

FIDDLED WHILE REICHSTAG BURNED

Maurice Clare's Experiences Round The World

ON the evening of February 27, 1933, a red glow crept into the dark sky over Berlin. With the increasing glare came the sounds of sirens and roaring engines. All Berlin waited and wondered as the dull, angry glow grew; but soon everyone knew that the Reichstag had been burnt. All through the night sirens wailed, and next morning the mass arrests of Communists began. A young Scottish violinist was in the German capital that night. He did not go to see the fire; he stayed indoors, and fiddled. The same Scot had seen, earlier in that year of great change, the elevation to the chancellorship of Adolf Hitler. The visitor had stood quite near Hitler on that occasion but did not raise his arm in the Nazi salute. He was not molested for omitting to do so; the true Nazi regime had not then begun.

Those two experiences are among many which Maurice Clare has had in different parts of the world. He came out to this country several months ago; and he is now the conductor of the National Broadcasting Service String Orchestra, which played for the first time over the air on Wednesday, December 13.

Music from the Cradle

Maurice Clare, coming from a musical family, was taught the fiddle, almost as soon as he began to walk, by his father. Later he studied with Hess's pupil, Horace Fellowes; then, at the age of fourteen, he left his native heath for a village of 19,000 inhabitants in what was Czechoslovakia; for it was at Pisek, the little village on the broad, central European plains, that the great Professor Sevcik lived.

The boy spent two and a-half years under the master.

Life in Czechoslovakia

Asked what he remembered of life in Czechoslovakia before the Nazis marched, Mr. Clare said with a smile that there was so much work to do, one did not see much outside; becoming a musician was a big task. But he did remember a little of the Czech language, which no Englishman except, perhaps, James Joyce, could ever have thought of: "pschshst swczchzt pcysh swychshps schwpps ppcshwst" is a rough idea of what a Czech tongue-twister looks like.

Gaining one of the valuable Caird Travelling Scholarships, which are awarded only to Scotsmen, or to people domiciled in Scotland for at least seven years, Mr. Clare went to Berlin and there studied under Carl Flesch. After a year-and-a-half there he went to study under Menuhin's great teacher, the Rumanian composer-conductor-violinist Enesco.

Adventure in Rumania

In Rumania, he had an adventure. He had been told on arriving that he must register and had obediently given particulars to an official. Expecting to be given a proper dossier, he was presented instead with a dirty piece of paper with a number and much Rumanian on it.

The sequel came about a fortnight later. Outside his hotel room, Mr. Clare heard agitated whispering, a Rumanian "pst, pst, pst, etc." which materialised into Rumanian police. He had out-stayed his welcome, they told him, and would have to be deported. The trouble was traced back to the official he had originally seen to obtain his visa — a pompous, intolerant Saxon. The matter was finally straightened

out; Mr. Clare saw Enesco, a visit was paid to the consulate, a note was obtained, and the officious Saxon had to endorse the permission to stay. There were no more momentous happenings in Rumania, except a big oil-well blazing which Mr. Clare saw as he was leaving the country.

On leaving Rumania, Mr. Clare played with English orchestras for a while—the Glynbourne orchestra, and the London Philharmonic under Beecham—and then, tiring of that, carried on with solo playing. He went to Folkestone for six months, and returned from the English watering-place fit and well to play, this time as soloist, with the London Philharmonic.

Free-Lancing

Then came free-lancing in London, playing with string orchestras, and solo work. Mr. Clare travelled all over England; played at various places during the day; worked with the Empire orchestra of the BBC; and finally decided that he "had had enough of it, and would come out to the colonies."

Mr. Clare has seen most countries of the Continent. Of them all, he likes France best to live in: "Paris—that is really home." He spoke about French people, tried to remember what an English writer had said recently: "French people are charming because they are ordinary people. The Frenchman in the south and the Frenchman in the north—each has his own local custom and style; underneath they are all Frenchmen. That is what makes them interesting."

A Toscanini Story

Mr. Clare speaks, besides his excellent English (in which there is no burr), German and French; and he "can understand Italian a bit." And speaking of Italian, he was reminded of a neat little story about Toscanini, the great Italian musician:

Fritz Busch was conducting in Milan one day. The conductor knew that Toscanini was in Milan and would be at the concert, and he looked forward to the great man coming round after the performance. However, when the concert-hall had emptied and the players were departing, no Toscanini arrived. Busch was rather worried. What had been wrong? A few days later Busch met his brother Adolph, and mentioned the conspicuous absence of Toscanini after the concert. "Oh, I met Toscanini yesterday," said Adolph, "and he told me to tell you that if you ever again put a *crescendo* in a Brahms symphony where Brahms didn't, he'll never speak to you again!"

The National Broadcasting Service String Orchestra, conducted by Maurice Clare, will be heard from the Exhibition Studio at 8 p.m. on Monday, December 18; and at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, December 20, from the Exhibition Studio, the orchestra will be heard with chorus in a special presentation, "The Christmas Story," told in carols and verses from many lands.

"HE THAT SHOULD COME" Dorothy Sayers' Nativity Play for Radio

HOW did the birth of Christ appear to His contemporaries? This is the question Dorothy Sayers, the well-known novelist and dramatist and creator of "Lord Peter Wimsey" attempts to answer in her Nativity Play, "He That Should Come." It is the question that Anatole France raises in one of his novels, but Miss Sayers raises it earnestly and not cynically.

In "He That Should Come" she portrays the political and social background of the old, familiar Christmas story. To do this, she throws a spotlight on the inn at Bethlehem. Here we see an interesting cross-section of the people of Judea. Here are characters representing every shade of political opinion in the land. There is the old-fashioned Pharisee, puritanical, bigoted, and loathing the new culture of the Romans; there is the progressive young Jew who has been educated at Rome; the inquisitive, foreign traveller; the merchant whose motto is "business first"; and the common people going quietly about their daily work. Standing aloof from them all, vigilant and proud, are the Roman soldiers, representing the might of Rome, keeping the peace and making sure that the taxes are paid.

Against this background, Miss Sayers tells in a sincere and moving fashion the story of Christ's birth. While the story is a simple one, it offers difficulties for the dramatist. For instance, there is a lack of the element of surprise in the story — the audience already knows what is going to happen. Further, the main action of the story can in no way be directly represented. Perhaps this is why, as Miss Sayers says, "Nativity plays are, generally speaking, remarkable for their twaddling triviality of form and content." Too often they have only the prettiness of a Christmas card with kneeling figures, tinsel and stars. But in "He That Should Come" we feel that the people who were close at hand when He was born are real people, people living in a



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world that had its problems which are curiously like our own.

The play has a Prologue and an Epilogue in which we hear the voices of the Three Wise Men, each asking whether He That Should Come has at last arrived.

Listeners will find that the broadcast of this Nativity Play is something out of the ordinary in dramatic fare, just as it is something rather out of the ordinary for Miss Sayers to have written. It will be heard from 2YA at 9.25 p.m. on Christmas Eve (Sunday, December 24).