderful laughter." Personally, I'd hate to think that we had lost for ever the enjoyment of that rumbustious, side-splitting, hilarious, rib-tickling, tear-streaming, guffawing, uproarious tide of laughter, the kind that sends overstrained buttons pinging away like Peggotty's and leaves us gasping, exhausted but happy. I laugh easy: like the fat woman in the fifth row of the stalls, for whom every comedian prays, I am prepared to meet every professional funny-man more than halfway.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Now, without quarrelling with my bread-and-butter, I can't help thinking that if the quality and quantity of our laughter have diminished, radio may partly be the cause. (I do not suggest we've lost our national sense of humour; only some of the outward and visible gusto.)

Apart from the great clowns who *do* funny things more often than they *say* them, it is a fair generalisation that a comedian is only as good as his script. And as Ted Ray put it to me, modern broadcasting (sound and vision) is like a colossal sponge, ceaselessly soaking up material. Small wonder that sometimes in the course of a non-stop run a production will be hap to the point of hazard.

Today on the air people are concerned more with the mechanics of humour than ever before, and accordingly it is harder for comedy to bubble up naturally. To give you one instance: timing has to be as near perfection as possible. Has it ever occurred to you that a scriptwriter has to write twice as many gags for a quickfire comedian like Hope or Ray as for a more deliberate comic like Harry Worth? Or that to broadcast a show lasting precisely half an hour the producer must time all the laughs on his stop-watch?

With luck, a single act would last the oldtime performer for years, in some cases half a lifetime. But that was before the day of the microphone, when a gag cracked in Plymouth on Saturday

was still fresh in Sunderland on Monday. Introduce a new joke on the air tonight, and by tomorrow it's everybody's property.

George Formby (Senior), Dan Leno, Eugene Stratton, Harry Champion, Will Fyffe and Nellie Wallace could, and did, sing the same songs for years—indeed, the public felt cheated if they didn't. Harry Tate (and I think he was one of the handful who could have held his own with the moderns) played his famous sketches, "Motoring" and "Selling a Car" among them, not for years but for decades.

Tate left a trail of laughter in countries all over the world: but you can't capture that sublime foolery in words. To the query "Why doesn't the engine start?" came the reply: "The sprockets aren't running true with the differential gear, and that causes the exhaust-box to short-circuit with the magneto ignition on the commutator—I don't think."

How can I explain to would-be comic writers that this kind of thing had their fathers rolling, as they say, in the aisles?

I once saw the stage directions for the scene which brought down the curtain twice nightly on "Motoring" and which helped to make this sketch of 1902 a music-hall classic. "All argue," it read, "Tate pushes urchin away. In doing so, he gets hold of urchin's cap and puts it on. Urchin puts Tate's cap on. Tate discovers it, pulls it off, puts it on over urchin's cap. Urchin kicks Tate. Car falls over. Curtain."

Well, there you are. This sort of thing cannot be written down, which is what I mean when I say that Wisdom's greatest gusts of laughter are summed up by three words: Norman falls down.

Surely one reason why laughter was not quite so hard to come by in the old days was because the headliners were characters in their own right and by their own invention. They were bigger than life, wore comic clothes and lots of make-up. They bought the songs they sang and the sketches they played, and no other artist in the world could sing or play them.

Whether they were happy or not, they gave you the impression they were having a marvellous time. If you have ever heard Marie Kendall singing when over eighty, "Did Your First Wife Ever do That?" you'll see the point I'm trying to make.

Maybe the trouble with comedy today is that the mantle of

those lovable, gaudy, down-to-earth have-a-bashers has fallen on a company of charming but harassed men in lounge suits, relentlessly pursued by chartered accountants and income tax inspectors. I hope I'm not being too hard on them. They are quite often funny—sometimes very funny indeed. But it's hard to escape the fact that they are working desperately hard in the process.

Now and again I feel like saying to them: "For goodness' sake cherish our heritage of laughter. It's too precious a commodity to lose."

THE JESTER'S ART

Comedy is in so many ways the most elusive form of television and radio-writing.

It is also the most difficult in which to acquire proficiency, if one can use such a phrase in connection with an art which has to be as light as thistledown and yet penetrating and subtle at the same time. As for teaching it—well, I suppose there *are* certain elementary rules, but in these days, when standards are liable to change so rapidly with the advent of each newcomer, even these must vary. I have implied in the opening paragraph of this chapter that certain hoary old jokes are always good for a laugh. But the odd laugh isn't enough when you are faced with the task of turning out a comedy show every week.

I am not evading the issue when I point out the pretty self-evident fact that the art of writing comedy depends on the man or woman for whom the material is required. I suppose it can be said that Charlie Drake could be very funny in situations which had been originally written for Norman Wisdom. These two brilliant clowns share an element of pathos. They are both adept in portraying the misunderstood little man who can be stung into vigorous and effective retaliation. They can illustrate the surprise comic value of the worm turning better than most of their fellow funny-men.

Ted Ray, with his crisp and incisive style and his skill in timing a gag, could certainly be successful with material written for delivery in the Bob Hope manner.

But most comedians are highly individual—hence their

success; and although I am not suggesting that they are above translating to their own uses what one might call the standard gag, could any comedians differ more, let's say, than Vic Oliver, Jimmy Edwards, Arthur Haynes, Harry Worth, the lugubrious Bernard Bresslaw and Jimmy James?

Of these, Vic Oliver has a sort of ageless charm. He is a comedian who can crack the same outrageous gags year after year and still be funny. ("What did Paganini have that I haven't got—except hair?")

Television, quite naturally, has brought about its own problems for the writer. At the same time, it brings its special advantages. Obviously, it helps when you can see a comedian *doing* funny things. But even here, some of our best-known drolls have used comic visual material which was created in the days of Dan Leno, if not by that renowned comedian himself. Visual comedy does mean that the laughter-maker can rely on his expressions, the lift of an eyebrow, the pained smile, the look of bewilderment, the "double-take." To write a page or two of comedy script for a comic whose main appeal is to the eye is to leave the unprofessional reader baffled.

"THAT MAN"

I said styles change—and they do, rapidly. Overleaf is an extract from "ITMA"—complete with producer's alterations. But don't expect to roar with laughter at these and any other lines I shall quote. Comedy dialogue is not for reading—except when the reader is a student of professional fun, and wants to see for himself or herself how it's done.

These lines were spoken at speed by members of the "ITMA" company: and remember that in that thirty-minute show the producer invariably had to allow at least four and a half minutes for laughter by the studio audience.

The current style is utterly different. There is, in the best funny material, an economy of words. In many cases the old target of "a laugh a line" no longer applies—nor is it attempted.

Television has encouraged the art of mime. Consider, as one example, Tony Hancock. In some of the most uproarious sequences with Sidney James there were long pauses—and

- 13 -

1. JACK: Nearer mic A light ale, sir? I'll join you -

2. HUGH: Hello Uncle - I've only seen you sober [redacted] - once in my life

3. JACK: And my boy only twice in my life have I seen you once -

4. HUGH: LOUDER Disgusting - my mater would have a fit -

5. TOM: What - Crafty Clara - she'd love it. Do you remember the Colonel time she played in pantomime at the old Tivoli?

6. JACK: Gad sir, yes - she rubbed the lamp and the spirit appeared -

7. TOM: Yes - you jumped on the stage and tried to put it back in the bottle - Clara played the principal girl - got mixed up in the flying ballet - collided in mid-air with the Fairy Queen, fell head-first through the trap-door and the band played "I see you've got your old brown hat-on

8. HUGH: There must be some mistake -

9. TOM: That's what the demon king said when he shot up two minutes later with Clara's tights round his neck -

10. HUGH: Come Uncle - [redacted] I'll stand you a glass of lemonade -

11. JACK: Alright sir - if you'll top it with gin -

12. TOM: And while you're at it lace his boots with brandy - goodbye -

Quicker (Door closes)

often, the longer the pause the louder the laugh. His authors have gauged the value of Hancock's gestures and expressions. They know his "character" to a nicety, and they are able to get remarkable effects by letting the viewers see how Hancock's mind works. They were always ready to take the gamble of letting you watch his brain ticking over for seconds at a time.

Ray Galton and Alan Simpson kindly gave me permission to cite the following illustration from a sound-radio programme. It depicts, with penetrating skill, the boredom of a Sunday afternoon.

TONY: It's not like this on the Continent, it's their big day over there. All the cafés open, football matches, race-meetings, everybody's gay. Not over here though. Everything's shut up.
SIDNEY: I wish you would.
OMNES: [LONG PAUSE . . . CLEARING THROATS . . . HUMMING . . . SIGHS . . . PAPERS RUSTLING.]
TONY: Get your feet out of the way, put them over there. [*Pause.*]
TONY: That's it, go on, take all the fire up. Don't let anybody else get a look at it, will you?
HATTIE: I'm sorry, I'm just trying to get warm. [*Pause.*]
TONY: What's the time?
SID AND TONY [*Together*]: —Here's a funny thing . . .
—I was just thinking . . .
TONY: Pardon?
SIDNEY: No, no, after you.
TONY: No, no, go on, what were you going to say?
SIDNEY: Nothing, nothing.
SID AND TONY [*Together*]: —I was just going to say . . .
—I was just going to say . . .
TONY [*little laugh*]: What were you going to say?
SIDNEY: It doesn't matter, nothing important. What were you going to say?
TONY: I've forgotten now.
SIDNEY: Oh.
TONY [*sings*]: Bom, bom, bom, bom, bom, bom, bom. . . . [*Pause.*] [*Changes the tune.*] Da, de dum, da de dum de da . . . what's that called, Sid?
SIDNEY: What's what called?
TONY: This tune. Da de de dum, da de dum de da.
SIDNEY: I don't know.

TONY: Don't you remember the film, old Anton Walbrook on the piano.

SIDNEY: No.

TONY: Oh. [*Pause.*] Let's go to the pictures. Yes. That's life. It's always the same. There you are. Up one minute, down the next.

SIDNEY: Yeah.

TONY: You never know when it's your turn next.

SIDNEY: No.

TONY: That's the way it goes. You never know what's round the next corner, do you?

SIDNEY: True. No matter how bad off you are, there's always somebody worse off than yourself.

TONY: That's very true. I was just thinking about poor old Albert in hospital. He's been there a month, and no one's been to see him.

SIDNEY: Haven't they really, poor old devil.

TONY: No one's been near him. He's just laying there.

SIDNEY: Oh dear, makes you feel rotten, don't it.

TONY: Poor old Albert.

SIDNEY: Well, look, why don't we go and see him this afternoon, we haven't got anything to do.

TONY [pause]: No, it's a long way, isn't it? He's probably asleep. We'll go next week.

SIDNEY: Yeah. [*Pause.*]

Now, an example of the Hancock-Galton-Simpson technique on television. The following sequence is taken from "The Train Journey," which was telerecorded in the B.B.C.'s studios, and transmitted in September, 1959:

Shot No.	*Cams.*	*Action*	*Dialogue*	*Sound* MIX GRAMS: 20/B/86 B.2.
			[CUT BACK TO THE CARRIAGE.]	
115	DISSOLVE TO *CAM. 3* CENTRE	M.L.S. COMPARTMENT	[*The train is going through the suburbs of London. The passengers are all either reading or looking out of the window.* JOHN *is consulting a textbook and making notes in an exercise book.*]	

Shot No.	*Cams.*	*Action*	*Dialogue*	*Sound*
116	CUT TO *CAM. 2.*	M.S. TONY	[TONY *is looking out of the window. Keep this going for a few seconds.*]	
			1. TONY: It's surprising what you can see in those windows that back on to the railway, isn't it?	
117	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	M.L.S. COMPARTMENT	[*They relapse into silence again.*]	
118	CUT TO *CAM. 2.*	M.S. TONY	[TONY *starts tapping on the window.*]	
119	CUT TO *CAM. 4.*	M.S. JOHN	2. JOHN: Don't do that.	
120	CUT TO *CAM. 2.*	M.S. TONY	[TONY *stops.*]	
121	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	M.L.S. COMPARTMENT	[*Silence again.*]	
122	CUT TO *CAM. 2.*	M.S. TONY	[TONY *starts whistling to himself, gradually getting louder and louder: "Coronation Scot."*]	
123	CUT TO *CAM. 1.*	2-SHOT TONY/COLONEL	3. COLONEL: Do you mind. [TONY *stops.*]	
124	CUT TO *CAM 3.*	M.L.S. COMPARTMENT	[*Pause.*]	
125	CUT TO *CAM. 2.*	M.S. TONY	[*Starts humming. Gets louder.*]	
126	CUT TO *CAM. 1.*	3-SHOT TONY/COL/ VICAR	4. VICAR: [*Quite pleasantly.*] Would you mind.	
			5. VICAR: I'm trying to write my sermon.	
127	CUT TO *CAM. 2.*	M.S. TONY	6. TONY: Oh, of course.	
128	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	M.L.S. COMPARTMENT	[*Pause.* TONY *draws on the window.* SID gets a *fag out. Strikes a match. They all look at him. He shakes the match out, without lighting the fag. He puts the fag back in the packet. They all go back to reading. Pause.* TONY *is getting on with his matchstick man on the window.*]	
			7. SIDNEY: [TO TOTTIE.] What's it like, then?	

Shot No.	*Cams.*	*Action*	*Dialogue*	*Sound*
129	CUT TO *CAM. 4.*	2-SHOT SID/TOTTIE	8. TOTTIE: I beg your pardon? 9. SIDNEY: The book. What's it like? 10. TOTTIE: Oh it's very good. It's Ibsen's *Doll's House.* 11. SIDNEY: Oh, I don't like kid's books. Doll's House, Gingerbread castles . . . got any whodunnits. 12. TOTTIE: No, I'm afraid I don't read those sort of books. 13. SIDNEY: Oh, well, never mind. Do you fancy stretching your legs? 14. TOTTIE: No thank you. 15. SIDNEY: Just down the corridor for a cough and a draw? 16. TOTTIE: A what? 17. SIDNEY: An oily rag. A snout. Fag. 18. TOTTIE: I don't smoke. 19. SIDNEY: Oh, all right. [*Turns away from her. Fed up with her.*]	
130	CUT TO *CAM. 1.*	M.L.S. COMPARTMENT		
131	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	STRAIGHT ON TONY'S WINDOW	[*Cut to* TONY *who is just putting the finishing touches on his drawing on the window. He admires it then leans over and taps* JOHN'S knee.]	
132	CUT TO *CAM. 2.*	LOOSE M.S. TONY		
133	CUT TO *CAM. 4.*	M.S. JOHN	20. JOHN: Now what is it?	
134	CUT TO *CAM. 1. LEFT*	2-SHOT TONY/JOHN	21. TONY: Come here. Come over here. [JOHN *leans forward.*]	
135	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	2-SHOT TONY/JOHN	22. JOHN: What?	
136	CUT TO *CAM. 1.*	2-SHOT	23. TONY: [*Indicates the picture.*] Who's that?	
137	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	2-SHOT	24. JOHN: Who's what?	

Shot No.	*Cams.*	*Action*	*Dialogue*	*Sound*
138	CUT TO *CAM. 1.*	2-SHOT	25. TONY: The drawing. who is it?	
139	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	2-SHOT	26. JOHN: I haven't the faintest idea.	
140	CUT TO *CAM. 1.*	2-SHOT	27. TONY: Yes, you have. Go on have a closer look. Go on then, who? Who is it?	
141	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	2-SHOT	28. JOHN: I don't know.	
142	CUT TO *CAM. 1.*	2-SHOT	29. TONY: It's you.	
143	CUT TO *CAM. 3.*	2-SHOT		
144	CUT TO *CAM. 2.*	M.S. TONY	Good likeness, isn't it? [JOHN *just stares at* TONY then settles back *in his seat and with a last stare gets back into his books.*]	
145	CUT TO *CAM. 3.* CENTRE	M.L.S. COMPARTMENT	30. TONY: Well it's better than some of the rubbish they get on "Dotto." You should have seen what they did to me. Made me look fat.	

"BOOTSIE AND SNUDGE"

Another excellent example of the script being subordinate to the mime is provided by that highly successful partnership—Alfie Bass and Bill Fraser.

Nobody would say that their lines first in "The Army Game", later in "Bootsie and Snudge" were particularly subtle. What did matter was that Bill could register infinite exasperation, while Alfie Bass, with a wink, a sly look, a mere inclination of the chin could reach true peaks of comedy.

One consolation of having twenty years ago been square-bashed into a stupor, drilled at the double in full marching-order, woken at cockcrow and generally mucked about was that you could enjoy the unsubtle moments of

that footsloggers' delight of a television show, "The Army Game."

It was (and still may be) based on the cornerstone of humour, the other fellow in trouble—or I'm all right, Jack. For most of us the barrack square was not so long ago that we've forgotten the menace it held. Forgotten? We still bear the scars!

"The Army Game," which existed before "Tell It to the Marines" or "The Navy Lark," was frankly a show designed to extract laughs, and to exploit situations and comedy which is very much broader than it is long.

It stayed stubbornly in the top ten in spite of the fact that the B.B.C. gave it the severest possible opposition.

Both Hancock and Sykes were put on as the Channel I alternative to Sergeant Snudge's amiable misfits. To no very appreciable avail.

If for nothing else "The Army Game" will be remembered as being the setting for the brilliantly funny partnership of Alfie Bass, as "Bootsie," and Bill Fraser as the Sergeant-Major. Both these actors are past-masters in the art of timing a gag or a grimace.

One secret of the Bass–Fraser team is that they are both experienced straight actors—with an abounding sense of comedy.

Alfie—a cabinet-maker's son from Bethnal Green—gave a touching performance in the film *The Bespoke Overcoat* and in other pictures. He was on the West End stage in *Finian's Rainbow* and *Mr. Bolfry*. He remembers his own war years with an occasional qualm of horror. Very much against his will he was trained as a dispatch-rider. "The big snag was that the instructor refused to believe anyone could be so dense about a motor-bike," he said. "I could never remember how to stop the darned thing, but he thought I was just trying to be funny."

He acted with David Kossoff and John Slater at the Unity Theatre before the war.

"We were a bunch of hungry people," says Alfie, "most of us unemployed and living on the dole, and we had to run the theatre on a shoestring. We painted the scenery and built the sets in our spare time. We ate at a pull-in for carmen round

the corner—egg and chips, a pot of tea, and bread and dripping set us back sixpence-ha'penny!"

Bill Fraser—who played the terror of the men who lived in Hut 29—had a varied stage career. One of his worthwhile projects was the founding of the Worthing Repertory Theatre in 1933. He ran it until 1939.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF WIT

Now, one of the great mysteries of show-business is why the British idea of what is funny varies from town to town all over the country.

North and South expect something quite different from their comics. These opposing points of view may be summed up by a snatch of conversation overheard in a Manchester pub.

"What about this new comedian they're cracking up?" said one man. The other took a pull at his tankard, and replied with deliberation: "Well, in spite of what they say, he's all right. As a matter of fact, it took me all my time to keep from laughing at him!"

A famous professional funny-man once gave me a most rational explanation.

"It's true enough," he said, "that a gag which curls 'em up in Barnsley may not get a laugh in Cheltenham, and vice versa. It's quite simple.

"Below that famous line from Birmingham down, people go to the theatre to enjoy themselves. Farther North, they go to see what it's like.

"The farther North you go, the harsher the environment. The dialect's harder, and they even talk louder, probably because the noise in the factories and the works makes 'em talk louder among themselves, and they carry it on even in the pubs, and when they get home."

It is, I believe, true that when the Northerner goes to see a show it's with the feeling, "Whatever happens, I'm going to get my money's worth!" The South is more receptive. In certain notoriously "difficult" towns if someone in a theatre laughs loudly the other customers all turn round to look at him. If

your neighbour laughs in a Southern theatre—well, it's more than likely to make you feel you'd like to join in.

That great showman the late George Black gave himself and his friends endless amusement by claiming, as he sat in the Royal Box at the London Palladium, that he could tell which town certain provincial customers came from.

It was all based, he said, on how they coped with their hats, coats and umbrellas (the good-natured implication was that no Northerner would ever waste money on cloakrooms!).

Each city, it would seem, had its own habits. The mackintosh folded neatly under the seat and bowler hat on lap was one clue. The hat under the seat and umbrella grasped firmly between the hands (thus quelling any weak impulse to applaud) was another. Some would decline to take their overcoats off, others would clasp coat in one hand, hat in the other and so on.

Having made his diagnosis, "G.B." would sometimes send an attendant to make discreet inquiries as to the patron's place of origin—it might be Oldham, Sunderland, Runcorn,Warrington —and it was astonishing how often he was right!

PICKLES *v.* WIGHTMAN

I once listened to an entertaining argument on this subject between Wilfred Pickles from Halifax and that down-to-earth Westcountryman, Ralph Wightman. Pickles took the view that he could get laughs that were just as hearty in Scotland as in Cornwall or in Yorkshire. Wightman came back with the reply to the effect that in his experience the hardest audiences he had ever met are to be found in the outer suburbs of London!

"Seriously," he went on, "I certainly would say that I find North Country audiences considerably more receptive than those of the London suburbs."

Pickles gave his opinion that the "hardest" town from the comedian's point of view is Bradford.

"In fact," he said, "as I've told the people up there, Henry Irving isn't the only actor who died in Bradford."

At the same time, it is probably true that certain North Country cities and towns take a pride in their reputation for being rather formidable customers. It amuses them to be able

to say: "If you make us laugh here, you can make them laugh anywhere."

The old tradition dies hard, and it isn't so long ago when people in other parts of the country would accept the Irish doctor, the Scottish postman or the Westcountry farmer, but if a chap came from the North they would act under the impression that he must wear a cloth cap and keep a whippet under the table.

I liked Ralph Wightman's philosophy: "Of course, the impression does exist that the Northcountryman is as sharp as a needle, whereas your Westcountryman is supposed to be a bit slow on the uptake. But in Devon, at least, the inhabitants are so certain it's the best place in the world that they don't have to swank about it. They just go on quietly patronising everybody else!"

Pickles' view was that there are differences in the light and shade of stories which are appreciated in different parts of the country. In the North the great stock-in-trade of the comic or the story-teller is understatement.

"This is illustrated by the story of two friends who had retired from business," said Wilfred Pickles. "But they went on meeting each other night after night, week after week in the same pub at the same time. One night one of these characters for the first time on record just didn't turn up. The other one went round to his house only to be told by the tearful widow that her husband had passed away. His friend just looked at her for a few moments without any change of expression and said: 'Did 'e say owt about a pot o' paint?' "

One of my own favourite Westcountry stories is of an old Devonshire countryman who used to keep his money in a stocking and was asked by a friend: "What about the interest you're losing?"

"Oh," was the answer. "I always puts by a bit extra for that."

When I pressed Wightman for a story of his own he reminded me of several that are rather too earthy for print. But one which he thought conveyed the kind of humour appreciated in his part of England was about a simple country lad who is going out with a girl.

"They got on very nicely," Wightman chuckled, "and at the

end of the evening the boy says: 'Before we go any further, I must tell you, I've got a disability.' She said goodbye, and never saw him again. He was quite a nice-looking chap and the same thing happened several times. He'd always take the girls out and there'd come a time when, being an honest sort of fellow, he'd say to them: 'There's something I must tell you—I've got a disability.' Once it got so far that he became engaged, but when he asked the question she gave him the ring back. At last he *did* get married, but this time he waited until after the ceremony before he made his confession. 'I've got a disability,' he told his bride. 'I'm colour-blind.' She replied: 'Bo', yo' sho' is.' "

THE HUMOUR OF THE HOME

Let's consider for a little while the fascinating subject of domestic comedy.

One of the most popular card games among children of my own generation was "Happy Families"; and it has been extremely interesting to see how the "Family" has come into its own on the air—the Dales, the Archers, the Appleyards, the Groves, the Larkins, the dwellers in "Coronation Street," and the rest of them. The "Family" has had its ups and downs, but on the whole its members are united, and by the standards of twentieth-century entertainment long-lived.

This type of show, almost more than any other, creates *characters* who become very real indeed to the man and woman in the street.

John Henry and his Blossom made radio history, and squabbled their way into the hearts of radio listeners thirty years ago; and one remembers that other famous "little man" character, Mr. Penny. How faithfully and amusingly he was portrayed by Richard Goolden. Mr. Penny and his Annie! I've still got a warm spot in my heart for both of them.

There was some more than average character-acting in that wartime best-seller of the air "The Robinson Family." And although few of the Dale family's admirers realised it, Ellis Powell who has played that indefatigable diarist for considerably more than ten years, was the greengrocer's wife, Mrs. Williams, in "The Robinson Family."

Then one day a few of the artists who had been with the Robinsons heard there was to be a new serial—although they didn't know what it was called, nor had they the remotest idea of what it was about. The producer asked Ellis Powell to read the part of the Doctor's wife in the new serial. Ellis Powell remembers how she nearly turned down a part that has lasted her more than a decade, but she did tell the producer: "I'm sure I'm quite wrong for it. I'd be absolutely hopeless. I'm a character actress."

Well, the Dales became part of the social scene in Britain, and there is no doubt about the fact that it succeeded because it was so true to life.

It is possible, of course, to be so true to life that one balances on a razor-edge between excitement and boredom. Whatever sophisticated listeners had to say about the Dales, the famous "Appreciation Figures" of the B.B.C. showed that the public declined to get tired of the Doctor and his family, and no one (least of all the writers and the players) will blame the B.B.C. for prolonging their adventures.

Years ago Arthur Askey talked to me for a fascinating hour or two about radio comedy you can believe in. Jack Benny was Askey's own favourite funny-man: and Arthur explained it to me by saying: "One of the vital reasons for Jack Benny's success on the air is that he acts everything. In other words, he is always a believable person, and the situations in which he finds himself week by week are credible situations. Within the limits of the licence to which any comedian is entitled they might really happen. Jack's supporting actors are real people."

"IT HAPPENED TO US"

This close-to-fact element is something that has to be borne in mind by all who aspire to write domestic comedy, and this type of broadcasting still has immense possibilities.

The Dales—and, for that matter, the Archers—are believable families. The Dale characters, indeed, took such a firm hold on their listeners that people all over Britain followed every move and thought in their imaginary lives.

Many listeners wrote to Ellis Powell about her "son" coming

out of the Army. The matron of a hospital asked if the Dales could spare a kitten from one of Jemima's litters. When Mrs. Freeman was involved in an accident—in the story, of course—she was supposed to be very ill. The B.B.C. was besieged by telephone calls and members of the cast were deluged by letters asking how she was.

"Mrs. Dale" told me: "One man wrote to me asking if I could arrange to have a special statement about Mrs. Freeman's health given out in the news bulletin!"

The great trick in writing domestic comedy is to concentrate on situations that might happen to anybody. Naturally, these are sometimes made to fit a size slightly larger than life, but most of the really uproarious comedy happenings have a basis in truth.

The "I Love Lucy" plots gradually came to border on farce, but a born comedienne like Lucille Ball could carry it off where others might have failed. To turn out a new weekly programme is enough to tax the ingenuity of a platoon of writers, and one can hardly blame Miss Ball's authors for stretching the elastic of probability almost to breaking-point.

In this country many attempts have been made to produce the ideal "married couple" series. On television Joan and Leslie Randall made a gallant stab at this tricky medium—but probably the pair who made the liveliest impact on post-war broadcasting were Ted Ray and Kitty Bluett. The Wigan-born Ray and his auburn-haired partner really showed a flair for presenting the more amusing aspects of domestic life.

Ted says: "The secret of domestic humour is something that makes a man and his wife look at each other while listening or viewing and say: 'But, darling—that's *exactly* what happened to us!' "

And this is a point writers do well to remember. Many of the situations in "Ray's a Laugh" were based on things that happened either in Ted Ray's home or that of that ingenious radio-writer Eddie Maguire.

There was the occasion on which some chimes were bought to replace the front-door bell. This was a major domestic operation: but when they were installed the only place in which the chimes could be heard was the bathroom!

There were situations about lawn-mowers and the car and

cooking—in fact, everything but mothers-in-law. In-laws provided a stock subject for the old-time music-hall comic, but the modern realistic type of comedy has gone a long way from that.

"I can't remember when I last cracked a mother-in-law joke," Ted Ray said to me. By the way, Ted's own favourite gag was when his "radio" wife, Kitty Bluett, says drowsily just before dropping off for the night: "Darling, do you love me still?" To which Ted replies: "I don't know, dear, I've never seen you still!"

It always seemed to me that in Ted Ray is to be found more than an echo of Tommy Handley's endearing characterisations. Both were Northcountrymen and both made their first bow as actors in Liverpool. Handley and Ray shared a crisp, almost metallic delivery of lines and a flair for the topical. There is a whole world of difference between the well-groomed, nonchalant Ted Ray's stage act and the technical subtleties of a best-selling radio show.

Ted understands this, and for this reason made his radio or television job almost a full-time one, and worked night and day to master the problems of an exacting medium. A word from Ray which might well be taken to heart by scriptwriters: "I have no use for gags however brilliant if they have in them a note of spite or malice. The golden rule is never get a cheap laugh at somebody else's expense."

HUMANITY—NOT MALICE

I'm reminded that some of the greatest artists of the century—Will Fyffe, Will Hay, Harry Tate and Sid Field, were all kindly men. They had an understanding of and a real affection for humanity.

There are lessons to be learnt also in the treatment of the "Life With the Lyons" series. This family proved that domestic comedy, when it is well done, is one of the best bets in sound radio or on vision. In "Life With the Lyons" we enjoy the good-natured bickering of a devoted household, and again the situations stemmed naturally from everyday happenings—cooking meals, Barbara's boy friends, Richard's habit of borrowing from Dad's wardrobe, and all the familiar misunderstandings.

The whole emerged as a choice blend of reality and farce—a blend which the senior Lyons have studied and brought to perfection. Everything had to be authentic. Each line was tried and tested, and if found wanting was ruthlessly discarded.

When it was decided, for example, that the Lyon Family should have a Scottish cook, it was not enough to have a character actress playing the part. It had to be someone with a genuine Scottish accent. The result was the engagement of Molly Weir from Glasgow who created one of the best-known comedy figures in radio—"Aggie."

I have held up the name of Eddie Maguire as that of an outstanding delineator of the domestic scene.

Maguire is not only able and inventive: his writing has about it the quality of warmth. He knows the people he's writing about. For many listeners the Huggetts could be the people down the street, and when you think that for many years Eddie Maguire has written a minimum of twenty-six stories every twelve months you can begin to understand the magnitude of the task. And "The Huggetts" is speech all the way through—"I can't break it up and save a few minutes with music, like you can often do in your programmes," he said not long ago.

Apart from his flair for handling the situations sympathetically there is great skill in the construction of these plots, and I would counsel you to listen carefully and see how the author puts his homely incidents together and leads smoothly to his pay-off. Eddie Maguire lent me some of his scripts so that I could choose an example of dialogue, and here is a scene selected more or less at random:

"THE HUGGETTS"

ETHEL: I don't know what your Dad's going to say, Bobby . . . if you go on like this you're going to be a failure. . . .

BOBBY: But I don't *like* doing Maths, Mum. . . .

ETHEL: I don't like doing housework—but it has to be done.

BOBBY: Okay—then let's swop over. *You* do *my* arithmetic and *I'll* push the vacuum cleaner.

JANE: Don't be cheeky, Bobby—Mum's only talking to you for your own good.

BOBBY: P'raps I don't *want* doing good!
JANE: P'raps we ought to let *Dad* decide that!
ETHEL: There's no need to start an argument about it. But your Dad's going to be very disappointed in you, Bobby. . . .
BOBBY: I wish *I* was Dad . . . *he* can do anything.
ETHEL: Only when he tries!
BOBBY: What good's Maths anyway? Dad got a good job without it. . . .
ETHEL: Yes—but he might have got a better one *with* it! And he's worked very hard to get as far as he has! Now just you go and get on with your homework.
BOBBY: Oh . . . okay . . . [*Going.*] But I don't think I am going to enjoy it. . . .

[*F/X—Door Closes.*]

JANE: Poor old Bobby—I know just how he feels, Mum—*I* didn't enjoy Maths either.
ETHEL: You didn't have to—you're a girl!
JANE: What difference does *that* make?
ETHEL: I dunno . . . but it ought to . . . Anyway—your Dad paid for you to learn your adding up on one of those machines!

[*F/X—Door Opens.*]

JOE: Aye, aye . . . why the worried look, Ethel?
ETHEL: Oh . . . er . . . we were just talking about young Bobby, dear. . . .
JOE: What is it this time—giraffes? [*Laughs.*] Don't worry, love—with Bobby's thirst for knowledge and a row of encyclopaedias to back him up, he'll soon be cleverer than the whole lot of us put together!
ETHEL: I wish he had as big a thirst for Maths!
JOE: Eh?
JANE: Mum's had a letter from his teacher at school, Dad . . .
JOE: Doing well, eh?
ETHEL: You'd better read it for yourself . . . here.

[*F/X—Rustle of Notepaper.*]

JOE: Lummee! No interest . . . falling behind . . . doesn't seem to think it matters! What does he think he's playing at?
ETHEL: Being like his Dad, I think!
JOE: Now hold on, Ethel—don't blame *me* for it!
JANE: She isn't, Dad . . . but you know how young Bobby likes to copy everything you do. . . .
JOE: Yes—but I didn't get school reports like *this* one!

ETHEL: No, dear—but Bobby says that you've done all right without Maths, so why should he worry?

JOE: *I'll* tell him why! Because without Maths nowadays a boy can't get *anywhere*! I *had* to manage without Maths—because I never got the chance. But don't think I don't regret it. I've learned quite a bit—but when some of the staff blokes start talking about ratios and trigonometry I'm completely lost!

ETHEL: You must be, dear . . . *I* don't even understand what they mean!

JOE: That doesn't matter, love—you don't need Maths to make a good rice pudding . . .!

ETHEL: Well—that's a comfort anyway!

JANE: But Dad—*I* wasn't any good at Maths either . . .

JOE: You're a girl, Jane!

JANE: Thanks! That's what Mum said. You'll soon have me believing it myself—once I've learned to make a good rice pudding!

ETHEL: You know what your Dad means, Jane. Bobby's got to make his way in the world—and he won't do it by ignoring things just because he doesn't like them!

JOE: Too true he won't!

[*F/X—Knocks on Door—Door Opens.*]

FRED: Hullo-ullo-ullo—guess who?

JOE: Get me a pencil and paper, Fred, and I'll try and work it out. . . .

FRED: Oh . . . have I butted in, Mrs. H.?

ETHEL: No more than usual, Fred. We were talking about young Bobby. . . .

JOE: Yes—he doesn't like Maths!

FRED: Oh—got good taste, hasn't he? *I* don't like 'em either! Ha-ha-ha. . . .

JOE: It's not funny, Fred. . . .

FRED: Oh—sorry, Joe. But we all have our likes and dislikes, you know. . . .

ETHEL: But we can't always please ourselves, Fred. *I* don't like housework. . . .

FRED: That's funny—neither does Clara! She says the vacuum makes her feel empty inside! Ha-ha-ha. Here—what don't *you* like, Jane?

JANE: People always telling me that I'm just a girl!

[*F/X—Door Slams.*]

Another first-rate idea gave us "Life of Bliss"—set in a somewhat higher income group than "The Huggetts."

Like many another broadcasting hit, "A Life of Bliss" was launched with a certain amount of head-shaking and pessimism. Would such a light and sophisticated comedy series have any sort of mass appeal?

"A Life of Bliss" grew from a suggested series called "The Medleys," about which no enthusiasm was shown at all—except by producer Leslie Bridgmont.

"I was determined that if it was the last thing I did I would get this series on the air," he told me. "With various changes of character, approval was at last given for us to do a limited number of performances. To everyone's surprise the show was immensely successful from the start.

"Although the comedy was so light it got the kind of belly-laughs from the audience that one expects only in the case of broad comics."

"THE LARKINS"

When "The Larkins" series—the fourth edition—elbowed its way on to our screens in 1960, author Fred Robinson—whom I nominate as one of the few writers who really deserves the adjective modest—permitted himself a wry smile, on two counts.

Fred, once a builder's clerk, remembered that the B.B.C. could have beaten ATV to the punch had they wished to do so; while, secondly, "The Larkins" was being staged at the Wood Green Empire, which is about half a mile down the road from the hall in which a company of amateurs acted the first "Larkins" play in 1948, or thereabouts.

To be fair to the B.B.C. I should say that when Fred Robinson submitted to sound radio a treatment of his very successful domestic series the Corporation were already committed to "The Huggetts," another Cockney family.

The original "Larkins" production was put on in Harringay by a company of—to use Fred Robinson's own expression—"Mums and Dads."

These were the parents of boys in the local scout group.

By the way, I'm telling you all this because here is a good example of my conviction that a good idea is never wasted, and it may give some of you heart.

"The youngsters put on their own shows," Fred recalls, "and their fathers and mothers thought it would be a good idea to raise some money by doing a show of their own, something more grown-up. I went along to play the piano—to help a friend of mine—and when I learnt that they couldn't afford to put on the kind of plays they wanted to, I said I'd have a go. The first 'Larkins' play was the result."

It was, with all its limitations, an enormous success locally, and Fred started writing other plays about the same characters. Ask him the reason why the television shows have been such a hit and Fred replies—and means it: "It's real teamwork. The cast is so blooming marvellous that you can believe in them. We couldn't have a better director, and as far as I'm concerned it's luck—just a happy knack.

"You can't really put your finger on the reason for success, can you? A chap can sit down and construct something which by all the rules should be a success. He can put in all the things people most like and enjoy, but even if he does it with a sort of clinical thoroughness it may still be flat and a flop—and nobody knows why."

Most viewers who are Larkins fans identify themselves or some relatives with the characters. Peggy Mount as Ada, David Kossoff as Alf, and the actors who play the rest of the family are certainly true to life, and if the situations are larger than life—who cares?

Fred gave me permission to give you this glimpse of how an idea in an author's mind is eventually tapped out on paper—in readiness for actors and producer to bring it all to life. . . .

The "girls" are in the parlour—a strictly temperance get-together—while the men have been indulging in a far from temperate get-together in the local.

Picking up the teatray, Ada leads the way into the living-room, where JOYCE *sits at the table.*]

JOYCE [*to* HETTY]: Hello, Hetty.

HETTY: Hello, Joyce. What, all on yer own?

JOYCE: Yes. I'm a grass widow this evening. Jeff's having a night out with Dad.

HETTY: Ooh. I never thought *'e* was like that.

ADA [*resenting this*]: 'E's not like that at all, wotever you may mean by "that." If you must know, Alf's gorn to a meeting, an' Jeff's gone along to take notes.

HETTY: That's funny. My Sam's out at a meeting.

JOYCE: P'raps it's the same one?

HETTY: I shouldn't think so. My Sam's Temperance. [*Catching* ADA*'s frown—hastily.*] Not that I'm against drinkin'—in moderation.

ADA [*with tea*]: Sugar? Or will you 'ave yours neat?

HETTY: Eh? Oh, now, no offence, Ada. I mean, we all know your Alf likes a drop, an' I say good luck to 'im. Well, it's *'is* life, isn't it?

ADA [*warningly*]: 'Etty. I'll tell you again: Alf's gorn to a meetin', an' if your thoughts immediately fly to drink, then I can only say you've got a warped mind.

BETTY: Well, really. . . .

ADA [*ominously*]: I don't want to 'ave to fall out with you, but it could be arranged.

HETTY [*preparing to join battle*]: Well, I'm very sorry, Ada, but . . .

ADA [*accepting this as an apology*]: That's all right, then. Don't jump to conclusions, that's all. Why, for all you know 'e might be at Choir Practice!

[ALF*'s voice is heard from the hallway RAISED IN BEERY SONG.*]

ALF [*off—fortissimo*]: Oh, Hi gorrer luverly buncher cokernuts. . . .

JEFF [*off—desperately*]: Sssshhhhh!

HETTY: M'm. That should go well after the sermon.

[ADA *stands glaring at the door. Once more,* ALF*'s bar-room baritone is heard from the hall—just the other side of the door.*]

ALF [*off—happily*]: . . . There they har a-standin' inner row. . . .

JEFF [*off—more desperately*]: Shhhhh!!!

ALF [*flinging the door wide*]: ". . . There stands me wife . . ."

[*The horrible aptness of the words makes him break off in mid-crotchet. For a long moment they face each other,* ALF *apparently being supported by* JEFF*, who looks most apprehensive,* ADA *regarding* ALF *grimly. Then* ALF *decides to try a nonchalant opening.*]

ALF [*with a brief nod*]: 'Evenin' all.

ADA [*in a terrible voice*]: And wot is the meaning of this?

ALF: The meanin' of wot? I wasn't 'ere, I just walked in.

ADA: Walked in? You can't even stand! [*To* JEFF.] Jeff, I'm surprised at you bringin' 'im 'ome like this!

[JEFF *looks more unhappy.*]

ALF: Now, listen, Ada, mate. . . . You're doin' me a grave injustice. I can stand all right. . . .

ADA: We'll see! Jeff! Let 'im go!

ALF [*anxiously*]: No. Ada . . .

ADA: Let 'im go, Jeff!

ALF: Ada . . .!

[*Accepting the inevitable,* JEFF *lets go of* ALF *and steps away.*]

JEFF [*owlishly*]: You shummena made me do that, Ma. . . .

[*Slowly, almost gracefully,* JEFF *sinks to his knees.*]

[ALF, *still perfectly upright, regards him compassionately;* ADA *and* JOYCE *with horror.*]

JOYCE: Jeff!

HETTY: 'E '*as* bin takin' notes, 'asn't 'e?

ADA [*ominously*]: Stay out of this, 'Etty Prout.

HETTY [*moving towards the door*]: I will. I don't want to get mixed up in it.

JEFF [*on his knees*]: Nor do I. I don' wan' any part of it!

ADA: You be quiet! We'll get to you later!

HETTY [*by the door*]: . . . But I'll say this: If my Sam came 'ome like that, I wouldn't know where to look.

ALF: Try the front-door step. That's where we left 'im.

HETTY [*aghast*]: What?

JEFF [*nodding solemnly*]: Yeah . . . Slee—ee—eepin' like a baby.

[*He makes cradling motions with his arms and nearly keels over.*]

ADA [*to* HETTY]: It takes the Temperance ones the worst. All right, 'Etty, I'll pop back with yer.

[*Looking very subdued,* HETTY *nods gratefully and exits.* ADA *pauses before following her.*]

[To JOYCE.] Joyce, you can 'ave your go at 'em first. I'll take over where you leave orf.

[*She exits after* HETTY.]

[JOYCE *looks down on* JEFF, *more in sorrow than anger.*]

Peggy Mount's deep contralto and double fortes and the Kossoff indignation must be heard and seen. But note how the author uses only words and phrases which ring true. Although the above accounts for only a few minutes playing time, the situation fits snugly into the story.

I have made the point that the best foundation for domestic comedy is fact rather than fiction. But this does not mean that all one has to do is to remember a string of funny sayings and put them down.

So many people have written to me at one time and another and said "I [or perhaps it was a friend] kept a party in fits of laughter by coming out with absolutely spontaneous jokes of which I enclose a selection."

Humour from the parlour, or even from the bar parlour, has its value, but one must not forget the vital importance of construction. A comedy sequence must be built up with care. The suspense must be maintained until the climax or pay-off. Each line and each implication must flow on naturally and fit smoothly into the pattern. I know it's easy enough to say this—but this is where intelligent listening can help tremendously.

The heyday of the broad, red-nosed, robust comic has departed. The funny-hat technique has (with one or two notable exceptions) vanished into limbo. The modern comedy script is a streamlined affair, and the best of them are polished and polished again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COLLABORATION

Two souls with but a single thought,
Two hearts that beat as one. . . .

Maria Anne Lovell

ARE two heads better than one?

Here is a question which every writer has asked himself or herself at one time and another. "Would it pay me to go into partnership with someone else?"

It's a fascinating theme, if only because people who get their living by the pen are on this point divided sharply into two camps. Either you are capable of sharing ideas, of being stimulated professionally by the company and conversation of another human being, or you find such a prospect infuriating. There *may* be a halfway house; but even if there is, I take it to be an uneasy lodging.

For some people collaboration has paid handsome dividends. In the world with which you and I are concerned consider such teams as those of Frank Muir and Denis Norden—of Ray Galton and Alan Simpson; of Bob Monkhouse and Denis Goodwin, and others.

These are writers whose compatibility makes the prospect of turning out entertainment scripts week after week, year after year, a boon. To them, obviously, it is a case of "doing what comes naturally." They have the gift of being able to share responsibility.

All the same, the business of forming a team to write television or radio scripts is not something to be undertaken lightly. In my own experience, having a passion for independence I have never been much of a success as a collaborator. Sometimes I wish to goodness I'd been less of a lone hunter. I've a feeling there would be more Pedrick coin stacked away.

There *have* been one or two people in my life with whom I felt I could work happily. The results have been limited—and reasonably successful. I suppose the total output of such colla-

boration to date amounts to three short radio plays—only a fraction of the many hundreds of contributions I've ground out over the years for various Drama, Documentary, Feature, Gramophone and Light Entertainment Departments.

The people I have chiefly in mind are fluent, highly intelligent people with an enviable vein of wit: but with engaging candour they are the first to admit that while they never find it difficult to write, they haven't any sort of flair for creating plots and situations.

Sometimes the choice of collaborator has been a matter of chance.

DIVISION OF LABOUR

Two writers may, perhaps, be introduced by a producer desperately trying to improve, or to salvage a series whose original author has failed to live up to expectations. They may be cheery, optimistic types who get on well, and decide to have a go for the fun of the thing. And there are the occasional husband-and-wife teams.

One is tempted to speak glibly about two or more writers being *en rapport*, or *sympathique*. This, I fancy, raises the subject to a plane far too lofty altogether. Obviously, the people concerned must like each other and be happy together, from the human standpoint. I don't think it is inevitable or even necessary for them to have the same interests off duty.

Certainly, they shouldn't live in each other's pockets. The ideal arrangement is when the parties agree on precisely what their respective responsibilities will be. In this matter there should be absolutely no doubt whatever.

In a characteristically casual way Frank Muir once said: "People often ask us how we work. The truth is that I choose the words and Denis arranges them." It was, of course, an agreeably flippant remark, but it had—in relation to the whole topic of collaboration—a core of wisdom.

There are certain types of programmes in which a writing partnership can be immensely successful. Mainly, one finds, these succeed in the world of comedy.

I don't see any young author, fired with inspiration and the

making of a masterpiece, seeking to share his thoughts with anyone else. The great thing in his case is to get everything down on paper as swiftly as possible. On the other hand, there are types of work in which splendid results can be achieved by co-operation with a kindred spirit.

The problem, as I found it, is almost entirely a personal one. As a comparatively infrequent collaborator I sometimes realised to my horror that I was letting the eager second-string do the major part of the work and, worse still, was delighted to let him get on with it. At other times, carried away by enthusiasm, I was (to vary the metaphor) the self-elected front legs of the performing horse, and becoming impatient with the hind legs!

The first rewarding partnership I encountered in the world of broadcasting was a three-handed one—that of Tommy Handley, Ted Kavanagh and Francis Worsley. It was tragic that Worsley's death followed so closely on that of the comic genius he nourished so skilfully. Then, only a few years ago, Ted Kavanagh, that lively unquenchable spirit, left us to join those other genial shades who had preceded him.

It should be written somewhere for all to read that Tommy Handley, in the fiendish forties of our century, made more folk laugh than any other native comedian—and by laugh I don't mean smile.

Yet for all the fame his sublime tomfoolery brought him, Handley remained One of Us. Maybe that was the secret—the Handley touch. I never knew such a fellow for keeping his end up and his ego down.

You might think that a quarter of a century of broadcasting would have in some fashion left its mark, blunted the edge of his wit. Not a bit of it. Handley's style, if anything, became crisper and more polished than ever. When he was at work gags streamed from his lips much as sparks fly from the engine of a night express, and for the same reason. Neither Tommy nor the train could help it.

PHILOSOPHY OF A COMIC

Handley approached his job with refreshing candour. "I'm just lucky enough to have a voice that people like." He explained

it as simply as that. "That Man" was the cause of laughter in princes. Children loved him and knew his nonsense patter by heart. The office boy and the managing director, the burglar and the bobby who ran him in, all found common ground in their liking for Handley. Yet I happen to know that the compliment Tommy valued most came to him from a mother whose sons were fighting overseas during the war and who wrote to him: "You sound like a nice man. I am sure my boys would like you."

Well, Handley *was* a nice man. After all, he was for years Britain's Number One radio artist, and nobody would have thought less of him had he done a little to advertise the fact. But sleek limousines were not for him: he preferred a push-bike. Had he wished he could have lorded it in Mayfair, but his flat in town was modest and at the week-end he was content to browse away his Sunday with the papers and a book.

Like almost every great droll who went before him Handley took life, and especially his working life, seriously. Not so many years before the coming of radio the giants of the music-hall would buy for a few guineas (or would write for themselves) an act which lasted them for years.

How drastically the pattern changed. Handley, Kavanagh and Worsley realised that the technique of radio buffoonery is partly a flair for finding fresh situations and new twists to old gags. After all, the men behind "ITMA"—the star, the author, the indispensable producer—had to face something like forty "first-nights" in succession every year for about ten years.

They realised, once their show was certain to be a winner, that the script was more than one man's job. Kavanagh's dry humour and quicksilver mind was a priceless asset, but the others could and did contribute a great deal. Ted Kavanagh would work on his own until he had found some novel situation or central theme. This he would develop—sometimes in the war-days scribbling his notes on the marble top of a washstand in some modest boarding-house. Then would come the next process —conversations in which ideas and wisecracks would flash from one to the other. Gags would pass with the speed of light.

WORDS BY FRANK AND DENIS

More and more in comedy shows those of us who were perforce behind the scenes saw how much the intelligent laughter-maker can contribute himself.

You have only to listen to or see on TV the programme "My Word!" to realise that Frank Muir and Denis Norden are natural humorists—in the best sense of the term. That unpretentious programme, nurtured in the Midlands, probably contains more gags and puns to the square half-minute than any other spontaneous show on the air.

As young men recently out of the Services, Frank and Denis learnt much of their technique from Ted Kavanagh—and one of the things he taught them was: "Don't even bother to open the gag-book."

Even these two highly organised and civilised writers are the first to admit that they have been lucky with their artists and producers. By trial and error they came to know instinctively the kind of dialogue, the phrases, the shades of meaning and the very words which would best suit the characters of the performers concerned in, let's say, "Take It From Here," or "Whack-O!"

They don't proceed strictly according to the book. For one thing, they like to write the last item in a programme first. This is something I can understand. How many brilliant ideas have foundered simply because the author or authors had a first-class idea but did not know how to follow it through to its appointed end.

Experience showed Muir and Norden that they could not be happy about any script until they knew how it was going to finish.

How do they work? On a strictly businesslike basis. Writers in the best-selling class, from Trollope and Arnold Bennett down to modern times have discovered and exploited the virtues of routine.

WRITING TO THE CLOCK

Everybody who gets his living by weaving words and sentences knows what a dangerously easy thing it is to allow one's

thoughts to wander and to put off until tomorrow what should be done today. The deadline is the greatest saviour of talent I know.

How many fine books, entertaining plays, have been lost because the writer, starting off with a first, fine, fierce zest, was distracted, lost the thread and, with the thread, the will to carry on?

So Muir and Norden, when engaged in producing one of their inimitable comedy shows, work to the strictest timetable.

"There's a job for each day," is how they put it to me, "and if by six o'clock we haven't finished the daily stint we just stay on until we have. In some writing partnerships we know the people work separately and then, as it were, join their efforts up. But we don't do it that way. We always work together. If one of us hits on a joke, the other must think it is funny—or else it is thrown away. In this way, every line suggested by one of us is filtered through the other. And we laugh quite a lot while we work."

From time to time some of the situations they use are based on things which happen in the everyday life of the cast. For instance, the week Jimmy Edwards bought a horse, "Matchless," they didn't have to look any further for at least one spot.

One morning would be devoted to reading through the entire script line by line with the producer. It would then be typed for rehearsal, and here some lines might have to be cut out and topical gags added. The authors used to claim that it took all of five days to write each edition of "Take It From Here."

They refuse, on principle, to write on one level. In other words they try to make their shows good value for every type of viewer or listener.

"We frequently use broad gags—slapstick in words, you might say," they told me, "but we also like to put in jokes now and again that couldn't possibly have a general appeal. Quips about ballet or about T. S. Eliot, for instance. But the trick is, of course, to *balance* the thing, and if we use an 'advanced' gag, well, we make sure of writing a broad one for good measure."

Theirs is a true partnership in the sense that they never separate while at work or divide the script chores between them. They move about restlessly, speaking lines as they imagine their

artists will say them, wrecking "the office" every now and again by trying out sound-effects with chairs, books or anything at hand.

For years "Take It From Here" was about the best we had to offer in British comic radio. It was liked by listeners in very different walks of life, and yet, at first glance, it was surprising that the show should be so *universally* popular. It was sophisticated; it relied firmly on burlesque and satire; and it had some of the elements of intimate revue.

This is not "the book way" to build a popular series. Sophistication has never been markedly to the taste of the man in the street. Writers who woo the largest audiences avoid satire like the plague. Devotees of intimate revue are limited. How, then, did "Take It From Here" contrive to amuse and stimulate such a representative audience?

Youth must obviously be part of the answer. The boys and girls of "Take It From Here" were expert in post-war humour, the humour of their own generation. And the same may be said of the "Whack-O!" team.

WRITING FOR TONY

One partnership which has grown and flourished is that of Ray Galton and Alan Simpson.

I like to reflect that I had a hand in putting this impressive team on its feet. Ray and Alan have always been generous enough to make a point of this in speeches and in print, a compliment which has always warmed my heart. Not because I expect such acknowledgment but because such a tribute is rare in these days, and when it happens—well, it does you good.

In my days as the pioneer radio Script Editor, I had an office on the third floor of the Aeolian Hall. Often I would pace up and down a carpet I had provided myself—only the highest executives in those days were permitted the luxury of floor covering—and long for the rare advent of a promising bit of comedy writing.

I was never a harsh critic, I hope, but in those strange days, which now have a dreamlike quality, my small staff and I talked in person to more than two thousand writers—and read scripts

by the score every day. If at the end of a year one per cent of these novices had made any sort of impact we were lucky.

One day I read a script which had been sent in from these endearing characters, who shared two vital statistics—they were both six foot four inches tall and were both eighteen years old. They'd sent in a comedy sketch written in longhand on foolscap paper. It came from an address in South London. There was no telephone number, so I sent them a telegram.

Within hours they were showing the flimsy to the commissionaire at the Aeolian Hall, and in less time than it takes to tell these massive young men were making my office even smaller than it was.

I was able to introduce them to a producer who had that morning been lamenting the scarcity of funny sketches. From that moment they never looked back.

It is difficult (and, after all, it doesn't mean very much) to assess incomes: there are so many factors to be taken into consideration. But in 1958 it was said that their joint annual income was something like thirteen thousand pounds. With the placing of Tony Hancock's television series this figure may well have been doubled, and I would not do them the injustice of saying that their current income is not considerably more.

But don't run away with the idea that life has been easy for these two boys. They first met in the Milford Chest Hospital in Surrey where they were both undergoing treatment for T.B. They listened to the radio in bed, side by side, while weaving baskets or enjoying the programmes which came over on the hospital's closed circuit station. They came to the conclusion that they could do better, and that's how it all started.

They began to write for Derek Roy, then for Frankie Howerd, and eventually for Tony Hancock.

They are versatile writers, but I suppose that their greatest success has certainly been creating hilarious situations for Anthony Aloysius St. John Hancock, and writing funny lines for him to say. Skilfully, they hit upon precisely the best way to write for a single artist—Hancock. They say, "We know Tony so well that we instinctively know what he is going to say in any given situation long before he says it. We don't work

deliberately with the idea of leaving the audience feeling sorry for the 'boy' getting into such jams—but they always do."

Hancock himself has this to say: "Those two know me better than I know myself. They are for ever watching my mannerisms and listening to what I say."

Like Muir and Norden, Galton and Simpson have the "office" approach.

"Laughter-making," they say, "is a business. We work strictly office hours. After all, there's not much fun working with cold towels and black coffee, waiting for the dawn to come up."

LYONS IN THEIR DEN

There is also what one might describe as the family partnership, and I'm thinking in particular of Bebe Daniels, Ben Lyon, and their children, Barbara and Richard.

I am sure none of these delightful people would wish to diminish the loyal service they've had over the years from a number of radio-writers—notably, Bob Block and Ronnie Hanbury; but it is no secret that Bebe herself has been the driving force behind a series of comedy programmes which go on indefatigably year after year.

Bebe herself is quite tireless, and all who have taken any hand in "Hi, Gang!" or in "Life with the Lyons" will tell you of those lengthy sessions which went on remorselessly throughout the night. It wasn't a question of burning the midnight oil. The lamps were still glowing until one o'clock, two, three, four and five in the morning.

The Lyons are courteous and friendly people, but even a close friend on being told that "Bebe is busy in the cellar" would gently replace the receiver. He would know that this was no time for idle chatter!

"The cellar" was the workroom in the basement of the house in Southwick Street, W.2, where they lived and worked for more than twenty years—and where the young Lyons grew up.

The Lyons favoured the intense method of writing a script—by which I mean that every gag, every pause and every inflexion was discussed, improved and polished, its final impact upon the audience gauged to the last guffaw, checked to the last chuckle.

The draft script would be read and read again, at conferences attended by the Family, the producers and the writers: and if, on mature and sometimes prolonged consideration, a line failed to come up to expectations, it was ruthlessly discarded. The hundreds of scripts, broadcast and re-broadcast in Britain, and transmitted again overseas were classic examples of collaboration carried to its limit—and to how successful a limit there is no need to inquire.

In their professional life the two senior (and founder) members of the Lyon family have been astonishingly and commendably constant. Goodness knows how many times they have been on the air—"We count our broadcasts instead of sheep!" they say.

Yet throughout the whole of their twenty-four-year stay in Britain they have appeared in only two series shows—"Hi, Gang!" which gave us so many laughs when laughter was in such short supply, and "Life with the Lyons." How many other top-line artists can claim such a record?

At one time nothing could have seemed more unlikely than that two young and internationally famous stars should wish to leave Hollywood and settle down in Bayswater.

They came to play a week's engagement in Dublin and to appear at the London Palladium; also to spend a holiday in Europe. Those weeks were somehow extended to a stay of ten years. Then, after a visit to America, Bebe and Ben returned to London for good. Ben confided: "It's a funny thing, but when we did go back to California on a visit after the war, we felt quite lost—like foreigners in our own country. Somehow we realised that home meant London not Hollywood."

It is probably impossible to grow old in the company of such lively spirits as Barbara and Richard, and one finds it hard to believe that in their teens both their parents were stars in Hollywood's golden age. Bebe was discovered by Cecil B. de Mille, made comedies with Harold Lloyd (to whom she was once engaged), was Rudolph Valentino's leading lady in *Monsieur Beaucaire* and gave a classic performance in the screen musical *Rio Rita*. At the same time, Ben was appearing on the New York stage and in pictures, acting with stars of the calibre of Gloria Swanson and Pola Negri. He made an immense reputation in the Howard Hughes epic, *Hell's Angels*.

Ben volunteered for active service with the U.S. Air Force; Bebe was the first woman civilian to land in Normandy after D-Day, and was later decorated with the Medal of Freedom, with two battle-stars. Lieutenant-Colonel Lyon was awarded the Legion of Merit.

Bebe and Ben were among the first performers who taught us to look out for the catch-phrase—still a novelty. One day a destroyer's commander saw at dawn the outline of a ship. Danger from enemy submarines was great and he insisted on immediate identification. A firm signal was sent out to the stranger vessel. To the delight and astonishment of all, the reply that flashed back without delay was "No, not you, Momma, sit down!"

MONKHOUSE AND GOODWIN

How often have I heard the words: "A comedian is only as good as his script."

Maybe there's some truth in it, but, at the same time, let me pipe up on behalf of my craft and say that the unhappy script-writer is all too often the performer's best alibi. If things go wrong and an artist reads a genial sneer written by his favourite critic, it is all too easy to say: "Yes—but what could anybody do with a script like that?"

To be misunderstood is one of our occupational hazards, and it has ever been so since the days of Grub Street, when there was no broadcasting—only broadsheets.

Some comedians are brave enough to write their own material, thereby depriving themselves of a useful excuse. Bob Monkhouse is a classic example (aided and abetted by his faithful partner, Denis Goodwin). I remember the time, not so many years ago, when Monkhouse knocked regularly at my office door in Bond Street to see if there was any work going—not as a funny-man but as a writer.

A job as a newspaper cartoonist had been the outlet for his sense of fun, but he was new to the broadcasting game. Bob got—and deserved—the traditional lucky break, and I'm glad to say that he has never looked back.

Bob Monkhouse and Denis Goodwin have been partners for

a dozen years or so. Goodwin had been helping to write "Life With the Lyons," and Monkhouse, a freelance cartoonist, had already made his first broadcast in one of those numerous programmes for beginners.

They both went to Dulwich College, and while Bob was drawing cartoons Denis was selling radio sets. But he always had an urge to find out how to make the noises which came out of the sets he tried to sell.

They talked things over, and having realised that they couldn't make a living out of their broadcasting, writing seemed to be the thing. Bob said: "It seemed a sensible plan to try to sell to other people the ideas we couldn't get a chance to do ourselves."

So they started writing for comedians, the first of whom was Harold Berens. They had a chance to show what they could do in a Derek Roy series, but it was a later show, "Calling All Forces," that really put Monkhouse and Goodwin on the map as writers.

Their experience as performers helped, and they went on to write eighty-one scripts for "Calling All Forces" without a break. Then they started writing for Arthur Askey in "Hullo, Playmates"—a series which won a National Radio Award.

They learnt much from Askey, whose impromptu work, his ad libbing, is in a class by itself. About the Big-Hearted one Monkhouse says: "Sometimes, you see, a script is not enough. If there's a fluff, or if the audience isn't quite in tune with the comic, then he has to invent comedy as well as read it. Arthur Askey is the supreme example of a comic who, even when he has been given nothing very funny to say, can keep people laughing. So few artists can do that."

Monkhouse and Goodwin went on to write still more successful series, including their own TV series "My Pal Bob," and they joined the select band of British authors to write material for Bob Hope. Their names are linked with the controversial "Candid Camera" series (or the Barmy World of Jonathan Routh!).

Without any doubt, one of the classic partnerships is that of the men who give us "The Archers"—Geoffrey Webb and Edward J. Mason.

In this famed programme we observe the success of what

must be regarded as one of the simplest, and at the same time one of the most original ideas in the story of these radio times. The harvest from this single idea has provided something on a bigger scale than Dan Archer ever dreamed of.

The ingenuity of Mason and Webb is nothing short of amazing. They never seem to have been short of a situation, and the story of the Archers has flowed smoothly on day after day, week after week, year after year. I shan't attempt to give you figures dealing with the hours of broadcasting and so on, because presumably the Archers and their friends will still be toiling, arguing, loving and living long after you're reading these words.

We will always, I imagine, have the soloists—the virtuoso writers like Ted Willis, Godfrey Harrison (of "Life of Bliss"), Carey Edwards, Roy Plomley and so on. But the writing teams outnumber these and the other single-handed authors. The pages of the *Radio Times* and the *TV Times* should give some indication of what I mean. On the day I wrote this chapter I read the programme-billings in both these publications.

To my surprise, there were no double or multiple credits at all in the *TV Times*—but this may not be so surprising as it seemed to me at first, because there were singularly few writers' credits at all. This, to my mind, is distinctly odd—and just one more item of proof that in Britain the author has a pretty stiff battle for recognition.

In the *Radio Times*, however, there were plenty of credits to illustrate what I've said. Here are some of them:

Author	*Title*
MICHAEL BENTINE JOHN LAW	"Round the Bend"
CHARLIE DRAKE DAVID CUMMING DEREK COLLYER	Charlie Drake Shows
BARRY TOOK PETER JONES MARTY FELDMAN	"We're in Business"
ALAN REEVE-JONES EDWIN BRADEN	"Sentimental Journey"

Barry Took Hugh Woodhouse	"Hi Summer!"
Bernard Botting Charles Hart	"Yes, It's Great Yarmouth"
Dick Vosburgh Brad Ashton	"The Jimmy Logan Show" *and* additional material for "London Lights"
Charlie Chester Charles Hart Bernard Botting	"The Charlie Chester Show"
Patrick Campbell Vivienne Knight	"Don't Do It, Dempsey"
Tony Shryane Edward J. Mason	"Guilty Party" (devised by)
Edward J. Mason Geoffrey Webb	"The Archers"
Peter Myers Ronald Cass	"Be My Guest" *also* writers of lyrics and music for "The Jimmy Logan Show"
Barry Took Marty Feldman	Frankie Howerd Shows
Rikki Fulton David Whitaker	"Make Mine Music"

SYKES AT LARGE

The inclusion in the above list of the two Charlies, Drake and Chester, does underline one interesting point—namely that often the comedian takes a fairly firm line in the preparation of his own material, especially when a series is involved.

Eric Sykes is another writer turned comic who has only himself to blame if script and situations are not up to scratch. Sykes won his spurs writing for Peter Brough and Archie. Now he has discovered for himself a very pretty line in what one might call pawky buffoonery.

He is the perfect foil for other laughter-makers—Harry Secombe, for example. Some of their funniest moments have,

in fact, been scriptless; that Morris dance sequence was one of the most diverting that I've ever seen on the television screen.

Kenneth Horne and Richard Murdoch in their "Much-Binding" days, took pride in writing their own special brand of topical, inconsequential comedy.

Many a time I have seen them, huddled in the writing-room of the Royal Automobile Club, scribbling gags likely to raise laughs in millions of homes.

Alan Melville, who naturally writes his own material—his "Melvillainy" programmes were unique—is an older friend of broadcasting than most people imagine.

The first time he ever faced a microphone was at the age of fifteen when he read from the Manchester studios some stories for Children's Hour under the title "The Adventures of the Pink Knight."

Later he became one of the regulars with Eric Fogg (Uncle Eric), Muriel Levy (Auntie Muriel) and Doris Campbell (Auntie Doris).

It was originally intended that he should go into the family timber business—but Alan found life as a freelance writer and broadcaster a great deal more attractive.

It took Britain a long time to get the idea, but for years top-line American laughter-makers have cheerfully absorbed the work of eight or a dozen writers. They act on the assumption that the best results come about through sharpening one's wits against those of someone else. We've been talking mainly of comedy. In drama the picture is different.

Authors who throw in their lot with each other must, then, work out as foolproof a way of writing as possible. If the partnership is going to succeed this won't be difficult. If there are any doubts whatever that the division of labour is not a fair and acceptable one—then throw up the whole idea and, if you must, find someone else.

Friendly arguments make for easy working. Imagination is nourished on discussion.

In the more straightforward field of drama the division is possibly even more clear-cut. Generally, you will find that one of the people concerned is inventive and has little difficulty in thinking out the situations. That's fine, for the other—the

Martha of the team—gets down to the typewriter. He or she is only too delighted to have a "line" to follow and the words come pouring out.

It is just a case of tossing the ball to and fro. But here is an example of what might happen when two professional writers, Tom and Jerry, get together:

TOM: We were going to get on with that idea of mine about the famous woman aviator who takes off one day in a single-seater plane and just never comes back—

JERRY: All right, we'll do that next. I'll take some notes as we go along. Your idea was that this woman, whoever she is, should be a kind of mixture of a well-known actress, an explorer and a flier—in fact, someone whose name is known all over the world.

TOM: Yes, an international character who has always been hitting the headlines. A sort of mixture of Amy Johnson, Rosita Forbes and any genuinely famous actress you can think of.

JERRY: I've got it: and the basic plot is that some well-known writer has been commissioned to write a life story of this old girl—

TOM: Old girl? Well, yes, I see what you mean. But not so very old. Round about forty-eight, fifty-two kind of thing?

JERRY: That's right. The disappearance would naturally have caused a terrific sensation at the time—and there's always that little bit of doubt that she might just possibly be alive.

TOM: That the vanishing trick was a fake job?

JERRY: M'm. And, of course, this does have the merit of being feasible. After all, Amy Johnson took off and vanished during the war, and so did Glenn Miller. And before the war there was the Duchess of Bedford, who got into her single-seater plane and was never seen again.

TOM: All right. We've got as far as that. What happens now?

JERRY: I think this could make a six-part serial. The story would go like this: the writer, who is a really well-known chap—writes best-sellers and film-scripts—sets about writing the biography in the ordinary way, but when he gets down to making serious inquiries he finds an odd sort of conspiracy of silence. The people who knew this rather colourful, adventurous character we're talking about in an intimate way are rather inclined to close up—

TOM: Our friend begins to be rather puzzled by this attitude. . . .

JERRY: That's right. He can't give it a name, but there's definitely enough opposition to the proposed book to intrigue him.

TOM: Anyhow, to put it in a nutshell the story goes that the more

he probes the private life of this woman the more curious facts he uncovers. She was tremendously wealthy for one thing—

JERRY: And although she would obviously be well off, it's difficult to account for the evidence of really remarkable wealth—money and property stacked away in all parts of the world.

TOM: And then we gradually lead up to the suspense part of it—and this character really can still be alive, perhaps, controlling some terrific underground organisation—mainly criminal, but with some political implications—

JERRY: Well, I think that should last for six instalments. [*He laughs.*] Nice work if we can sell the film rights.

TOM: Touch wood.

JERRY: Well, I think it's a jolly good idea. How do we start Episode One?

TOM: Let's try to do something different. How about starting it at the première of a film this writer chap—we'd better find a name for him soon—is going to.

JERRY: His own film, of course.

TOM: That's it. We can have the effects of the sound-track and a smart audience talking, and getting so much on this chap's nerves that he has to go out and have a drink—

JERRY: And in the bar he meets the man who was the confidential secretary of our heroine—and starts trying to make him talk.

TOM: O.K. Let's start making notes for the script. "Effect of film première audience chatter. Theme music of film starts up and talk dies down. Half a minute of theme music, with latecomers whispering, banging of seats and so on, and then sound-track dialogue begins. . . ."

JERRY: That's fine. We'll take it from there. . . .

Of course, once having found a really good partner there's only one drawback. You have to share the fee! But if you'd been on your own and either hadn't the idea to work upon in the first place or the ability to develop the idea afterwards then there wouldn't have been a fee at all—so why worry?

Every writer who sees clearly the view ahead knows the value of enlisting the expert. I mention, for it is interesting, another form of collaboration.

Ted Willis, for example, who is a man bursting with ideas and whose imagination never flags, was certainly not above asking those who knew police work from personal experience to help him with his nonstop series of television plays, "Dixon

of Dock Green." One of the chief merits of "Dixon" is its authenticity. Willis makes it as true to life as possible in every detail.

Even policemen could not fault the way George Dixon and his chums at the sign of the Blue Lamp in Dock Green talked and went about their work. Early on, Willis saw how valuable it would be to base his scripts on incidents which had happened in real life.

He advertised to the effect that he would be glad to hear from men and women in the Police Force, and would see that any situation he used would not go unrewarded. The result was that true stories came flooding in, and today Ted Willis has available original and human stories which could keep the Dixon series running for years to come.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ADAPTATIONS

> The history of Art is the history of revivals.
>
> *Samuel Butler*

PLAY for safety, rely on the tried and the true. . . . Only the hard-boiled, or the professional plyers of verbal shock-tactics ever put this thought into words: but you know how it is, or if you don't you should by now.

Don't be disheartened (why should you be?) if now and again the Planners pick and hammer their way back through the literature of half a dozen generations and resurrect the works of the gaslight best-sellers.

Even in the searing sixties of the twentieth century, the majority of us want something more than plays based on violence, broken marriages, juvenile delinquency and the curious sub-human acceptance of what has been called the Chelsea Set and its apparently repellent habits. Say what you like, the novelists who flourished at the turn of the century, and in that fertile period twenty years earlier, still knew how to tell a story: and personally I am all for seeing that these superb, economically-told adventure yarns are not wasted.

A writer may, in fact, engage upon quite a thriving trade in adaptations of famous books. Not only for sound radio—in which the leisurely reconstruction of the fascinating past is specially acceptable—but in the breathless, thrombosis-ridden age of the "goggle-box."

A number of writers have, in recent years, made a very good thing out of their own interpretation of the classics. One small but not unimportant factor is that in so many cases these bulky works (yes, bulky, for we all know how the Victorian and Edwardian novelists were far more generous with regard to the number of pages they wrote per novel than their modern counterparts) are out of copyright.

After all, since one is using someone else's story and is perfectly free to quote—or bring up to date—chunks of dialogue,

the fees for adaptations are naturally rather less than for original work. The B.B.C.'s practice is to pay half the customary fee paid for original material, but if you're not happy about this the way is still open for discussion. Fair enough: one can't very well quarrel with it. And I do repeat that here is a market not to be overlooked.

At one time and another most of the major British novelists—Miss Austen, Trollope, Thackeray, Dickens, Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy—have been posthumously enlisted as scriptwriters. The B.B.C. began it, and commercial television follows suit after its own fashion.

The works of writers of the calibre of Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, the Baroness Orczy and Stanley Weyman were ideal subjects for sound radio—with many a field-day for the Effects Department.

If you haven't seen an effects "boy" simulating a sword-fight by banging an old music-stand with a stick, and practically bringing on an occupational seizure with the effort, you've missed a stimulating experience.

The stories, with all their romantic meetings, diabolical plots, duels, heroic dashes across Europe, thefts of glittering jewels and all the rest of it, were told with tremendous zest. Incident followed incident at a spanking pace which would leave many of our current best-sellers winded after the first couple of laps. All this made for good cloak-and-dagger stuff—easy to dramatise and easier still to listen to.

Television was not slow in seeing the virtues of such stories for dramatisation. To begin with, it was obvious that in this direction, at least, the murderous desperate hunt for stories could be eased somewhat. Whatever the faults those bygone writers may have had they did know how to spin their stories—and Heaven knows, they were never stuck for a plot.

On the other hand, when original stories have been launched (with all the inevitable ballyhoo inseparable from such ventures) it has too often been found that after scripts three and four are "in," invention flags and the familiar last-minute scramble to employ script-doctors and ideas-men must begin.

One can say of television that at least it has never scorned the

advantages of learning from radio. After all, most of its successful producers were brought up in a world of sound.

Had there been any doubt about the wisdom of using classics to be found on the shelves of any public library (and most private ones) the example of the cinema—which was never in business for the sake of its health—was there to add weight. Hollywood never bothered to rely completely on the work of newcomers. It cheerfully made its forays into the world of the classics. High-powered productions of *Ben Hur*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and scores of others, were massively mounted with a fine disregard of what Miss Brontë or Monsieur Verne would have thought about the results.

"A fine piece of hokum," said the critics about the 1960 version of Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth.*

On the whole, televised adaptations have been exceptionally well done. I can remember Miss Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*; that absorbing tale of legal procrastination by Dickens, *Bleak House*; Sir Walter's *Redgauntlet*; H. G. Wells' *Mr. Polly* and *Ann Veronica*; and others, all written by men or women whose imagination soared to heights compared with which television had barely left the nursery floor. There was also on television an excellent and most workmanlike version of Trollope's *Barchester Towers* by Peter Black, one of the few constructive critics of television. (Mind you, he has more space than some to be constructive in!)

Of later vintage, we had in 1960 stories based on Edgar Wallace's *The Four Just Men*, but based so freely as to be fairly unrecognisable so far as my own memories of the Great Edgar go. "It is impossible not to be thrilled by Edgar Wallace," was the slogan blazing round Britain in his lifetime. Could the same be said of those television tales? Well . . .

Wallace himself, with his alert reporter's eye, would have made short work of television assignments: there would have been no stopping him. I saw this master of the deadline many times in his home in Portland-place: and also in Fleet-street. For the paper on which I worked, Wallace tipped a horse every day (fabulous payment for what was sometimes a single word). But much as he loved horses his luck on the Turf was—well, variable, to say the least of it.

FICTION BY INSTALMENTS

Also on the screens of Britain in 1960 were a succession of *The Third Man* stories, and dramatised versions of some of the famous Maugham tales. I mention these because they are in a somewhat different category from the adaptations I had in mind just now.

Books like *The Prisoner of Zenda* by Anthony Hope, for example, and Conan Doyle's *Rodney Stone*, could be developed by a single writer in the comfort of his home—or in the case of someone who is, as I am, fundamentally idle—from the deliberate discomfort of a hard office chair. (If this personal foible is of the slightest interest to anyone, I find it practically impossible to work in an easy chair. Give me a hard seat and a room that is preferably not too warm, and I am all for getting finished as quickly as possible.)

The point I am making is that while the dramatisation of a Victorian novel can be attempted by one person, the modern crime thriller on television—with certain obvious exceptions like the gifted Francis Durbridge, Michael Gilbert and Berkeley Mather—is often thrown open, as it were, to competition. Many of the stories that went to the making of *The Third Man*, *The Four Just Men*, *Murder Bag*, *Shadow Squad*, and so on, were the work of different authors.

If you ask me how on earth the everyday writer can possibly read the crystal ball clearly enough to find out just what is wanted—well, there are only one or two ways of going about it. It may be, let us assume, that one of the ITV companies proposes to present a series based on the celebrated medico-legal character of Dr. Thorndike. They might do worse, at that.

But if the series is so successful that the first thirteen programmes become twenty-six, and the demand looks like continuing, and if, also, not all the numerous existing stories are suitable—then how do you get in on the band-wagon which conveys to the studio floor the *next* series of thirteen stories?

The first move—provided, that is, that you have not thought of the idea yourself, in which case you are in anyway—is to study the radio columnists for advance information and to read, in particular, *The Stage*, which incorporates "Television Today." I should point out that this is not a gratuitous plug

for that fine old veteran in the world of newspapers: its centre pages make up the official organ of the Screen Writers' Guild. If reference is made to some new venture, the name of the producer will be given, and the next step to take is to write to him suggesting the outline of a story with the relevant characters very much in mind.

The second method is to become acquainted with an agent. I shall talk about the agent, this invaluable adviser, later on.

ADAPTING FOR SOUND

I have been thinking mainly about television in these last few pages: but for many many years the B.B.C. Drama and Features Department has been presenting adaptations of best-sellers. Alan Burgess, for example, has been producing a series of programmes under the title "With Courage."

I was asked to do one of these and so can speak with some experience. The book in question was *Skorzeny's Special Mission*. Otto Skorzeny was the daring Austrian officer whose most sensational exploit was the abduction of Mussolini under the very eyes of his guards. The Duce, it will be remembered, had fallen from power and was being closely guarded. The location of his "prison" was kept a close secret and was the subject of intense speculation on the part of the German High Command.

Captain Skorzeny was summoned to the Führer's Secret Headquarters. Apart from the fact that it was somewhere in Prussia and had a code-name—"Wolf's Den"—he had no idea where it was.

Once they were alone, Hitler told Skorzeny that he had an important commission for him. Mussolini, said Hitler, had been "betrayed by his king and arrested by his own countrymen." He wasn't going to leave "Italy's greatest son" in the lurch. Gradually, Skorzeny realised that the Führer was telling him, no less, that Mussolini had to be rescued, and promptly. If this did not happen the deposed dictator would be handed over to the Allies.

That was only the beginning, because Mussolini's whereabouts were a mystery, and before the raiders eventually

descended from the skies to snatch Benito from his hideout there were false moves, checks and delays.

One point which had to be remembered was that one wanted to give a true and dramatic picture of the incident without making the leading character who was an enemy, if a brave one, too sympathetic.

This problem I overcame by letting a voice set the tale in a friendly, easy-to-listen-to way. This is how the introduction went:

VOICE [*as if talking to listeners quietly and conversationally*]: No one with any feeling or sense would lift a voice—or a pen—to glorify war. Certainly no one who saw it, felt it, heard it or smelt it at close quarters. But now and again in all that welter of blood and sweat and among all those grim and dreary communiqués—which in one mood of desperation you'd believe and in another kind you wouldn't—there'd come just an isolated tale of impudence and daring and courage that enlivened for a moment the whole sordid business. We'd read of some exploit or other—and don't forget they happened not only on our side but the other side as well—which made us smile at a time when Heaven alone knows smiles were hard enough to come by. They had about them, these exploits, a quality which smacked almost of the schoolboy "dare." They were grim enough, in cold truth, with their quota of death and treachery and broken limbs and bodies, but invariably it was as though they were illumined by a radiance which had in it some gleam of chivalry and—if the word isn't too inappropriate altogether—of fun. Such was the successful attempt in 1943 to rescue from confinement by his own countrymen, Benito Mussolini, the discredited Duce who, to quote the popular song, "thought the Mediterranean was an Italian lake." It was cheeky, brave and improbable—and an adventure in which a small but happy band of comrades gambled their lives to free an elderly, tubby, unshaven Dictator who'd fallen on evil days. Of all "Skorzeny's Special Missions" it was the most special of all, and it earned him the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, and the title of "the most dangerous man in Europe." The *dramatis personae* was exceptional. Heading the cast—Adolf Hitler.

Skorzeny's Special Mission was the officer's own account of his wartime experiences, and who could blame him for giving his own point of view?

Luckily, Skorzeny had a sense of humour. Years afterwards, although he came before the German De-Nazification Court, he was acquitted. In the words of that famous agent, Wing Commander Yeo Thomas: "Colonel Skorzeny and his officers have always behaved as gentlemen"—while the defending officer, Lieutenant-Colonel McClure went even further and told the Court: "Gentlemen, I should have been proud to have men like the accused in any Unit I commanded. . . ."

The difficulty of writing a dramatic version of this type of book is that, for one thing, it is likely to be very long—considerably longer, at all events, than the average modern novel—possibly some two hundred and fifty pages. This means that every page has to be read with care.

In this particular case there were lengthy chunks of text, with few (if any) quotations or snatches of speech. This is where the art of the adapter comes in: and it can be applied both in sound and vision. There's a world of difference between the literary discussion of an event—vividly written though it may be—and the transforming of thoughts and episodes into the urgent terms of radio or, for that matter, of television.

The highlight and most dramatic moment of Skorzeny's book was his account of the actual snatching of the deposed Italian leader. There were a score of details which went to build up the excitement and the suspense, and these had to be interpreted and illustrated in terms of staccato sentences and sound effects.

The story-teller—I used the character of Skorzeny himself—described the crash-landing near the hotel, and then as we went into the scene itself one had to invent the dialogue and indicate the effects. It went something like this:

SKORZENY: All around—jagged rocks of all sizes. We could have been smashed to pieces. No time to worry about that now. . . . A sentry stands at a corner of the hotel. He seems lost in amazement. I can't blame him as he sees me catapulting towards him, with my company of picked men on my heels. . . .

[*Fade.*]

[*Sound of running: shouting: doors banging, and general commotion.*]

VOICE: Mani in alto! Hands up!

SKORZENY: Corporal Himmel! Follow me. In through this door.

[*Crash of tommy-gun butt on door.*]

Smash that wireless set! Hands up, you!

[*Sound of spintering wood and glass as radio is smashed.*]

HIMMEL: There's no way into the hotel itself from here, sir.

SKORZENY: Right! Outside again! Then right round the building —don't waste a second!

[*Sound of pounding feet.*]

The terrace. Himmel! Your back. . . . [*Grunt of exertion as he climbs terrace.*] The rest—follow us!

HIMMEL [*breathlessly*]: Captain! Look! That window on the first floor. Isn't it—?

SKORZENY: It's our man! Thank God for that, anyway. [*Shouting.*] Away from the window! Keep away from the window! [*To Himmel and men.*] Now through the entrance hall—and don't fire unless I do. . . .

[*Sound of excited talking and shouting in Italian: effect of boots moving rapidly on stone floor.*]

SKORZENY: Put those machine-guns out of action!

[*Sound of heavy blows, metal on metal.*]

Now for the Carabinieri! Mani in alto!

[*The order "Mani in alto" is taken up by other voices.*]

[*Sound of scuffling, a few blows, grunt of pain.*]

Up the stairs! Come along!

HIMMEL [*panting*]: Captain . . .

SKORZENY: We want our man alive . . . !

[*Sound of footsteps rushing up stairs: then running along corridor.*]

[*Sound of gun-butt on door: door opening.*]

Duce, forgive me. You two gentlemen—stand with your backs to the door! Untersturmführer Schmerdt—take these officers outside. They must stay in the corridor until I give you further orders.

I have spoken rather at length about this particular assignment. Adapting is interesting work—it can be fascinating. But there are pitfalls galore. One has to steer a course between using too much of the original dialogue (which, when spoken, is often stilted), and making your own adaptation rather too free, in which case some of the finer shades of feeling or intention may be lost on grounds of expediency.

Alan Burgess himself produced the programme and expertly cast the numerous characters. Skorzeny was played by Howard Marion Crawford; and one of the actors engaged was the late Arthur Young, whom I had known as a repertory actor in Plymouth, and who won the critics' praise for his portrayal of Mr. Gladstone in the play *Parnell.*

Otto Skorzeny is now living in Spain as a successful man of business. He heard the programme, and I was interested in a letter he wrote to the B.B.C. from Madrid. In it he said:

> Through a friend who just happens to go over to England, I send you back the tapes with your radio programme about me. The tapes will come to you over Miss Therese Denny of the B.B.C. Television Section.
>
> I take this occasion to thank you very, very much for the excellent programme you made out of my book. Some guests of mine and I myself enjoyed the reality and excellent wording of your programme tremendously.
>
> With many thanks, I remain,
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> OTTO SKORZENY

All television companies are interested in adaptations of celebrated books, sometimes for serials and sometimes as separate productions lasting sixty minutes or ninety minutes. Soon after I had started this book it occurred to me to find out what the market in this field was. I submitted to an extremely helpful and sympathetic executive the names of something like a couple of dozen books which I had personally enjoyed.

Among them were the following:

Title	*Author*
SIR JOHN CONSTANTINE	"Q"
BELLA DONNA	Robert Hichens
THE KING'S MIRROR	Anthony Hope
THE AMERICAN PRISONER	Eden Philpotts
MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE	Booth Tarkington
JOHN CHARITY	H. A. Vachell
MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD	A. Courlander
FLOTSAM	Seton Merriman
LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET	Miss Braddon

Title	*Author*
INCOMPARABLE BELLAIRS	A. and E. Castle
TRANSLATION OF A SAVAGE	Sir Gilbert Parker
MATTHEW AUSTIN	W. E. Norris
MRS. GALER'S BUSINESS	W. Pett Ridge
THE HALL OF UNREST	Seton Merriman

Of course, it wasn't just a case of being told that, yes, such-and-such a book would be fine—go ahead and adapt it. There are quite a few points the Script or Story Department concerned first had to answer. Had the book in question been adapted and televised before? Were costume plays acceptable? Would the spinning of the yarn in vision as distinct from print involve the use of film? If so, how much?

One vital question, then, had first to be answered before it was worthwhile tackling any other problems. Was it possible to arrange approval from the point of view of copyright? Certain authors, or for that matter their executors, aren't always disposed to permit the adaptations of a story for television purposes.

One can understand, for example, the argument that a premature or not particularly brilliant production of a novel on television might affect the possible sale of film rights. Anyhow, I am sure I have said enough to make it clear that there is more to adapting a story—even if it is a classic—than just saying: "Oh, what a good idea it would be to do *The End of the Corridor* or *Annabel's Secret Orchard.*"

The point is that as the result of my suggestions two books were selected as subjects for possible Television adaptation. One was *Lady Audley's Secret*, a famous Victorian novel; the other, *Sir John Constantine* by Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, a book I recalled reading with pleasure when a boy.

There were excellent reasons why some of my suggestions could not be carried any further. *Micah Clarke*, that wonderfully exciting tale of the Monmouth Rebellion by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, had not indeed been televised, but there had been a production a couple of years before of *Thunder in the West* which, it was considered, bore too great a similarity. Again, while there was a sympathetic feeling about the Stanley Weyman romances, these—with their period costumes, galloping

horses and thrilling duels—presented too many technical and financial difficulties.

What was the next step? Well, to begin with, it is against all my principles to write a single line without having some arrangement in writing.

In the case of new writers, there may be no help for it. It so happens that I've been lucky enough to be busy all my life—and I have a constitutional aversion to doing anything free of charge. There may be more than a touch of vanity and laziness in this attitude, but there it is: I take a fairly firm stand on this matter.

Anyhow, in two or three weeks' time I received an offer asking if I would prepare detailed outlines of the two novels. A fee was suggested, this to be paid "on acceptance." This is a phrase which has meagre appeal for me: and I persuaded the department concerned that there must be something on account.

The first objective was to obtain the books in question. It may seem odd to you that having suggested two old favourites I had not kept these volumes, neatly-shelved and dust-free over the years. I fear that my copies of both Miss Braddon's melodrama and "Q's" appealing story had lost their way during removals at one time and another, or—which is more likely—had been borrowed with the best of intentions by someone who had overlooked the formality of returning them.

Although I believe and have always believed in trying to give value for money—in fact, I can't remember ever presenting a script which *underran* its allotted time—I am inclined to interpret rather freely the phrase "detailed outline," and usually consider that three or four pages, concisely worded, meets the case well enough.

I enjoyed reading *Lady Audley's Secret* so much, and was so impressed by the way in which the novel had survived almost a century, that I decided to break my rules for once and give an outline which even the sourest reader would call detailed.

There was a certain method in this madness, however, because if by any chance the proposition came to anything a tremendous amount of spadework would have been done. I decided not only to give the Television Organiser a pretty fair outline of the story, but to list the dramatic highlights, or peaks,

and then to suggest a running order which would give the scenes their maximum effect and ensure a smoothly-running development of the plot.

Here, then, is how the outline went, and I give it in full as a guide to how other novels among your own favourites could be presented with an idea to serialisation.

STORY OUTLINE

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"
by M. E. Braddon

There is a good reason why this classic of melodramatic fiction should be broadcast as a television play in 1960. It was one hundred years ago that Mary Elizabeth Braddon published her first novel (*The Trail of the Serpent*): and *Lady Audley's Secret*, the book which made her famous, followed two years later in 1862.

Lady Audley's Secret has a most ingenious plot and a strong element of suspense which will stand comparison with any modern thriller.

It is probably the finest and best-constructed Victorian "shocker": but don't be misled by this description. The characters are entirely credible and skilfully drawn, and although the incidents are unusual they are not far-fetched or even improbable.

The story, in my opinion, is powerful enough to be presented without the touch of burlesque which has sometimes been found necessary to strengthen plays set in this period. This one is compelling enough to rely on its own merit as a "straight" piece—except, perhaps, for the occasional emphasis on some point which would lend a note of subtlety and humour. There is plenty of action. The story moves quickly and the settings need not be in any way formidable. The plot develops to a great extent in the interior scenes:

(*a*) At Audley Court, a splendid old mansion;
(*b*) Robert Audley's rooms in the Temple;
(*c*) A cottage at Ventnor, Isle of Wight;
(*d*) The Castle Inn.

Film shots could be limited to:

(1) The grounds at Audley Court. The old well which plays an important part in the story is "in the shrubbery beyond the Lime Walk";
(2) A churchyard in which the supposed body of Lucy Graham is buried; and
(3) The garden of her father's cottage.

Even these could be dispensed with and the essential sets built from studio resources—so long as some shots, at least, could be obtained in the gardens at Audley Court.

ARGUMENT

Cut to the bones, this is the story of *Lady Audley's Secret.*

Sir Michael Audley, at fifty-six, has married a second wife. For seventeen years he has been a widower with an only child, Alicia, now eighteen. The second Lady Audley is vivacious, beautiful, brilliant, accomplished—but unbalanced and, in the last resort, capable of murder.

She came to the neighbourhood from London to be governess in the family of the local doctor. Sir Michael is completely captivated and persuades Lucy to marry him—although, to give credit where it is due, she tells him she "does not love anyone in the world" and has never before known anything but poverty.

Lucy is, in fact, the wife of a young man called George Talboys, by whom she has a child. The little boy is cared for by her father, a retired naval officer. Talboys was the son of a rich man who disinherited him for marrying a penniless girl.

One night, desperate because of his wife's reproaches, he deserts his little family, emigrates to Australia and it seems unlikely that he will ever be heard of again.

After four years he strikes it rich in the Australian gold fields and returns to find his young wife, Helen, and their child. But Helen (who has changed her name to Lucy Graham) has only a wedding-ring, her baby boy and the letter he wrote to her before he vanished, to remind her of this chapter in her life.

She has given up hope of his return. By "marrying" Sir Michael Audley she has taken a calculated risk which makes her a bigamist and leads her to desperation and eventually to attempted murder. She is already being blackmailed by her maid, Phoebe Marks, who has discovered in her Ladyship's jewel box a baby's shoe and a lock of golden hair obviously from the head of a child. Phoebe realises the implication and makes the most of it.

George Talboys is a friend of Robert Audley, Sir Michael's nephew, a barrister who is too lazy and financially independent to practice. At the same time, he is an amiable, good-looking young man who is stirred to action when his friend George unaccountably disappears after a visit to Audley Court. Before this visit, Lucy has heard of Talboys' arrival in England and, what is more, is told by Robert that he will be bringing his friend to Audley Court.

She acts quickly, with the result that by the time George, in his

efforts to find his wife, has got in touch with his father-in-law, Captain Maldon, in the Isle of Wight, a local girl (who had died a natural death from consumption) has been buried under her name. George is shown the grave, and is heartbroken.

But, with Robert, he visits Audley Court all the same. Lady Audley is away and her rooms are locked, but the two men find a secret entrance to the apartments and there George is shown and recognises —a life-size portrait in oils of Lucy. There is no mistaking the truth. Lady Audley is his wife, Helen Talboys.

Next day, Talboys and Robert go fishing. While Robert sleeps on the river bank, George follows Lucy to the Lime Walk. They quarrel, there is a struggle, and the unwanted husband falls to the bottom of the well, apparently to his death.

From a window in an upper floor of the Court, Phoebe Marks has watched the scene and she and the man she marries, her cousin, Luke, a drunken, good-for-nothing-type, take possession of the Castle Inn. Lucy continues to buy their silence.

Robert Audley, puzzled and distressed by his friend's disappearance—a disappearance he cannot understand—becomes a different man. He is no longer the languid, carefree young lawyer, but a keen and determined investigator with a single idea—to solve the mystery.

A bruise on Lucy's arm arouses his suspicion. Robert goes on to trace the story of Helen Maldon from the time she married George Talboys. The day after her husband's desertion (so he learns) she became a teacher in a girls' school under the name of Lucy Graham. Later she took up an appointment as governess to the local doctor's children, and finally married Sir Michael Audley.

Robert tells Lucy that he proposes to search Audley Court for the grave of his murdered friend, even if it means "levelling the house to the earth and rooting up every tree." Lady Audley replies: "You'll never live to do it. I'll kill you first!"

Robert goes to stay at the Castle Inn: and that night Lucy sets fire to the place in the hope that her husband's nephew will die in the flames. But he had changed his room and thus escaped.

When the man she thought was dead by her hand appears before her next day, Lucy gives way and confesses the whole story to her "husband." She reveals that there is madness in her family, and that her own mother is in an asylum. She had arranged, she says, for a consumptive girl to be buried in her name so that her real husband would give up hope of tracing her. Later, when Robert takes Lucy to a mental home in France, she accuses him of bringing her to "a

living grave" and goes on to confess that the body of George Talboys lies at the bottom of the well in the shrubbery.

The truth is that Talboys had only sustained a broken arm and shock. He had been able to climb, exhausted, out of the well and had gone to New York, leaving two letters behind him. One was to Lucy and the other to Robert. He had given them to Phoebe Marks to deliver, but Phoebe, still determined to do everything to keep her mistress's secret, had never delivered the messages.

George finally turns up again and the friends are reunited. Robert marries George's sister; the romance forms a subsidiary part of the story. Sir Michael, a tragic figure, lives on in London, while Lucy, known only by the name of "Madame Taylor" spins out a twilight existence in the French nursing-home until her mind finally gives way and she dies after a long illness.

[NOTE: This is how the book finishes: we will employ a more tragic ending for the play.]

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STORY

The following incidents will make dramatic peaks in the development of the plot:

(1) The governess accepts the Baronet's proposal;

(2) The personal maid discovers the baby's shoe in the locked jewel box;

(3) George Talboys sees what he believes to be the grave of his young wife;

(4) He and Robert Audley, having crawled through the secret passage to her Ladyship's rooms, come upon the full-length portrait of Lady Audley—a Dorian Gray type of shock;

(5) George meets his wife by the well;

(6) Robert sees the bruises on Lady Audley's arms in spite of her efforts to cover them;

(7) Robert confronts Lucy with the evidence of her crimes;

(8) Her attempt to kill him by setting fire to the Castle Inn;

(9) The shock when she sees him next day—having thought him dead;

(10) Lady Audley's confession;

(11) The return of George and the removal of Lady Audley to the nursing home in France.

THE CHARACTERS

The cast—certainly so far as the principals are concerned—need not be large. The leading figures in *Lady Audley's Secret* are:

(1) *Lady Audley:* A vivacious, fair-haired, extremely pretty woman. She is frivolous and gay, but underneath the mask must be a mind which can plan quickly, and which is completely ruthless. She is charming, extravagant, decorative. The actress must be able to convey a hard determination beneath a seemingly helpless girlishness, which can captivate a middle-aged man. Now and again —but only very seldom—one can observe a flash of madness. A twenty-three-year-old Beatrix Lehmann.

(2) *Sir Michael Audrey:* A handsome and virile fifty-six. Could be well played by Roger Livesey, Andrew Cruickshank or Mark Dignam.

(3) *Robert Audley:* Tony Britton.

(4) *George Talboys:* George Brown.

(5) *Phoebe Marks:* Rosalie Crutchley.

(6) *Captain Maldon:* Seedy, elderly. Maurice Colbourne.

(7) *Luke Marks:* Howard Marion Crawford.

SEQUENCE OF PRINCIPAL SCENES AND DEVELOPMENT OF STORY

(1) Opening shot. Churchyard setting. Close-up of tombstone with inscription:

Sacred to the Memory of
HELEN
THE BELOVED WIFE OF GEORGE TALBOYS
Who departed this life
August 24th, 1857, aged 22
Deeply regretted by her sorrowing Husband.

(2) Shock cut from tombstone to close-up of Lady Audley holding wineglass, as brilliant hostess of party at Audley Court. She touches a locket hanging by a ribbon from her neck—not once, but several times.

(3) The guests leave. One quick, eyebrow-lifting exchange between two old battle-axe type guests to show that not everyone approves of her new Ladyship.

(4) Enough reaction to show blind affection and admiration by Sir Michael.

(5) Quickly into shots to reveal leading characters. Cue from Sir Michael referring to his "young nephew." Shot of Robert in his rooms in Fig Tree Court, Temple. He is smoking and reading an invitation card from Audley Court.

(6) To Phoebe Marks. We see Phoebe in Lady Audley's bedroom. In the distance we hear gay chatter and music from below. Phoebe is preparing her mistress's bed for the night, and we see her hesitate and then, curiosity overcoming her, she opens the jewel box. Close-up of baby's shoe and lock of hair.

(7) Cut to George Talboys on ship coming home. He is looking at a miniature of a girl. There is no doubt it is Lucy.

(8) Scene which subtly suggests that Phoebe is blackmailing Lady Audley—although there is all the time in their relationship a suggestion that the girl has a real affection for Lucy and is loyal to her. A brief meeting between Phoebe and Luke, hinting at their future relationship.

(9) George arrives in England. By chance, he and Robert Audley meet next day in London and George tells his friend the whole story. They visit the coffee house to which address George had asked his wife to forward letters. There is no word from her.

(10) George idly picks up a copy of *The Times* and reads in the obituary column the announcement of his wife's death.

(11) The scene changes to Ventnor. First of all we see George visiting the churchyard where his wife is buried: and then

(12) His meeting with Captain Maldon, who tells him how his daughter's health failed and she died.

(13) In the book, Talboys starts off to Liverpool to sail back to Australia but misses the steamer. He returns to London and Robert persuades him to accompany him to Russia where they stay for a year. This passage of time can be drastically shortened for our purposes: and the next really important step is the visit of the two men to Audley Court.

(14) Sir Michael and Lady Audley are away, but Robert and Alicia Audley show George the Lime Walk and the old well. They talk about the portrait of Lady Audley.

(15) They discover the secret passage. We see them crawling along it to Lady Audley's apartments. Dramatic moment as George sees the portrait and recognises the subject. The artist has caught more than a suggestion of Lady Audley's real character.

(16) George and Robert start off on their fishing expedition. Robert falls asleep on the bank. George leaves him there.

(17) Shot of Lady Audley sauntering in the shady Lime Walk. She is overtaken by George. They quarrel.

(18) Cut to Phoebe Marks, gazing down from window.

(19) Artistically, it is probably better to suggest the struggle and George's fall into the well. Better to show Lady Audley returning alone to the house.

(20) She meets Phoebe and it is obvious from their manner that Phoebe has seen everything and that Lady Audley knows this.

(21) Scene to show Robert's anxiety at his friend's disappearance. At dinner, he notices the bruise on Lady Audley's arm.

(22) Several scenes here to show Robert's determination to find George. He revisits Captain Maldon and proves the Captain's statement that George had called on them to see his boy before returning to Australia is false.

(23) Scene between Robert, Phoebe Marks and her husband at the Castle Inn. He is more than ever convinced that they have a hold over Lady Audley and that they know something which her Ladyship must keep hidden at all costs.

(24) Sequence showing Robert's investigations—reading documents and letters which give him a picture of Lucy's life before she "married" Sir Michael.

(25) Robert's dramatic interview with Lady Audley and her threat to kill him.

(26) Robert goes off to stay the night at the Castle Inn.

(27) Lady Audley gives her husband an edited version of Robert's accusation, and he swears not to believe a word.

(28) Lady Audley at the Inn. We see her starting a fire.

(29) Close-up of Lady Audley standing by her portrait, believing at last that her enemy is dead.

(30) Dramatic moment when next day Lady Audley is walking in the grounds and a figure approaches. It is Robert. He insists on a confession.

(31) Scene in which Lady Audley confesses to her husband, and tells him her sordid background and how, having read of George's return to England, she arranged for another woman to be buried under her name.

(32) Robert is called to the bedside of Luke Marks. Luke makes a dying confession that George had not died in the well, but had gone overseas. He had left two notes, which had not been delivered.

(33) A scene showing Robert about to escort Lady Audley on her journey to the French Maison de Santé.

(34) As they approach the lodge gates a man is walking up the drive. It is George.

(35) Lucy and George gaze at each other without expression. The coachman whips up the horses and we close with close-up of Lady Audley's face, hard and expressionless, as she leaves for ever the house where she'd plotted and had been prepared to murder.

I think you may feel there is a pleasant field here in adaptations which could produce results. I have, perhaps, put a little emphasis on the classics. I should make it clear that when thinking in terms of serialisation the gate is wide open.

As far as recently published novels go, there may of course be copyright difficulties, but one doesn't want to forget the enormous library of stories which has been published in the past twenty-five or thirty years. To quote an example, let's take a best-selling book like Dr. A. J. Cronin's *The Citadel.*

A television Script Editor asked me if I would be interested in adapting this as a six-part serial, and interested I certainly was. I had read the book with pleasure and remembered also the splendid performance given in the film by the late Robert Donat. The story was a gripping one and flowed along fluently, while apart from the character study of the young medical man there were high peaks of drama. At the last moment, after I'd done quite a good deal of work on the project, I was told by the editor in question that a rival company had beat him to it and that the plan so far as he was concerned was off.

All the same, adaptation is one of the fascinating byways of writing for television and radio, and I commend it to your attention. If you are in doubt as to the acceptability of a title, take the trouble to write a page or two explaining why the idea appeals to you and why it should make good entertainment for broadcasting. You should soon hear whether there are copyright problems or whether some other writer has got his bid in first.

Another type of programme which should be mentioned in this chapter is the trial scene.

The art of cross-examination has an abiding fascination for listeners and viewers alike. Sound radio for years made capital

out of famous trials, and from the early days of TV producers discovered the visual appeal of the court scene.

Causes célèbres, like that of Oscar Wilde, attracted enormous audiences, and you'll remember the interesting discussions on the relative merits of two almost simultaneously produced films based on the Wilde trial—with Peter Finch and Robert Morley as the actors concerned in these two rival productions.

On TV we saw the series "On Trial" in which the Casement trial, for example, and the scandal of the Baccarat case at Tranby Croft were dealt with faithfully—so faithfully that it was claimed that only the actual words used in court were spoken by the players.

"Boyd Q.C." has been a best-selling series, with appeal, again, in the cross-examination; and there were light-hearted efforts with a Court background, of which I recall "State Your Case." And how about Perry Mason, toughest attorney of them all?

For various good reasons, prestige being not the least of them, the B.B.C. and all the television companies keep an eye on their child audiences. What I have said above applies in this connection. There are countless books which have pleased generations of young people, and from time to time these, in an adapted form, find their way to the air or on to the screen.

Sound and vision planners know well the importance of programmes for children, and this, of course, is a market to explore.

For as long as most of us can remember the B.B.C.'s output for children has been first-rate and even today it can appeal to an adult audience as well as the young people for whom it is intended.

The Independent Television Authority has a Children's Advisory Committee, and it was interesting to see in a 1961 report that "children's time" is regarded as mainly for entertainment. "But in the entertainment," it is stated, "TV can do much to satisfy curiosity, impart knowledge and establish values important in the formation of character." Each programme company has appointed members of its staff to view all films sent to them as possible material for children's programmes.

On B.B.C. Sound a good deal of attention is focused upon

younger children, and these have even had their own serials like *The House at Pooh Corner*, *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Just So Stories*. For the older age-groups there are school stories—*Jennings at School*, for instance, and tales about those boy detectives, Norman and Henry Bones, while with an eye on the early teenagers there have been adaptations from historical romances, of which *Lorna Doone* and *The Black Arrow* are examples.

Toy Town is a classic of broadcasting, and it is fairly safe to say that among the original listeners to the programme are many who have since become parents, if not grandparents.

In short, the B.B.C.'s children's programmes are intelligently planned and presented, and any idea for a story or a series of talks would be judged sympathetically.

FICTION—AND FACT

At the time of writing there are nine hours of children's television programmes a week transmitted by the B.B.C. There are single plays, serial plays, documentary programmes, talks, light entertainment, magazine programmes, outside broadcasts and films.

On the whole an excellent balance is held, but I don't think there's much doubt that drama is most popular. Many famous books have been adapted, but it is fair to say that the gate is wide open and if you think you have something worthwhile then by all means send it to the Television Centre.

There are plenty of programmes in which the children themselves join in—"Thrash It Out," a series of debates, is one example which comes from Wales. Then there is the "All Your Own" series, in which children from all over Britain come to the studio to talk about their hobbies and to perform when their talent justifies this. Programme-planning changes from year to year, but no time would be wasted by examining current billings closely and sending in ideas for plays and series which would appear to come in line with what is obviously required.

The commercial companies have in mind the important child audiences, realising that it is only a matter of time before these same children will be wage-earners and thus potential "in-

vestors" in their products. Mainly, plays destined for young audiences are also the concern of the men and women employed by each company to select and present television drama. For example, the drama group responsible for all dramatic production for ATV deals with plays both for adults and children.

Associated-Rediffusion have planned programmes for schools with considerable care.

To give you some idea of the material produced, let me quote some titles from the 1961 Spring Term programme. There was a new series called "The Angry Gods" for thirteen-year-olds and over. This was an introduction to Greek civilisation and the origins of Greek drama. There were two productions—an abridged version of the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus, and *The Winter's Tale* by Shakespeare.

Especially for children between nine and fourteen there was "The Farming Year," which highlighted the spring and summer activities on a Midland farm. "The Story of Medicine" traced the development of medicine into modern times, relating the subject when possible to the children's own experience. There was a series "The World Around Us" for primary-school children aged about ten, and some geographical programmes about the British Isles. For good measure there was a French series which illustrated the day-by-day events in the life of a French doctor, his family and their friends.

The other organisations are no less authentic when it comes to providing programmes of this kind.

It is correct to say that most executives whose duties involve planning programmes for children have their eye on the ball so far as topical interest goes. Science has its fair share of programme time—and in lighter vein, there has been all the space fiction the most fanatic of young would-be aeronauts could desire.

Don't hesitate to send off your good ideas, remembering especially the age-groups for whom your work is intended and the fact that only a limited amount of miracles is possible between the four walls and the lofty ceiling of a television studio.

CHAPTER NINE

THE BROADCAST SHORT STORY

RADIO—and television, too—have, in the words of James Langham, done a great deal to keep "live and active in Britain the miniature art of the short story."

Mr. Langham should know, because he is the extremely able and charming producer who for years has chosen the large number of stories which have been broadcast in various series by the B.B.C., notably in the well-established programme "Morning Story." In pursuit of this agreeable task he reads scores of manuscripts every week, and gives authors the benefit of his long experience and unequalled knowledge in this field.

I first met James Langham when he was the Station Director of 5 PY, the Plymouth relay station of the B.B.C., and I don't think he has ever in his life been anything but courteous and sympathetic.

The short story may not at first glance seem to be a particularly promising, or for that matter profitable line, for the writer to follow. On the contrary, it is a valuable shop-window and it is by no means impossible for a broadcast story to have a future elsewhere. It may, for example, be repeated. It may be broadcast overseas. It may be recorded by the London Transcription Service and sent to many stations in different parts of the world. It may serve the purpose of crystallising a good plot and giving one an opportunity to turn it into a radio play.

The short story—and I am thinking of the original short story for broadcasting, not existing tales from the classics or by well-known authors—has always had a place in British radio. The vogue goes back to the famous A. J. Alan and beyond.

A. J. Alan, as older listeners will remember, was the elusive but inventive Civil Servant who brought the writing—and the reading—of a short story to a fine art. From the public's point of view he maintained his anonymity to the end—and he

became a legend among those who in the 1920s elected to wrest a livelihood from the B.B.C.

His stories invariably had a twist in the tail—the O'Henry touch. Mostly they were real mysteries—and they were rehearsed and timed with such meticulous care and accuracy that they were as near foolproof as human ingenuity could make them. They never overran. They were polished to the last comma. It is said that Alan always took a candle with him into the studio—in case the light failed unexpectedly.

A. J. Alan knew not television; and TV in any case is a different affair altogether so far as the short-story writer is concerned. For one thing, your story-teller must know his words by heart, or at least give the impression that he is chatting away amiably to his listeners in their homes.

In this difficult medium the late Algernon Blackwood was a past-master. He was an old man when television "discovered" him, but we came to look forward to seeing that long intelligent face, aged by the weight of years and experience. He would lounge happily in his armchair as if those powerful and disturbing studio lights were candle-glow. He would look at us benignly and clasp his sensitive fingers—and launch into some breathless and often blood-curdling story. It was superbly done.

There have been other and younger television story-tellers, but two come to mind more clearly than the rest—Anthony Oliver and John Slater. Oliver, with his gentle, persuasive Welsh accent, was immensely effective with his stories of village life in Wales. He certainly had the knack of it.

John Slater, with a smile which occasionally lit up his dark and rather saturnine face, was more forthright and more vigorous in style. He gripped our attention from first to last, and I've often wondered why television didn't keep him on as a kind of permanent spinner of yarns for one of those late-night series.

Other programmes have given fluent speakers a chance to use their imagination. I am thinking, for instance, of the TV series, "Tall Story." Here, with Robert MacDermot in the chair, three or four men and women who could "tell the tale" were called on to recount some seemingly incredible or far-fetched story. At the end we were asked: "Well, do you think

that story was true or false?" I suppose we had to rely on the integrity of these people to tell the truth, though the answer was sometimes hard to guess. Actress Barbara Mullen, with her soft brogue, was particularly successful in these programmes.

To say that the short-story market is not what it was is to make a very considerable understatement. For various reasons the number of magazines has fallen sadly—and most drastically. One remembers how, before the war, there were displayed on the bookstalls many of these journals which would print short stories by distinguished authors of the day and by newcomers. At random I recall the *Strand Magazine*, in which, of course, the Sherlock Holmes mysteries first appeared, the *Windsor*, the *Royal*, *Pearson's Magazine*, *Britannia* and *Eve*, and many others. Today, only a handful remain.

It may be understood, then, that the B.B.C. fulfils a useful and welcome function so far as the author is concerned—especially those who are still devoted to the art of telling a good story in a few thousand words—and how difficult that can be.

In Mr. Langham's view it isn't necessary to apply any "special" technique just because your words will be read by someone with a microphone on the table in front of him (or her). He believes that a good story is a good story, whatever medium the author may have in mind. As proof of this he recalls that three of the most successful broadcasts of short stories ever made were tales by Ambrose Bierce, George Gissing and Leonard Merrick—all written before the age of broadcasting.

The time customarily allotted to the broadcast short story is fifteen minutes and this means that the manuscript should be between 2,100 and 2,300 words in length. You can choose almost any subject you like—in other words, your story can be light or it can be dramatic, it can be in dialect, it can be serious or gay.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate what I've been saying is to print below something which was used in the "Morning Story" series. It is, I admit, one of my own, and I quote it here with some diffidence. I'm not claiming that it has any great merit, but it will perhaps serve to show the required length, and the blending of description and dialogue: and it does underline a point I made earlier—namely, that stories of this kind can be repeated (this one had an encore after an interval of six months

or so); and it did serve me as the basis of a half-hour radio play which has since been re-broadcast on the Continent and in Commonwealth countries.

"ONLY ONE MAN FOR THE PART"

When Sweetlove and Armitage were seen conversing at one end of the Club Long Bar, not one of the members who sauntered in for a drink failed to register that facial back-somersault known to all students of show-business as the "double-take."

In short, they couldn't believe their eyes. After Sweetlove had bought Armitage a large gin and Dubonnet, Sandy, the barman, was called upon to treat several of his frailer customers for shock: at their own expense, of course.

[We are into the story right away: no long introductory paragraph.]

By grape-vine, bush-telegraph, and even by word of mouth the news flashed to the tall, austere pile from which day by day, hour by hour, programmes go winging into space—programmes gay, programmes grim, programmes topical, nostalgic, entertaining, educative, programmes sombre, programmes lively, and—well, just programmes. Wherever two or three were gathered together, it was Topic A.

"Sweetlove and Armitage have buried the hatchet." The word went round, and despite cynical inquiries as to which of the two had buried the weapon and in whose head, the fact seemed incontrovertible. At last, confirmation came from Sweetlove himself.

[Within the first ninety seconds we know the two men were enemies but have made it up.]

"Yes, we've decided to be our age," he said, and even Armitage muttered; "No use going to our graves hating the sight of each other, I suppose," although it was generally agreed that he might have phrased the sentiment more happily.

"I've even written in a part for Armitage in the new series," said Sweetlove. That clinched it.

[We now go on to describe the two men—but note that every item in their mental and physical make-up has some bearing on the tale as a whole.]

Every character-actor would give his right arm to be cast in a Sweetlove series. These were invariably successful, and ran so long that before they'd run their course leading ladies became grandmothers, and child actors grew up, married and had children of their

own, all the juveniles became producers and some wished they hadn't.

A part in one of Sweetlove's radio best-sellers was a plum—it often meant security and an assured income for years. That Sweetlove should write in a part for his ancient enemy Armitage—thereby saving him from bankruptcy and/or an alcoholic last-curtain was incredible.

Speaking of his latest offering, "Ernie can play the kindly old uncle from Australia," said Sweetlove blandly. Armitage came, in fact, originally from South Africa, but there was no malice in Sweetlove's tone. "Bags of opportunity for a good character-man." Those who heard him marvelled. "He sounded just as though he meant it," they told us, and made no attempt to disguise their bewilderment.

In case you are wondering why this reconciliation caused so much astonishment, let me say at once that Sweetlove and Armitage had hated one another for years. It was a bitter, remorseless, brooding kind of hatred—not just the casual dislike that can flourish between two intelligent men.

At one time Armitage had been the more successful of the two. He was a superb actor. From the days of the cat's whisker and earphones he had understood and loved the mike, nursed it, crooned over it—and mastered it.

Sweetlove had come on the scene comparatively late in the Armitage story: a young, cocky, clever provincial.

[Here comes the vital reason for enmity between the men.]

Armitage, looking for an original thriller, read a Sweetlove script, spoke well of it in the right quarter, and put the writer on the map. Sweetlove had unexpectedly married an attractive American: and it was Armitage's unorthodox interpretation of lease-lend that led to the first row.

The marriage went on the rocks, and Mrs. Sweetlove took herself back to Atlanta. Sweetlove blamed the actor. It never came to blows, but a deep and bitter vendetta began between the two men.

There was no limit to the sneers and gibes they loosed off at each other.

"The fellow might have got by if he'd been content with leading a double life," jeered Sweetlove. "It's being greedy and making it a treble that's tripping him up."

The two men spat and scratched and loathed each other.

As has so often happened before in stories of mutual detestation, the star of one man waxed as the other's waned. Sweetlove had a flair for the slick, inventive stuff that listeners and viewers lap up.

His programmes didn't only warm the hearts of the men and women who dedicate their lives to the deadly task of pleasing most of the people most of the time: Sweetlove also had a way with the Press.

And you can take it from me as a writer of scripts myself how important that was. The luck went all his way. His TV thrillers were bought by film companies; his domestic comedies were adapted for the stage and ran in the West End for years.

With Armitage, it was all the other way. He had never denied himself the refinements of life, and now he started drinking on the grand scale. His social life became one long round of reciprocal entertainment, but of the most unreasonable variety.

As is the way of human nature, he was quite sure his failure was all the fault of Sweetlove.

"He's got it in for me: been talking to producers behind my back. Heaven knows what lies he's told 'em."

It must be admitted that his suspicions were well founded. Sweetlove wrote a book of pen-portraits dealing with famous actors, but the name of Armitage was omitted. Sweetlove dedicated his book "to all the people I haven't mentioned because they would have sued me for slander if I had."

No one ever knew quite how the reconciliation came about. But it was pathetic to see Armitage smiling and smartening himself up, preparing to take advantage of this miraculous chance of a long run in a Sweetlove series.

"The publicity's just what I wanted," he said. "Might even get a chance for a film." That's how people talked about any of Sweetlove's work. It was never "*if* the show goes well . . ." It invariably did.

[The scene is now set. It is time to build up the suspense.]

The new serial was timed to begin in the second week of the New Year. As usual, Sweetlove insisted that the subject and the setting should remain a dark secret.

"Surprise is the greatest of all the gimmicks," he said. Others (including, I am sorry to say, his producer) hinted unkindly that the real reason was that he only had the haziest idea himself. The great man had never been noted for punctuality in the delivery of his scripts; secretaries in the producer's office came and went, but all of them knew what it was to sit up at their typewriter until after midnight, bashing out a Sweetlove episode for the morrow.

But, when it did come, the stuff was miles better than that of his fellow-authors.

We were all curious to know how Sweetlove would develop this

supposedly "fat" part of what he'd called "the kindly old uncle from Australia."

Sweetlove refused to be drawn.

"All I can say," he declared, "is that it's a key role. The whole story depends on it."

The effect on Armitage, as I have said, was remarkable. He even staggered friends by settling a few outstanding debts of honour, and promised to pay off a great many more "once this new thing I'm in is in its stride."

Then, on Christmas Eve, came the shattering news. Sweetlove was dead.

[The first dramatic peak in the story, coming just over halfway through it. Why did Sweetlove die? What happens next?]

Not to put too fine a point on it the celebrated purveyor of mystery and murder had himself been made away with.

Lunch-time (approximately twelve-fifteen to four p.m.) had found him in the Club, making Christmas his excuse for treating himself and his cronies even more generously than usual. By eight o'clock he was lying very untidily on the pavement outside his seventh-storey flat.

The window of his study was wide open. But from the very first it was obvious that his final exit had not been made without assistance. The familiar theory of how the poor chap, feeling faint, had staggered to the window, and having thrown it open to get the air had then carelessly fallen out of it, could not be sustained.

A bloodstained poker had been found on the carpet. It looked as though someone had given him a vicious tap on the back of the head. Sweetlove had then either toppled over the sill, or been shoved into eternity.

[So much has been planted about the antipathy between the two men that Armitage must have had something to do with Sweetlove's death. But how? and why?]

His friends, without exception, agreed that highly dramatic as was his end it was really not up to the customary standard of Sweetlove ingenuity.

Anyone could have thought of such a simple and uncompromising method.

The point was—who *had* thought of it?

A month ago, spoken or unspoken, one man only would have fitted the bill. Armitage. By the same token, had Armitage been found dead in similar circumstances our first suspect would have

been Sweetlove. But why, we asked ourselves, why should Armitage kill the goose that was about to lay for him a weekly clutch of golden eggs? "There's no sense in it," we told each other glumly.

But whether there was any sense in it or not, the mystery didn't remain one long.

The porter in Sweetlove's block of flats had seen Armitage enter the lift. Armitage was a man it was pretty easy to recognise. A minute or two before the body was discovered and identified this same porter had seen him leave. Early on Christmas morning a man

[Second surprise.]

had dived headlong in front of an Underground train. He was identified by letters and by the copy of the contract for a broadcast in Sweetlove's serial.

I learned all this from the genial, businesslike Inspector—so true to the form of Sweetlove's own favourite Inspector Mayberry—who called on me while I was still opening the last handful of Christmas cards.

"I understand you knew both the deceased gentlemen, sir," he said. "I wonder if I can trouble you to step along to Mr. Sweetlove's flat. You might be able to throw a bit of light on all this."

I doubted it very much: but one doesn't argue with detective-inspectors, however genial. I knew that much. There was nothing particularly odd about Sweetlove's flat, so far as I could see.

"Of course, Mr. Armitage's fingerprints were on the poker," said the Inspector. "But what I can't understand is *why* he did it. They used to quarrel: I know all about that—but my information is that they'd made it up. Were quite good friends, in fact."

[We still can't understand how, if Armitage is the murderer, why he did it.]

On the desk were some crumpled sheets of typescript. Idly, I smoothed them out.

"Hullo," I said. "It's the first episode of Sweetlove's new thriller."

Attached was a note in Sweetlove's hand.

"Dear Armitage," it ran. "I thought you would like to have your script to read over Christmas—in fact, it comes to you with my best Christmas wishes. You play Bertram Stott. As I told you, it is a key-role, and although it is not a long part I know you will give it all you've got. . . ."

I looked at the cast, set out on Page One. Yes, there it was. "Bertram Stott . . . Wallace Armitage."

It was that phrase "although it is not a long part" that started to nag me. I began to read.

Page Five told me the truth.

"What a devilish thing to do to anyone!" I muttered. The Inspector was polite.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"I can tell you why Sweetlove was murdered," I said. "He'd promised to give Armitage a part in this new serial. Armitage had built all his hopes on it. It meant a come-back for him—a weekly cheque—all kinds of possibilities of other work—in short, security."

[The story-teller knows the answer, but he is still not giving it away.]

"Well, what about it?"

"This about it, Inspector. It's true that anyone cast in a Sweetlove story can rely on months of work, probably years. It wasn't until Sweetlove had sent him a copy of the script that Armitage realised that the joke was on him, that Sweetlove's friendly attitude was a pretence. . . ."

The Inspector's tone had an edge to it.

"I still don't see . . ."

"Armitage," I explained patiently, "was to play the part of Bertram Stott—a key-character from the point of view of the plot. But on Page Five, Bertram Stott is . . . murdered. Which meant that Armitage was in one performance, and in one only. . . ."

[Your listener is still wondering.]

One fee for old Armitage—just one fee—then oblivion again. To think that one man could hate another so much.

The Inspector's voice broke in on my thoughts.

"May I ask how this character—this Stott character—was killed?"

If I smiled, and I may have done, be sure there was no mirth in it.

[We have kept the dramatic pay-off literally until the last sentence of the story.]

"Someone slugged him on the back of the head with a poker," I said, "and then chucked the body out of a window."

Please don't think from the foregoing that all stories should be thrillers or be connected with sudden death!

Your story may be set on the ski-ing slopes above a Swiss resort and may attempt a far more interesting essay in character-reading than the story I have quoted. It can have humour, if you

fancy that style, but whatever your plot, certain rules apply. You must carry the story along smoothly—and you have only a limited time in which to tell it. Move quickly, therefore, from one situation to another, never losing the feeling that you are moving steadily towards your last sentence—the pay-off to the tale.

The characters must *live*, but must be described with a minimum of words—from the dialogue itself where this is possible. As so many experts have told us, the art of the short story is a difficult and delicate one—and by the time you reach the last page the reader, or in this case the listener, must have a sense of roundness, the satisfaction of having encountered and enjoyed a polished piece of work.

CHAPTER TEN

THE BROADCAST TALK

The time has come, the walrus said,
To talk of many things.

Lewis Carroll

YOU have only to read the programme billings to realise that there is still a very considerable market for the radio talk.

In fact, bearing in mind the Regional interests, this aspect of broadcasting is extremely useful. I am not evading the issue when I make the point that listening to what goes out on the air is a great deal more helpful than any amount of precept in the printed page. I am thinking in terms of the talk read from a script rather than of the discussion programmes and interview programmes in which, although for convenience assumed to come under the general umbrella of talks, are often "spontaneous and unrehearsed."

You can't do better than listen to programmes like "Today," "Woman's Hour" and "In the South-East." It will be seen at once that variety is the keynote, and talks—one must admit that they are short talks—are acceptable for these programmes. Then there is the "Two of a Kind" series in the Home Service every Tuesday morning—with its occasionally varied titles, "Three of a Kind" and "All of a Kind"—and there are the "Signpost" programmes from Midland Region, "The North Countryman," an excellent magazine programme sponsored by the North Region, and the West Region's "Far and Wide."

Network Three offers its own shop-window for speakers who know their subject well, and there is a helpful Talks Department run by the General Overseas Service of the B.B.C.

If you are interested enough in a certain subject and believe that you can talk informatively or amusingly about it, then the broadcasts themselves will show you the kind of thing the various Departments require. "Today" might be interested in an entertaining four or five minutes on the subject of Easter

Eggs at Easter, but if your interest in the topic is rather more academic, then you may feel it could be a possibility for broadcasts to schools.

The Regions all use talks: but the subject should naturally have a bearing on the part of the country they serve. In Wales, for example, the talks people prefer a fifteen-minute talk to be written before it is sent in. In the case of longer talks an outline of the idea would be sufficient—especially if roughly four minutes of material were included to show how you would treat the subject.

I have often been asked by writers who intend to see what can be done on these lines whether I would let them see a typical B.B.C. talk. Here are examples of two. One is a fifteen-minute talk given in the Home Service. The length is approximately 2,250 words.

DANTE GABRIEL'S "GUARDIAN ANGEL"

by Gale Pedrick

"My dear Dunn," wrote Dante Gabriel Rossetti to my Great-uncle, Harry: "The question of Emma must be wound up soon, and I begin to incline strongly to the belief that she will have to go. . . ." And, as good cooks go, Emma went.

Can you wonder that from boyhood I always wanted to know more about my grandmother's elusive brother Harry, who threw up his job in a Cornish bank and learnt to paint well enough for us to see one of his pictures in the National Portrait Gallery?

For years, Henry Treffry Dunn, to give his full name, was Rossetti's companion and secretary at the famous house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. He ran the affairs of that chaotic household: engaged the female staff—and sacked a procession of auburn-haired goddesses: the ones who opened the front-door and showed Mr. Burne-Jones, Mr. William Morris, Mr. John Ruskin, Mr. Ford Madox Brown, Mr. Whistler, or it might be Mr. Algernon Swinburne, into the Master's study.

"Dear Dunn—it is my express wish and order that Ellen be discharged at once with a month's board wages and a good character." So runs another letter to Great-uncle Harry. You can read the original and many more like it in the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

There was another good reason why Dante Gabriel wrote as he did to Uncle Harry: "You are the best of fellows, and my guardian

angel." Officially, Dunn's job was that of "professional assistant." . . .

We can make of this phrase as much or as little as we will: but it poses some pretty problems for the experts. Part of Harry Dunn's duties was to paint replicas of Rossetti's most successful pictures.

In a book, *Rossetti, His Life and Works*, Evelyn Waugh deals with the poet-painter's later years, and says: "His income was maintained chiefly by a steady output of replicas. One can only surmise how much of them was the work of Dunn, and how much of the faltering master. . . ."

Wouldn't *you* have been curious to know more about such an unusual, not to say romantic relative? True, Great-uncle Harry died six or seven years before I was born. But you might have thought, as I thought, that his family in Cornwall—his sisters, and his cousins and his aunts—would never tire of talking about Young Harry and his adventures and encounters with Mr. Robert Browning, Mr. Longfellow, Lord Tennyson and with the members of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

No, not a bit of it. No one in the family could—or would—be drawn on the subject of Henry Treffry Dunn.

I was baffled by their attitude. Surely somebody could tell me something about this attractive and talented man. I pointed out that a portrait painted by Dunn had a place of honour in the Town Hall of Truro: so obviously his fellow townsmen thought well of him. But even my Great-aunt Frances, a delightful old lady, would gently, and very very firmly, decline to breathe a word about her brother.

I was fascinated—and exasperated. There must surely be someone who could tell me more about the artist who for so long shared the secrets of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and weathered the domestic storms and upheavals, and the financial ups-and-downs of life in Cheyne Walk?

What stories must lie behind some of those phrases in the Rossetti-Dunn letters. *Why* did Ellen have to go? *Why* was it necessary for "the question of Emma to be wound up"? What was the story behind the intriguing message: "My dear Dunn—the 'Elephant' writes in a rage, but I have sent her a 'settler' ": "Elephant" being the pet name for one of those statuesque models whose auburn or golden "harvest yellow" hair seemed to throw a spell over the dark, romantic-looking poet with his Italian origins.

Just how much of Dunn's work is to be seen in our famous art galleries above the Rossetti signatures? And how plaintive, human and familiar sounds another query: "My dear Dunn—Is the tax paper a *final* application? If not, it may stand for a while. . . ."

One thing is certain. Few people could have known more intimately the personal story of the complex, brilliant, unstable character who was to make such a tremendous impact upon the late nineteenth century with his poems and with his pictures.

My Great-uncle Harry, tactful and self-effacing, must have watched the great man in his moods of gaiety and melancholy, seen him inspired—and tormented—by some of the lovely women in his life: kept the jealous ones at bay, protected him from creditors, haggled with agents, and waited for those flashes of genius which made that passionate life worth while.

He truly was "a guardian angel." But wasn't it perhaps this close friendship with Dante Gabriel which led his family to renounce the clever young artist? He had left his steady job in the Capital and Counties Bank, and gone from Truro to London. That was bad enough. But he had (or so they believed), joined a godless, carefree circle in which everyone smoked cigarettes, and drank. One knew only too well the kind of life led by the Bohemian artists and poets of Chelsea. As for their women models—doubtless they were not above taking off their clothes and were, in short, no better than they should be.

Moral standards didn't exist. There was talk of drugs and attempted suicide. And then the dreadful climax. Mr. Rossetti, having buried a manuscript book of poems in his poor wife's coffin, proceeded later on to have them and her dug up again, so that the forgotten verses might be printed.

This, I imagine, was something the Cornish conscience could not and would not take. And as for poor Uncle Harry, who was but an onlooker of these turbulent scenes—well, it was a case of turning his picture to the wall, and never mentioning his name again. To them it must all have appeared unspeakably odd: and they didn't propose to speak of it—ever.

After Rossetti's death, his brother, William Michael, described Henry Treffry Dunn as "upright and straightforward." Dante Gabriel had been improvident and hopeless when it came to money matters: but Dunn had seen to it that the bills—the most pressing, at any rate—were paid: even when his own salary was far in arrears.

The sad truth is that when I should have been hot on the trail of the few people still living who knew and liked Harry Dunn, I was too busy with my own affairs, working up to the age of twenty-five as a journalist as nearly round the clock as made no difference; and was then caught up in the excitement of a new world—broadcasting.

But now and again I'd find time to pursue the genial shade of

Great-uncle Harry: and gradually a picture of him became clearer in my mind.

I learnt how he was introduced to Dante Gabriel by Charles Augustus Howell, who'd been Rossetti's secretary and became his agent. I met the late Mrs. Watts-Dunton and discovered how Harry Dunn, like Swinburne, had been a more-or-less permanent, non-paying guest at The Pines, in Putney. Her husband, Theodore Watts-Dunton, was a poet and critic, and an intimate friend of Rossetti. In fact, Treffry Dunn's picture in the National Portrait Gallery shows the two of them in the parlour at Sixteen, Cheyne Walk. And it was at The Pines I first heard of the series of unpublished letters written by Dante Gabriel to his "guardian angel."

They met when Rossetti was thirty-five. Harry Dunn would be the younger man by ten years.

They got on famously from the start. Rossetti pointed to one of the pictures in the studio—"The Loving Cup." "I'd like you to make a copy for me," he told the young Cornishman. Great-uncle Harry did as he was told and Dante Gabriel liked the result. It was the first of many such requests.

In no time at all, Harry Dunn was a fixture in Rossetti's home—where on every wall there seemed to be drawings and sketches by Millais, Holman Hunt, Thomas Woolner, William Bell Scott, Ford Madox Brown and James McNeill Whistler.

Rossetti's fancy for collecting old blue Nankin and other china was in full swing. There were musical instruments strewn all over the place: and odds and ends of every kind, objects which some time or another might be handy for a picture.

It was an odd household. I'm quite sure the twenty-five-year-old Westcountryman was fascinated by its museum-like quality; intrigued, first by the contents and then, even more so, by the creatures, human and otherwise, who lived in it.

Uncle Harry told a friend that Number Sixteen struck him as a sort of "miniature South Kensington Museum and Zoo combined." Rossetti personally took his new companion into the garden and showed him his famous animal collection. In one large packing-case covered by a heavy slab of marble was a racoon.

From time to time this animal would escape, to the fear and resentment of the neighbours. There were the two armadillos, who made a habit of destroying the flower-beds next door. The owner fed them with beef dipped in prussic acid. The beef disappeared, and, so it was hoped, did the armadillos. But, no: after three months they appeared, "in a sadly mangy and out-at-elbows state." They

didn't mend their habits, and were made over to the Zoo in Regent's Park.

There were two kangaroos—mother and son. "As far as my observations went," reported Uncle Harry, "I don't think they lived on very good terms with each other. At any rate, the mother was found dead one morning, murdered by her bloodthirsty offspring."

A peacock annoyed the neighbours so much with its noise that the bird was disposed of, and a clause was added to the leases of Lord Cadogan's property that no peacocks should be kept in the gardens of his tenants.

Dante Gabriel's favourite was, to quote Harry Dunn again, "a singularly wicked and morose parrot." Its chief delight, so he says, was "to get visitors to stroke its head, and then without any warning suddenly to fasten on their fingers, and finish up with a sly, slow, chuckle."

But with all this one can't help thinking that poor Uncle Harry had more trouble with the lovely human birds-of-passage who came and went through the wrought-iron gates of Sixteen, Cheyne Walk. You can take it for granted that all the housemaids, all the cooks and all the models were "stunners," to use a contemporary expression. Every one of them was tall. Their figures were perfection. Their hair was either the colour of ripe corn or of burnished copper; and they had a great deal of it. But were they efficient?

"The housemaid Mary," writes Dante Gabriel to "My dear Dunn" —"The housemaid Mary is leaving. I should be glad if she were prevented from gossiping with the other people in the house, but made to take her things, and go promptly. . . ."

Could there be any connection, I wonder, between this and another urgent note: "I hope to get your answer as to locking all letters in the safe. I remember there is a large number in one of the lower drawers of the inlaid cabinet next the back door of the studio. . . ."

The relations between my Great-uncle Harry and his celebrated employer were almost completely harmonious and there are some appealing domestic touches in their correspondence. As for example: "My dear Dunn—your dress-trousers are, I believe, in the drawer near the window in my bedroom. I saw two pairs lying there lately and I believe I only possess one. . . ."

And: "My dear Dunn—Many thanks for your beautiful sketch of Donatello's cherubs. I enclose a cheque for fifty pounds, having received this morning one for five hundred. . . ."

I have the impression that sometimes—just once in a while—Uncle Harry's job got him down: as when Dante Gabriel wrote to

his "guardian angel": "I do wish, my dear boy, you would *read* my dispatches as carefully as I *write* them."

After all, not long after Dunn's arrival at Cheyne Walk, Rossetti made three thousand pounds in a single year, thanks in a great measure to Uncle Harry's water-colour replicas. But in spite of this, Rossetti was very slack when it came to paying his salary: and this led to one quarrel, when Treffry Dunn took himself and his paint-brushes home to Truro.

But usually it was a case of: "I can't thank you enough for the extreme care and trouble you have taken with the replicas—you are the best of fellows."

So you see that in spite of everything I was able to add a little substance to my imagination's first faint outline of my Great-uncle Harry Dunn.

After Rossetti died his "art assistant" took his own studio in Chelsea. I found just one more friend who could recall the kindly old gentleman at the turn of the century. "You could tell he was an artist," he said. "He couldn't have been anything else." He wore, said this friend, the beard, the flowing cloak, the wide-brimmed black hat of the Bohemians. With a boon companion—for I'm sure he had to be *someone's* "guardian angel"—Great-uncle Harry would weave a majestic pilgrimage down the King's Road, stopping from time to to time at some shrine of Bacchus.

Later still, he found a haven at The Pines, sitting happily at his easel, dreaming of the days when he helped to entertain Ruskin and Browning, and Whistler, at Number Sixteen, Cheyne Walk: and occasionally walking up the hill to Putney Heath for a breath of air, a glimpse of woodland and a glass of something on the way back. For his Cornish relatives were right on one score. He smoked—and, yes, he liked his toddy.

I wish he'd lived another twenty years so that I could have heard from his own lips the true story of Mary the housemaid, who had to pack her things and go: and why the "Elephant" had to be sent a "settler."

But it was not to be, and I shall never, never know why the question of Emma "had to be wound up." But Dante Gabriel's "guardian angel"—he knew.

The second example is a shorter talk which was broadcast in the magazine programme "Monday Night at Home," which again offers a market for writers who can speak their own lines. The humour in "Monday Night at Home" has been for the most part what may be called "off-beat," although my own

piece doesn't make pretensions to be anything but mildly entertaining.

Here it is.

GALE PEDRICK:

I recall with quite dreadful clarity having to ask a much-headlined actress if a certain rumour happened to be true.

The lady in question has now achieved a positively awesome distinction. She had even then a bleakness of manner before which strong men were known to quail and flee from her presence as though propelled by some power not fully comprehended.

If you saw Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* and you remember the wicked witch Malevolence, you'll get the general idea.

When I tell you the nature of the rumour I was to persuade her to be good enough to confirm or deny you will understand how I felt. My instructions were to go to the West End theatre in which this lady's current play was being presented, find my way to her dressing-room during one of the intervals and say: "Miss So-and-so —is it true that you are going to have a baby?"

Now, I'm well aware that in matters of refinement and delicacy, fings very definitely ain't wot they used to be. We've grown accustomed to hearing intimate subjects discussed in clinical detail.

They make commonplace week-end reading.

Still, even today, some of us would find it embarrassing to ask a complete stranger about the chances of an addition to her family. And this was—oh, at least twenty-five years ago.

In an interview some months earlier the actress had given some powerful advice to mothers on how to bring up their offspring. Her views had been unorthodox, to say the least of it. Now, so the tongue of rumour had it, her situation was such that she might shortly be able to put her theories into practice. This was news.

An exclusive interview on the subject would be a scoop. Competition was keener then—or so I like to think—in the newsrooms of the National Press, and this was my big chance. I went to the theatre. I was announced by a personal maid: but from the moment the dressing-room door closed, I had a feeling of impending doom. I felt trapped.

Miss X was seated at her dressing-table brushing her hair with long, sweeping strokes, rather like those frightening ladies do in the fairy-tales.

"Good evening," I stammered.

She made no audible reply to my greeting, but acknowledged it with a cool stare and an inclination of the head.

It was not a happy start and I began to panic. Should I have brought flowers, I wondered? How should I begin?

If only it had been jolly Nell Gwyn, I thought, or the roguish Peg Woffington. They would have been sympathetic, might even have laughed and said: "La, sir—what questions you men will ask us poor creatures!" and all would have been well.

Sweet Nell might at least have offered me an orange, and there would have been more than a chance of a kiss from Peg. Why did it have to be this stern, uncompromising, modern Siddons who gazed at me through her mirror with an expression which seemed every second to become more baleful, more charged with scorn?

There was a silence quite long enough for the highlights of my life to unfold themselves in some detail.

By now the deep-freeze atmosphere *should* be thawing in the glow of my gay and witty conversation. A compliment or two, the latest *bon mot* picked up in the club—all cunningly designed to lead up to the sixty-four thousand-dollar question.

The lady went on brushing with greater determination. At last, at long last, I heard someone speak. It was I.

As though some inward compulsion was forcing them through clenched teeth, I heard myself squeak just seven words. "Are-you-going-to-have-a-baby?"

The brush wielded by the lovely Miss X hung poised for a fraction of a second and then continued its relentless, graceful motion. She didn't speak.

Her eyes said all that was needed. I read in them scorn, freezing contempt, scorching indignation, withering disdain, haughty derision.

All these fused in one single glare. She didn't actually say "Go!", but her intention couldn't have been clearer if she'd shouted the command—and go I did, and with the speed of light.

Miss X had spoken no words at all. I had spoken—seven.

It was the shortest interview I'd ever known: but it was the most eloquent.

Oh, by the way—it *wasn't* a rumour. As a matter of fact, it was twins. . . .

What one has noticed in the past year or so is the growing number of short talks which now go to make up—with the help of music and informative items—the contents of the numerous magazine programmes.

The broadcast talk is undoubtedly one of the most effective methods of breaking into radio as a contributor. The desired

length varies. A talk which is deemed to be able to stand on its own feet, as it were, as a single item is usually fifteen minutes in length. In "Two of a Kind," two talks are often broadcast in a space of either fifteen or twenty minutes. Which means that the script should take seven or eight minutes to read.

In the "Roundabout" programmes and items like "In the South-East" and "Today" the talks may be as short as three to four minutes.

The best practical advice I can give is—write something on one of your favourite subjects, whether it be butterflies, Maundy money, a story about the local football club, some incident in village life, or even an amusing encounter with a bus-conductor. Above all, avoid the "literary" style.

There's not the slightest doubt that so far as the modern broadcast talk goes it is best when writing it to imagine you are gossiping with an old friend and telling the story—with plenty of humour and detail and no trimmings which could make it resemble in any way the school essay.

Crisp writing, a break into dialect where this heightens the story—and that's really it.

You will find that the producers concerned, to whom you can send this type of material direct, are friendly, well-disposed people, and if they like the subject they will be ready to talk about it and give you advice on how to tackle it.

A number of regular broadcasters started by selling a broadcast talk. They may have felt strange, going into a studio and looking a microphone in the eye for the first time: but it was a start, and you may easily find that you have a talent for this sort of thing. I can think of many speakers whose work I have been happy to repeat in my "Pick of the Week" programme who would certainly describe themselves as amateurs, among them men and women who have retired from the Forces, the Diplomatic Service, and other professions. But they have hit on a good "line" and have eased themselves into a pleasant, interesting and a remunerative sideline.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IT'S WORTH TEN PER CENT

> Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement.
>
> *Edmund Burke*

IF I had been asked ten years ago whether it was essential to employ an agent I should have hesitated before giving a definite answer.

There were not many openings which an intelligent radio-writer—who spent a reasonable amount of time listening and viewing—was unable to see clearly enough for himself. Now, the picture is different. With the world expansion of television new sources of revenue are coming into being constantly.

Only the expert can keep track of these, and it is, I would now say, imperative to have an understanding with an agent with the skill and knowledge to sell your material in many different countries. You and I are not to know what Munich, Stuttgart, Paris, Vienna, Johannesburg, Halifax, want to broadcast or televise. Your astute agent makes it his business to know precisely whether there is a demand for thrillers or light comedies or serials.

We can't all turn out plays which are well-reviewed by the critics, or which have such a large audience that the companies concerned immediately ask for more. But it is quite possible that even an average success here may please and appeal to a story editor hundreds of miles, or even thousands of miles, away. You can therefore see the force of a business arrangement with a man who has up-to-date information at his fingertips and can follow through the life of a play, keeping an eye on the various media—including the theatre and the cinema—which might prove remunerative.

THE FUNCTION OF THE AGENT

First of all, he is the buffer between the producer and the consumer. Unless you happen to be built that way—and perhaps

only fifty per cent of writers are—you will probably not be a great salesman of your own work. It is difficult to tell planners and producers what a wonderful chap you are—even more difficult to convince them. But there is nothing to prevent the agent from singing your praises.

Again, only a proportion of authors have any true business sense and the agent can negotiate a contract with real knowledge of every situation and possibility, to say nothing of those vital clauses, hidden away and in extremely small print.

Some story editors, strange to say, are pleasant and even sensitive people who may not wish to hurt your feelings by being blunt about your shortcomings. On the other hand, he or she is much more likely to say to an agent: "Look here, this author of yours is pretty good and I like his stuff, but he has one failing . . ." Your representative can then pass on this possibly vital point of view, without any loss of face or damaged feelings.

The agent, too, is in a position to exercise a sense of comparison. What I mean by this is that he has a number of writers on his books and is thereby enabled to judge the varying talent and potentialities of them all. Because it is his job to do so he has a pretty clear view of what is going on everywhere.

I do not suggest that he is taken into the confidence of planners, and sometimes the agent will be as surprised as anyone by some unexpected decision or change of policy. Nevertheless, his daily work brings him into touch with producers and script editors of many concerns, and the value of that is obvious. He knows the level of excellence—or mediocrity—which is expected or required.

NURSING THE BABY

Where the agent really comes into his own is in safeguarding and nourishing the child of an author's brain after the parent has tired of it. Human nature being what it is, many writers become tremendously enthusiastic while a play is being written. Once the child is safely delivered they are inclined to turn at once to a new idea and lose interest in this particular project. But the agent, with an eye on the success of his own business, will carry on where the author leaves off and obtain every

production that is possible. As I have said, it is not the author's function to become an authority on markets at home and abroad.

What are the disadvantages of working with an agent?

Well, generally speaking, it takes longer to get your money. This can be frustrating, but at the same time there is nothing quite like receiving a cheque for something you'd forgotten all about.

Then, your agent will cost you ten per cent of your receipts. The only other disadvantage which occurs to me is that if you happen to be unlucky in your choice of agent—you are faced with the somewhat embarrassing situation of having to make a change.

Of course, it would be invidious for me to suggest names, but you would find a comprehensive list in reference books dealing with the requirements of various publishers, journals, and television organisations, notably *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book*. The Society of Authors, that valuable organisation with its long history of service to writers, would no doubt help, but inquiry from a helpful assistant at any public library would solve the problem.

Two invaluable organisations exist to safeguard the interests of men and women who write for a living. One is The Radiowriters Association; the other is The Screen Writers' Guild (formerly The Television and Screen Writers' Guild).

The Radiowriters Association (formerly the Radio and Television Writers Association) operates under the wing of the Society of Authors. The Society was founded in 1884 and its President is John Masefield, O.M., the Poet Laureate. The purpose to which the Society is dedicated is "to further the interests of its members individually and collectively and to fight for the protection of those interests whenever and wherever they are challenged."

The Radiowriters Association was reconstituted in 1960, and quietly and effectively acts as a watchdog on behalf of all who write for sound broadcasting. Since it was formed the Association has fought many a battle with the B.B.C., and thanks to devoted work by officials and a number of committee members, has notched up some notable victories.

At the moment it has one specially important duty—to ensure that the interests of writers are protected if and when commer-

cial radio is launched in Britain. One of the injustices it is engaged in putting right is the inadequate press coverage given in the National Press to sound radio programmes.

The Association also takes a firm stand against what it calls "the defeatist attitude of administrators" who see programme budgets ruthlessly cut so that more money can be diverted to television. The Association takes the view that this is a bad thing, since cheaper programmes mean fewer listeners.

Membership of the Radiowriters Association is free to members of the Society of Authors, who qualify under the Rules of the Association. I counsel all authors who write for sound radio to get in touch with the *Secretary of the Radiowriters Association, c/o The Society of Authors, 84 Drayton Gardens, London, S.W.10.*

The Screen Writers' Guild was formed in May 1959 by an amalgamation of the former British Screen and Television Writers Association and those who were on the television side of the Radio and Television Writers Association. This came about by means of a friendly break with the latter organisation, and was the reason why the Radiowriters Association, as it exists today, was reconstituted.

It is true to say that no television writer can afford to overlook the vital work being done on his behalf by the Screen Writers' Guild.

It secured the first Television Film Minimum Terms Agreement ever arrived at—with the Sapphire Film Company, in January 1960. A Minimum Terms Agreement covering live drama was negotiated and signed in June 1960, with four of the Independent Television Companies—Associated TeleVision Ltd., A.B.C., Granada and Television West Wales. At the time of writing a similar agreement covering series and serials, adaptations and dramatisations is also being negotiated.

The Guild is affiliated with the Writers' Guild of America and the Federation International des Auteurs des Films. The Guild undertakes to register scripts, outlines and synopses, and besides running a weekly news column in *The Stage and Television Today*, the organisation has its own quarterly magazine, *Guild News*, published free to members.

The Guild has an ambitious programme, and in its short life has already brilliantly justified its existence. Its solicitors give free legal advice to members, and a Benevolent Fund is to be set up.

For years British writers have been at a disadvantage, mainly because, when dealing with film and television producers, they have had to negotiate from weakness. They have had no organisation to support and fight for them. But now the Guild is a formidable organisation, aiming at a membership of at least a thousand. It has already taken up scores of cases where writers have been exploited and unfairly used; and it has improved fees and the very shaky system whereby credits are given or, as has happened so frequently in the past, withheld.

Again, I would advise all who hope to get their livelihood from writing for the television screen, to write to the *General Secretary of the Screen Writers' Guild, 7 Harley Street, London, W.1.* (There is a Branch Office of the Guild in Glasgow—the address: *56 Bentinck Street, Glasgow, C.3.*)

CHAPTER TWELVE

SUMMING UP

IT is quite clear I must not pretend that the subject of writing for television and radio is an easy one to develop; but I hope that some, at least, of your questions have been answered, and that some of the advice contained in the preceding pages will set you thinking on profitable lines.

At the beginning I said as frankly as I could that here is one subject which defies the formality of an orthodox textbook. Of course, there are matters about which more might have been said, but I assure you that the scene is changing so rapidly that advice given at this moment might be out of date in a remarkably short time.

I am thinking, for example, of the Overseas market—and the selling of material for transmission on the North American continent. I could have written pages of discursive matter on this topic, but I prefer to be truthful and to say that this is a world in which the novice can make little headway on his own. Once the initial experience has been gained, then an agent of integrity will guide you with all the knowledge which it is up to him to gain from the simple business necessity of keeping abreast of events and trends.

Let me gather some of the threads. Bear in mind, then, that—while no Planner of Programmes would be so foolish as to ignore an absolutely first-class idea—there is a growing company of professional writers who, if not a hundred per cent members of a staff, are under contract. In one way this must limit the market for the out-and-out freelance or for the part-time author. All the same the system as it is has its compensations, since it means that once the assault has been made, and an idea accepted, there is skilled advice and collaboration waiting in the wings.

I have not gone into great detail about documentaries, talks, Children's programme material, School Broadcasting and so on, for the simple reason that I believe in the counsel of common sense. The heads of departments in question know what they

want. They rarely find themselves with so much good writing on their hands that they will turn a deaf ear to anything which is exceptional. (And if the writer is not to become bitter and disgruntled, one must surely remember that brilliant as an idea may seem to him, there may be a score of cogent reasons why it is unacceptable at a certain time. And here I speak as one who has himself at times been astonished, scornful and disappointed by the rejection of suggestions which have seemed both original and foolproof.)

Remember, there are few things more difficult than judging while they are still on paper words which are intended to be spoken aloud.

I have studied many thousands of scripts and found some of them highly entertaining to read: but I could number on the fingers of my hands the times that I have been prompted to laugh aloud. Only those who have been dealing in this sort of comic coinage for years can read, let us say, a page of a "Goon Show" script and understand how it will sound on the air.

In the words of the portly, much lamented and once Goon-ridden announcer, Wallace Greenslade: "It's all in the mind, you know!"

The kind of broadcasting which exists in terms of sound only is a world of its own. An inflexion, the tone of a voice, the turn of a phrase and, for that matter, the turn of a switch controlling an effects record—all these can alter the meaning and the laughter value of a line.

Even in television, scripts that are mainly dependent for their effect upon the eye may seem to be gibberish when solemnly set down between the opening page of a stencilled script and the closing one.

At the same time, a word of warning. Because a script, however funny, does not convulse the reader as if he were perusing the subtle wisdom of a Perelman or a Thurber, or for that matter a Wodehouse, it does not mean that every gag must be explained. The temptation to explain the point of a situation or a verbal phrase may be hard to resist, but fortunately most of the producers who will read your work are men who have been concerned with this sort of thing for many years. They don't need to be told what is funny and what isn't. They have an

instinct dearly bought at the expense of much eyestrain combined with trial and error.

Different authors, different methods. But one rule is observed by all who have made a more than modest livelihood from radio-writing and have, at the same time, retained their sanity.

The secret is to prepare a framework. The all-important thing is to know where one is going.

I do not set myself up as an infallible guide, but I can say that some of the most difficult script assignments I've ever had were robbed of their terrors by the fact that the last page was written first.

Too many authors start off gaily making the most of what appears to be some supremely original idea. The situations stem smoothly one from the other, the action is fast and everything looks fine—until halfway down page twelve.

Then, so often, the well of inspiration dries up as though in obedience to some evil genie's command and for no apparent reason the imagination is drier than the Sahara.

"What on earth happens now?" asks the hapless writer, his fingers rigid above the typewriter keys that stare back malignantly.

If, on the other hand, you have your plot mapped out, your situations in order and your finale set, then the battle is half won already.

I think it is worth listening to what a craftsman like Agatha Christie has to say about her own methods.

"I type my own drafts—on an ancient but faithful machine I've owned for years. And I find a dictaphone useful for short stories, or for recasting an act of a play. But not for the more complicated business of working out a novel. No: I think the real work is done in thinking out the development of your story, and worrying about it until it comes right. That may take quite a while. Then, when you have got all your materials together, as it were—all that remains is to try to find time to *write* the thing!

"Writing plays is much more fun than writing books. You haven't got to bother about long descriptions of places and people—or about deciding how to space out your material. And you must write pretty fast, to keep in the mood, and to keep the talk flowing naturally."

And a word about your producer.

A good director can ensure the success of a programme. He can also ruin it.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of producer—or director. There is the producer who does too much for you: there is the producer who does too little. Lucky is the writer who finds himself in the hands of a man or woman who is tactful enough to hide firmness under the guise of friendly compromise.

Nothing, of course, can be more exasperating to a writer than to find a "new mind" working on his brain-child, chipping away splinters of wit or slapping on here and there an extra bit of clay which alters the whole appearance of the work.

It is equally annoying for a producer who has spent years and years learning his job to be confronted by an angry young author who only at dagger's point, so to speak, will agree to have one of his verbal gems recut.

Producers often worked themselves to a standstill. They still did until a few years ago, and for all I know to the contrary some may still do so. It was always a case of working the willing horse, and in the halcyon days of broadcasting when Light Entertainment alone employed forty or more producers, there were always half a dozen who doggedly took on three or four shows a week.

Some have gone to their graves a thought too soon. Others contrived a strange kind of immunity to overwork. One could always tell these. They appeared to live in a world of their own. The reason was simple enough. They were invariably thinking, not of their current show or the next one, but the one after that.

Television wrought a change in this odd, absorbing, and still exclusive profession. It was a long time before the majority of radio producers allowed themselves to believe that vision could be a serious threat. The adventurous ones—notably Eric Fawcett and George More O'Farrell—took themselves gaily enough to the heights of Wood Green, and then climbed still higher by green Corporation coach or the red single-decker of public transport to Alexandra Palace itself. But TV was to have only three fierce, busy, probing years before the war. Then the inevitable fade-out and silence.

Disillusionment might have come quicker but for the war. It was a respite: but soon enough "Ally-Pally" was humming again, still short of funds but bubbling with ideas. In no time at all, the unbelievable had happened. Commercial TV erupted.

Even those who should have known, couldn't say how it really happened. It didn't appear to evolve or grow gradually as any normal living thing will do. One day it wasn't there. The next day it was.

The picture changed and there was such a general post, such a coming and going of producers, such an exchange of old for new, that it had to be seen to be believed. Some jobs were given to those who knew little about the technique of the medium. For scores it had to be pay as you learn. They were of the type that is fundamentally adaptable, and to give credit where it is due it didn't take even these long to shake down and give a credible performance in knowing what it was about.

On the whole, the now impressive company of producers are efficient and pleasant men and women. If they are not so kindly as the old hands of Savoy Hill, St. George's Hall and Broadcasting House—well, kindliness flourishes where there's leisure. And the new generation is so very busy.

Life for your modern producer is grim and productive of internal complaints, noises in the head and buzzings in the ear.

Today, only the rearguard remains of the jaunty, cut-a-dash brigade who would tilt a lance at any ogre and still think it a game. These pioneers, worn out and saddle-sore in the service of many an old war-horse of a series, no longer set their sights quite so high as in the golden days. Who could blame them?

The race is to the swift, and there may be only a few more years to roll before the arrival of that self-donated gift which strikes the death-knell to ambition: the pension.

One thing is certain. The up-to-date producer does not expect his writers to be familiar with all the latest technical terms. There are new words and new sets of initials coming into use all the time.

The poorly written script would be none the better because it is perfectly typed with spacing and margins as neat as the flower-beds in a Dutch garden. A sprinkling of abbreviations and directions can't improve a bad scene. At the same time, any

producer would be delighted to receive a play like *Juno and the Paycock* or *Private Lives* if it were written on the back of old B.B.C. handouts.

Producers are subject to the whims of those who are set in authority above them. And especially, as is the case in Commercial Television, these chiefs are in their turn burdened by others above them, whose awareness of what goes on diminishes as their importance increases.

A producer is only as good as his last show. Sad, but there it is.

It is said of recording stars that they are only as good as the last record they made. A producer or director may be on the crest of a wave in June, may carry off some coveted award in July and, because of a bad Press or a show which didn't come up to expectations, can be almost ignored by October.

With these thoughts I leave you. One day you may find yourself so near Success that she will sweep you up into her arms and carry you along with her. Whatever happens, I hope my words will enable you at least to pluck at the hem of her skirt.