

public's conscience. I could not help remembering all the same that there have been a distressing number of great artists whose love of freedom was not their strongest motive force. Most Renaissance Italians, many seventeenth-century Frenchmen—without coming any nearer home—put up with despotic rule successfully and even profitably. The anti-Fascist services of most modern artists—which heaven forbid that we should underrate—were given because they sensed that Fascism threatened all civilised values simultaneously and directly. Had it aimed only at political liberty and left the arts alone, even if only for a time, we might have been less well served. Finally, must we always stress the defensive proficiency of the sentinel? That the whole of our energies yesterday and to-day have had to be used in saving ourselves is surely our misfortune rather than the necessary basis of all our theories.

Laughter in Court

I AM now able to report that the Brains Trust laugh is not a myth. Evidently microphone conditions are the underlying cause, for the last session I heard from 3YA had none of the old familiar voices—Huxley, Campbell, Joad—and yet sounded once or twice like an asthmatic barnyard. The feature of that session was the denial of Hilary St. George Saunders, author of *The Battle of Britain* and other publications which have raised the official booklet to the level of literature, that he was a historian. Mr. Saunders didn't give the reasons for his denial, but from his remarks it was clear that he had no objection to being regarded as a chronicler of contemporary events. One is therefore left guessing. Was it mere modesty? The remaining Trustees certainly appeared to reject his claim; and after all, how is one to classify the literary equivalent of the documentary film, which gives both the facts and the dramatic values of its subject, if not as history? Journalism it is not, though journalists have written it. Perhaps, with modern methods of recording contemporary events, we must alter our classification.

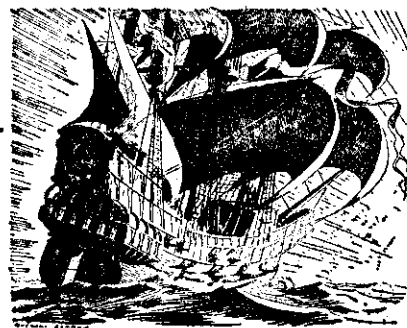
"The Great Ship"

PROBABLY this work by Eric Linklater, broadcast over 3YA on a recent Sunday, used the possibilities of radio drama in a new way. I don't remember any other which moved back and forth in time and space, told two stories at once, using about eight actors and a narrator, and combined battle action with realistic description, passing over into a sort of dreamlike intensity where the desert, the sky, and the sea seemed almost interchangeable forms of experience, and then into an allegory which might be no more than delirium. This sounds incredible, but was a triumphant success. The whole highly complicated story—I forgot to mention that there was a passage where we heard a man's thoughts—came to life and communicated itself in a manner unique and unforgettable. The technical skill of the author was superb; and his highly imaginative writing, bordering at times on poetic prose, produced some profound effects. The description of two men in the last stages of exhaustion, on a night march in the desert, when it seems that the stars have come to life and are following them in a shining herd, was like some of the best in Dunsany; only Linklater's feet are so firmly attached to the ground that one could believe him. The

allegory clearly derived from the experience of 1940; from a condition of nearly complete despair, the chief character suddenly senses English history as a unity, a voyage with a destination, and moves into the central image of the Great Ship. This is expressed with great fervour and perhaps a little floridly, but no one could doubt its sincerity. The production was NBS, and very, very good.

Minor Poetry of Music

WHAT can be said about Edward Macdowell, except to lament that his pleasant and melodious talent has been eclipsed by a later, more raucous variety of American composer? The "Sea Pieces," performed by the 4YA Concert Orchestra, are not in the first rank of musical works, but as an example by a minor poet of music they stand high. They have fanciful enough titles and deal with the sea in many aspects, from wandering icebergs to Spanish galleons. But I am quite sure they could be performed without any commentary and sound



quite as charming. Macdowell prefaced numbers of his compositions with fragments of poetry, and to little purpose. Nobody, hearing the Sea Pieces without their titles, could possibly say whether they describe the sea, the sky, the open fields, or the flights of fancy which exist only in the composer's mind. A great deal of the commentary and description which preface a radio performance of any work is superfluous; if music cannot stand without literary support, we may well ask the composer why he wrote it and the performer why he plays it.

Surfeit of Thrills

THE listener who hears too many radio thrillers becomes in time, like the reader of too many detective novels, both blasé and easily bored. He knows by heart the methods which may be used to murder a victim; he is on the look-out for mistakes made by the criminal; he can analyse the importance of each clue as it is presented. Should he anticipate the denouement, he is so far past the stage of being pleased at his own cleverness that even his self-esteem is not proof against the disappointment. All it amounts to is that yet another author has turned out to possess clay feet, and where are we now to turn? In some such mood I listened to "He Came by Night," a BBC fifteen-minute thriller from 4YA. It had the all-too-familiar old lady and companion living in the all-too-familiar lonely house in the country (even the villagers thought it haunted), and when the all-too-familiar rubies put in an appearance one suspected the worst. A thief got into the safe, but the old lady had anticipated that and substituted her false teeth for the gems. The companion, whom one had suspected all along, turned out to be a guilty accomplice and the criminals were completely fooled. The gentle listener was not, more's the pity.

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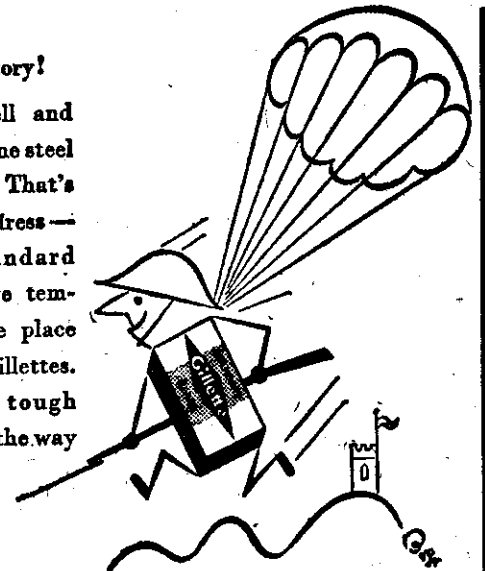
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