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"Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" Evie asked, all excitement, and hardly bothering about her food, although she was so hungry.

The young man shook his head. "Wait a minute. Aren't you a Scandinavian, then?"

"No. I'm from Stornoway."

"STORNOWAY!" At this Evie broke into song, keeping time with her fork. "Horo, mo nighean donn bhoidheach," she sang. The young man grinned.

At the library she wouldn't look at a book by a John Howard, but if it was by Gustav Hellstrom she was caught at once, preferring bad Hellstrom to good Howard. Micky-wicky names got her, she devoured the Russians, and her proudest moment was when someone took her—it was probably a sly dig—for a Russian.

The coming of refugees was Evie's harvest time. How she pricked up her ears if she heard a foreign lingo: she was entranced by one girl simply because her name was Ingeborg Ellida.

To know that Austrian girl Lisl, charming with her fair plaits, or lively Marushka the Czech, or the exciting Ansos from Esthonia, who stepped straight out of the pages of Dostoevski—what bliss to Evie.

Some day I'm going to introduce Evie to Aunt Ada, just for the fun of seeing the hair fly!

Listening While I Work (38)

By "Matertamilias"

IT is a little hard to say at first sight or, rather, at first hearing, what it is that makes one programme a good documentary and another a flat piece of propaganda. The answer rests with the producer, and with BBC programmes coming out thick and fast there is at present a good choice of producers. There is also very great variety in the productions. The best that I have recently heard is the BBC production *To See the Vacant Sea*. This is unemotional and unsensational. It is as documentary as if a film unit had been sent to an R.A.F. Coastal Command station and had photographed the men at work there; only instead of a film unit we have a visit by a BBC reporter, and his account—dramatised—of what he saw there. There are no special headlines, no emphasis on subsunk or planes missing. The emphasis is on the deadly routine, the importance of precision, navigation, alertness, attention to detail. For the 50 times that a plane leaves "to see the vacant sea" the crew may sight a sub once only, but the routine flights have to be made. This could be very dull listening,

but it isn't. The programme was given in two parts on two successive Friday evenings from 2YA. I liked almost everything about it, the convincing atmosphere of the station, the economy of descriptive words, the simple, unsensational account of the practice bombing and the music, Vaughan Williams's *Coastal Command Suite*. It was a welcome contrast to so many of the documentary or semi-documentary programmes which build up excitement by quick patter and strained voices.

* * *

TO SEE THE VACANT SEA is, I fancy, a studio production built up from an eye-witness account. Perhaps that is why it is really more satisfactory than some of the other types of similar programmes—*Transatlantic Call*, or (to take another recent BBC feature) *Aeroplane Hospital* (2ZB, Sunday, 8 p.m.). *Aeroplane Hospital* described the routine of plane salvage and repair in Britain. It was interesting because we like to know how these things are done, but it had the usual sort of questions and answers by employees and people on the job, and despite the varied accents (Welsh predominating), there was a monotony due, I imagine, to the fact that most of those taking part were reading scripts in their answers. Another BBC feature heard

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