

YORKSHIRE HUMOUR

An Examiner's Beer and Skittles

A LITTLE man with twinkling eyes and a genial, hoarse laugh whose face puckers into a thousand wrinkles when he smiles, was interviewed in the 2YA studios by *The Listener* the other day. We see things relatively: to a candidate in a music examination, Dr. Frederic Staton probably looks like a cross between an ogre and a hobgoblin. But we found him a very charming Englishman with a humorous outlook on life. He was ready to talk and told us some of the lighter sides to his work. Being an examiner for the Royal Schools for Music may not be all beer and skittles, but Dr. Staton has found that there is much fun in the work which takes him across the world.

The first thing we asked was: How is this war going to affect you in your work?

"Examining in Australia and New Zealand will go on," he said, "because

it is in a self-contained area." He and his wife may possibly stay in this part of the world, for the time being at any rate. In England Dr. Staton is conductor of the Sheffield Philharmonic Society's Choir, and as Sheffield is a centre of armaments factories, he supposed that all concerts would have to stop there.

Dr. Staton is nothing if not versatile. "My main work is conducting," he said, "but besides that I judge at musical festivals at Home and abroad. I was made a Bard for my work at the Welsh Eisteddfod. Then I have carried out auditions for the BBC, and in my spare time I lecture for Sheffield University."

During his auditioning and examining Dr. Staton has found many touches of humour—especially among the people of Yorkshire.

One hot day in June, a portly gentleman asked Dr. Staton to hear him play. With the announcement that he had not started to learn the piano until he was over thirty, the would-be virtuoso took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and sat down at the piano. To say "sat down" is a little too simple. He manoeuvred into position in front of the

keyboard; and began the Sonata in A Minor by Brahms.

Considering that he had started to learn the instrument when most people are forgetting it, he did not play badly, said Dr. Staton. But at last came nemesis. The pianist arrived at a passage where he had to play cross-hands. For several seconds, perspiring profusely, he struggled with the music. Then, defeated, he turned and said in disgust:

"Ee, I can't do't. Me — stummack gets in t'road."

On another occasion, Dr. Staton was approached by a prospective Caruso



S. P. Andrew, photograph
DR. FREDERIC STATON

with the request that he hear his voice. To see what the quality of the voice was like, Dr. Staton played the note A flat, and asked the man to sing it. Came a

quavering sound some distance off the proper note. "Try again," said the examiner. But the second time was no better than the first. Then, glancing over the keyboard, the singer divined the trouble.

"Ee, doctor," he said seriously, "I only sing t' white ones."

Another story concerns two bass players. An aristocratic lady living in a little Yorkshire village decided to augment the local orchestra for a special concert and engaged some of the famous Hallé players. The night of the concert arrived, and the two bass players, one home-grown and the other imported, were sitting together. All around them the orchestra was tuning up. Noticing that the Yorkshire man made no move to adjust his instrument, the Hallé player said, "What about tuning up? Aren't you going to?"

"Oh, nay," replied the other, "me strings are about as tight as I usually 'ave 'em."

Dr. Staton has heard many humorous remarks made, too, as when one Yorkshireman, referring to the cadaverous appearance of his companion said, "Ee lad, tha looks't as though tha'd lived in a grandfather clock and been fed through t'key'ole!"

Listeners to 1YA Auckland recently may have heard Dr. Staton on "What is Good Music?" He will broadcast again from the same station at 8.30 p.m. on Wednesday, September 27.



"I eat them myself"

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