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RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say

Death in a Nutshell

AFTER hearing "The Case of the Invalid Colonel" and "The Case of the Home Guard Trench," the first two of the six mystery plays written by Freeman Wills Crofts for the BBC, I cannot help hoping that the author has not allowed these to interrupt his regular output of books. He and his detective are such old friends as to have claim on our most serious attention even when they appear in almost unrecognisable form. Chief Inspector French has here traded in his methodical tenacity for a brisk cleverness, and the maze of technical clues that evolve slowly in the books are exchanged for two or three simpler clues that loudly proclaim their significance half-way through the plot. In this lies the essence of the difficulty. If the listener is to be given something that will keep him guessing, there must be laid before him a fine mixed bag of clues and characters. This is not possible when the whole thing takes only 14 minutes. A mystery story as short as this must rely on dramatic excitement for its effect. Freeman Wills Crofts is one of the least dramatic of detective story writers; he has held his readers' interest by his slow, intricate, and technical patterns. While these present radio excursions of his are on the whole disappointing, there is no reason why, by giving him more time to play round with his developments, the BBC might not enable him to write scripts that do full justice to his ability.

How Not To Do It

INTENDING authors who think they have a chance of winning a prize in the forthcoming radio-script competition may do well to listen to some of the plays which come over, as much for warning as for emulation. One which I heard recently from 4YA, called "Fools Rush In," was a complete example of how not to do it; at any rate, if I were judging a competition for radio plays, a script of this sort wouldn't stand a chance with me. It was slickly written; it had action; the players put it over excellently. But what was it all about? People called Lady So-and-So, Cynthia, Gerald, and Pam. What were their ambitions in life? They seemed to have none? What did they do for a living? Nothing, apparently. What was the theme of the play? Match-making, neither absolutely pure nor particularly simple. Indeed, it was very complicated —Pam was in love with the heir to the title, who was in love with Cynthia, whose sister was engaged to Gerald, who decided to flirt with Pam, who in turn —maybe I've got it a little wrong, but that was the general idea. Anyhow, it ended happily, with the right people in each other's arms, which I suppose was the only thing that mattered. Or was it?

"We Have Been Listening"

THE voice of the announcer is imper- turbable, unimpassioned even; a correctly and clearly enunciated statement of fact. With the omniscience born of experience, the triumph over difficulties secret to himself and his cohorts, he foretells the immediate future, and it happens. Sometimes he may, by the

inflections of his voice, suggest that he hopes the listener has been pleased; but whether he was interested, excited, bored, or indeed whether he even heard the broadcast, you know not. "You have been listening to—" he says, and becomes a man apart, completely detached from the event. Recently a 2YA announcer varied his back announcement by saying: "We have been listening to—" The effect was magical. The variation may have been indicative of a spontaneous interest in the preceding music or no more than variety for variety's sake. No matter. There was a new intimacy. Both sides of the microphone came together. Music had come right into the room.

The Dog Beneath the Skin

WHAT the announcer unfortunately insisted on calling "A Panorama of Latin-American music," was, with its commentary, one of the most interesting and informative broadcasts 3YA has had for some time. The recordings for the most part tangos, sambas, guarachos, congas and other dances—illustrated the commentary, and the whole was a study in primitivism; for Latin-American



music is founded largely on the rhythms of Indians and Africans—Inca religious dances, laments of subjugated Amazonian and Mexican tribes, the drum-beats and choruses of negro slaves—and sometimes on their inter-

action, to judge from the Brazilian samba, whose name is derived from the caste name for those of mixed Indian and negro blood. All this is overlaid, first by imported European motifs, which appear enervated by comparison when—as in the Argentine bolero or the beguine of French Martinique—they have remained apart, unmixed with the primitive rhythms; and, secondly, by the veneer of sophistication imposed by the modern commercial and professional dance band which spreads these dances abroad. But again one may speculate whether the sophistication brought by such a style differs so widely from primitivism after all. The whole programme, in itself entralling, brought out the fascinating problem why the American civilisations (North as well as South), so proud of their civilisation, continue to draw their popular music from sources so primitive as to be actually tribal.

Andrea Chenier

THE real André Chenier was a poet of somewhat classical style and somewhat conservative views who, after welcoming (in the "bliss was it in that dawn" manner) the French Revolution in its highly conservative beginnings, developed a violent dislike for its democratic and proletarian aspects, and was ultimately guillotined. Not so the Andrea Chenier of Giordano's opera, recently heard in a 3YA "Music from the Theatre" broadcast; the stock type of the romantic poet, melodramatically accusing the whole life of the eighteenth-century, he throws in his lot with some rebellious peasantry and inspires them

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