

THE MAN WHO PUTS THE EMPIRE TO BED

E. C. WRIGHT.

THAT was what we dubbed him in the days when we first made his acquaintance. It was a short wave radio set, presented by a thoughtful Santa Claus, which brought him to our notice. One or two households in our town—it would be a village in England, but in Canada it is a town—had radios with short wave reception, and we had been present one afternoon when one of the householders had attempted to get a news broadcast from London. Another owner had entertained us one evening with various mutterings and groanings which he attributed to short wave. The only intelligible message he had reported was a call to Philadelphia police to rush to a certain house where a man was beating his wife. That reminded one of us of the advertisements we had seen on London hoardings some years ago, "The air is full of things you shouldn't miss!", but was not encouraging about the possibilities of enjoyment to be obtained from a short wave set. Discouraging, too, was the warning on the directions that came with our set, that finding on the short wave dial was not easy, and users must not give up if their early attempts met with little success.

With little to guide us, then, we set out on our voyage of discovery over an almost uncharted course. Who says the Elizabethans had a monopoly of the interest and excitement that come from venturing forth into unknown territories? Exploration, discovery, conquest, peoples speaking unknown tongues, strange customs, romance, new worlds opening up, we have had them all. The first time we heard "This is London calling you", we could hardly contain ourselves for excitement. After many months we are still conscious of a thrill when the notes of Big Ben boom forth in our little living-room. Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, Rome, Buenos Ayres, swam into our ken and we stood silent, marvelling.

First one and then the other would explore the dial, and results would be compared. It was not long before we discovered when and where we might expect to hear "This is London calling" in the evenings; then the housewife, waiting for the dilatory man of the house to come in, would try the radio and happen upon London; or the man of the house, waiting for a laggard meal, would pause beside the set and turn the dial. We chanced to get London one

afternoon just as the announcer was finishing up with "Goodnight to you all from London. Goodnight, everybody, goodnight." That was amusing, but it was disconcerting to hear one morning at breakfast, especially when we were conscious of the lateness of the hour, "Goodnight, everybody, good night." That programme must have been intended for Australia and New Zealand, we thought, and we wondered if we had any business to be listening in. Soon it became a game to see how many goodnights we could gather, for Australia, for India, for South Africa, for the West Indies, for Western Canada.

It was our lack of acquaintance with the B. B. C. accent that led us to suppose that it was always the same announcer who was bidding us and the other parts of the Empire goodnight, and to refer to him, during the first few weeks of listening in, as the man who puts the Empire to bed. More extended acquaintance revealed differences in the unseen voices, and mispronunciation of a Canadian place name by Number Two, after we had heard Number One give it correctly, settled the matter. Number One seems to be a permanency, but Number Two, who mostly softly cooed the final goodnight, has gone. Number One is also known as "The Nice Man", partly because he gives the news as if it were something interesting he was pleased to pass on to us, and partly because of his charming asides. We must admit, though, that we sometimes disapprove of his vowels. One announcer was suspected of being a Scot, and one was a most unintelligible person whose disappearance after a few weeks was a great relief. One is referred to as "the Welshman," but that may be due to the fact that he was first noted as a new voice when a Welsh choir was on the programme.

Long ago, of course, we learned the particulars of the various transmissions, and secured the official programmes. As our friends have acquired short wave sets, we have been very helpful; we have shown them what places on the dial we found most likely to yield results; we have given them our old B. B. C. Empire programmes as a guide to times and seasons, and we have pointed out the means of obtaining similar programmes for their own use. Perhaps it was unfair to deprive them of the joys of discovery, but explorers have ever been jealous, and we would like to keep unique our discovery of The Man Who Puts The Empire to Bed.