

which I could listen no matter what his subject or how he treated it; and the undoubted fact that he really loves and admires Blake. But his method of saying so was to keep his praises till the end of his talk, and to treat Blake's poetry to an initial onslaught which would have devastated a poet less secure in his readers' affections. "A robin redbreast in a cage" was dismissed as "the poorest jogtrot doggerel." Certain verses of "Tiger, Tiger," were "stuff and nonsense" and the tiger himself was "shamefully ill-groomed." After irritating many Blake-worshippers in this manner, James Stephens then subtly changed his ground and ended up by saying that although Blake was the most careless poet who ever lived, and many of his verses far from perfect, yet there is not one of his poems that we could do without!

The Round Knight at Table

FALSTAFF, "this bed-presser, this huge hill of flesh," is all of *King Henry IV*, Parts One and Two. There are many glorious moments — Owen Glendower and Hotspur provide no small number of them—but the Round Man blots out the world whenever on the stage. There is now a reaction against



those critics who, swept from their feet by the tide of his vitality, commit themselves wholly to his cause and stigmatise the Prince's final rejection of him as a dishonourable act; for, after all, what else was he to do? The reaction, as reactions will, proceeds to go too far, and attempts to convince us that towards the end of Part II we are to see Falstaff in a less glorious light. But it is hard to see that any stage presentation, any reading even, can prevent that mighty personality from annexing the scene the moment he surges on to it and by reason one must, I fear, write off the BBC readings from *Henry IV* with the rest of their present Shakespeare series so far as too pale.

Ornamental Hermit

THE five promised BBC programmes on English Eccentrics will be worth listening to, judging by the first sample which I heard from 4YA (the only one I have heard at time of writing). The most remarkable figure in this programme—I found him almost unbelievable—was one who called himself an Ornamental Hermit; it seems that there really were such creatures, for in the later 18th and early 19th Century owners of palatial mansions in the country would hire a hermit to reside in a grotto on the estate. What pleasure they and their friends obtained from the presence of a hermit in the garden would no doubt

depend on the particular hermit's nature and attainments. Just as hired fools could be relied on for quips and jests, so no doubt one might expect the resident hermit to enliven a country holiday with wisdom of a more metaphysical sort. Provided that the grotto was dry and the climate not too chilly at nights, and given the presence of a few tomes, a quire of paper and something to write with, such an existence (meals provided) would seem, compared with the modern complications of a thinker's life, positively paradisaical.

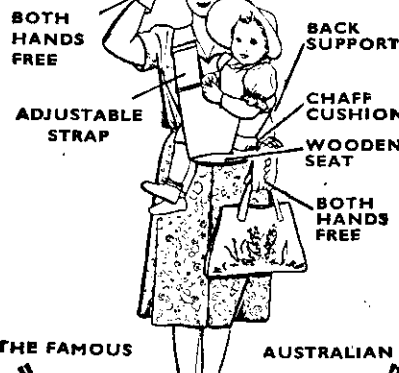
Master Pianist

THERE is no doubt whatever that Solomon is a master pianist; the overworked word "great" is the only one which can be applied to him. And yet, however great one may have thought him through listening to recordings, and through hearing his broadcasts from New Zealand stations, the impact of his actual presence on the concert platform at once adds cubits to an already immense stature. It is surprising that so colossal an effect of personality can be conveyed to an audience without any display of artistic histrionics; on the contrary, the very restraint with which Solomon performs is an added reason for accord between artist and listener—no visible distractions or mannerisms are allowed to short-circuit the current of pure music which electrifies the concert-hall. At a tender age I remember hearing Paderewski in Dunedin; later, when I was old enough really to appreciate what I was hearing, there was the outstanding landmark of Backhaus. His recitals were among the unforgettable "highspots" of our musical life, and the authority and power of his renditions will remain as a criterion for students of the piano, who may count themselves lucky that they have had the opportunity of hearing him.

Imperious Caesar

"REMEMBER CAESAR" were the cryptic words which the Restoration judge, in Gordon Dario's play of that title (3YA, September 2), found scribbled on a note in his coat pocket. His calendar read March 14, and Caesar was killed i' the Capital on the Ides of March. His life was clearly in danger, and (to use the words of a New Zealand poet) he emplaced cannon at all his windows, barricaded his doors, to the acute indignation of his cook, and prepared to stand siege. Then it was that a peaceable caller arrived to pay a pre-arranged visit, one Mr. Caesar; that the handwriting on the note proved to be the judge's own; and that his wife, who had throughout preserved an attitude of delightful calm, pointed out that the Ides of March fell, on the 15th anyway. This was admirable fooling; and, to allay any doubts that may arise, persons surnamed Caesar do exist and are christened Julius and Augustus by their parents. Moreover, there was more historical veracity in the tale than might be supposed; in the 17th Century a gentleman having reason to fear an assassin or a mob might well barricade his house and arm his family and servants—indeed, it several times happened and, for the matter of that, the maternal grandfather of Winston Churchill, in 19th Century America, defended his newspaper office with artillery against an incensed multitude. In good King Charles's golden days there was no police and not much standing army and the citizen might well fend for himself until the militia or the Household Troops got to hear about it

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