

RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say

Local Colour

DAI-KEONG-LEE; a fascinating name.

The anticipation of the broadcast from 1YX of his "Prelude and Hula" conjured up an impression of tropical imagery, the scene and expression of a people of whom we derive our ideas chiefly from over-coloured travel posters. For it would seem that Dai-Keong-Lee writes his music in Hawaii. Yet the music was a disappointment. It may be that distant fields are greenest and that it is the nostalgia of the exile which gives the sharpest picture of his homeland; or it may be that Kipling was right and that those who have not adventured beyond their native heath may not even have adventured there. I do not know anything of the life and adventures of Dai-Keong-Lee, and he may know as little of Hawaii as I do. There certainly was nothing exotic about the music, and save for a rather obvious rhythm which may easily have been based on the hula, the music might just as well have been written by the writer of any film music in any country. It was pleasant but undistinctive. Aaron Copland's well-known "El Salon Mexico" which followed the "Prelude and Hula" has a much more authentic ring about it. Although written about Mexico by a citizen of the U.S.A., its rhythms and vivid colouring give a much livelier impression of local colour.

Good Radio Writing

NO better author than Freeman Wills Croft could have been chosen to write 15-minute thrillers for radio. His prose style is so matter-of-fact, so unencumbered, so concise that it needs little more condensation to make one of his stories into a short shocker. The little that was necessary was well done in "The Case of the Stolen Hand-Grenade," which I heard from 4YA. A swift process of elimination fixed the guilt; the listener might have guessed who was guilty, and with another five minutes in which to think it over might have discovered for himself the "slip of the tongue" which the murderer made to his undoing. But the denouement in a 15-minute play necessarily arrives with such a rush that no time is left to wonder whether we might have solved the problem ourselves unaided. And that, of course, is the secret of good radio writing.

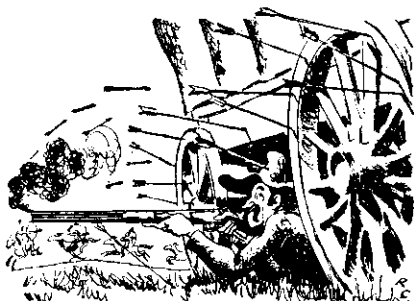
Nation Shall Chirp Unto Nation

I SUGGEST that the "Music from the Map" series from 3YA might be improved if each session possessed a little more plan in its selection. A typical session begins with informing us that Sir Walter Besant, Charles Dickens, and

George Meredith were born in Portsmouth, plays us some part of Walton's "Portsmouth Point" Overture, leaps abruptly to Athens, with some rather shaky references to Byron's services to Greek liberty and presents a fruity tenor singing that poet's "Maid of Athens"—which unfortunately has nothing much to do with Greek liberty, but merely illustrates the habit of the Romantic poets, so infuriating to those who hanker after adult and reasonable behaviour, of professing spiritual devotion to young women whom they had met twice and who very definitely had not deserved all this. Some continuity and plan in this idea of interesting possibilities might remove a certain vagueness that clings about this, as about many morning programmes.

Wide Open Spaces

ONE would expect a work entitled "The Prairie" (the Lucas Foss cantata heard from 2YA recently) to give one an impression of vastness and space. Of wildness perhaps but not of ruggedness, to be elemental yet not chaotic. But to me this composition conveyed nothing of what would seem to be the



essential spirit of its subject. I found it pretentious, noisy, and dull. The cantata is based on a poem by Carl Sandburg, "The Corn Huskers" with which I am not familiar, though phrases from it ("They are mine, they are mine," "In the dark of a thousand years") seemed to be repeated by the chorus with monotonous regularity, so that they are graven permanently on my heart and may even have penetrated to my subconscious. The cantata aims at giving musical form to the history of the middle states—the early days before the white man, the pioneering period, the wars with the Indians, the ploughing of the land, the machine age, the future of America. But there seemed to me nothing particularly expressive of America about it, and in Part 2 which, thanks to the commentator, I know is intended to depict the prairie just before the white invasion, the thundering herds of bison could equally well have been gnus and there is an oom-ba-ba-ba effect in the background distinctly reminiscent of Sanders of the River. But I am reserving my bitterest criticism for the final movement, said to express America's future expansion and prosperity. The jaded listener had the right to expect a certain triumphant serenity in the treatment of this theme, but, as the

critics explain, the work was completed in 1942, and echoes of the war have crept in. The cantata seems to end where it began, and we leave the prairie in one of its more rugged moods.

Old Moustache

H. SETON MERRIMAN'S *Barlasch of the Guard*, a BBC version of which is now coming from 3YL, has the makings of an excellent serial. Such a book as "Barlasch" belongs to the great days of the historical novel, when writers such as Merriman, Weyman, Crockett, Henty and others had arrived at a method of making the Sir Walter Scott style palatable to a large public. The works of these good men seem at a later date often as stodgy as their mighty original, but they had certain notable virtues which were also his. In the first place, the authors knew some history; the redoubtable Henty wrote dozens of historical novels, each one of which dealt with some historical episode, not without colour, and in some cases, requiring a fair measure of general information. Hence Papa Barlasch presented with tremendous vitality is the model for all radio serials; a nice old gentleman himself, half his charm comes from his Napoleonic background—"once a Sergeant—Italy—Egypt—the Danube"—and from his being the archetype of the Imperial old soldier, the "groggnard" or "vieille moustache," the combination of Odysseus and Old Bill, dear to the French heart.

Memory Test

IN 1823 the publisher Diabelli wrote a simple waltz and invited composers in Austria to submit one variation each. Beethoven responded along with 50 others; he was then busy sketching out his Ninth Symphony, put this aside for the time, and with his thoughts still running on a vast scale, turned out 33 piano variations instead of one. I don't think it follows that because Beethoven took a spell from writing the Ninth Symphony to compose the Diabelli Variations, he would expect us to take two spells during the hearing of these variations and fill each with a week's work at other things. Yet strangely enough, while we have become used to taking the Ninth Symphony at one sitting, 2YC is giving these seldom-heard variations in three weekly batches, though one would expect there to be more variety in a set of variations lasting about an hour all told, than in a symphony lasting 80 minutes. The catch about listening to variations is that one has to remember the theme to make any sense of them. Last year when 2YC played another grand rarity, Bach's 30 Goldberg Variations, and dividing them into three parts, it was galling to find Bach's theme so elusive that we had lost the whole thread of the affair by the time the second and third Saturdays came round. This time like the wise thrush we took no chances; we leapt on the theme, sang it several times over, and ordered the rest of the family to do the same daily

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