

listeners. The tales differed very considerably in quality; in spite of the title and the inaugural publicity they never attained to a Grand Guignol or "Horror" style; there were no ghosts worth mentioning and not a great deal of atmosphere; several devices, like the giant octopus, had whiskers on and cobwebs on the whiskers; for the most part they depended on suspense for their effect, which unless handled by a virtuoso like Hitchcock, seems shopworn. But one listened regularly, partly for the vigour and distinction which John Dickson Carr brings to his most perfunctory themes, and partly for the admirable performance of an unknown actor who, in the role of the Man in Black, introduced each broadcast in a few velvet-and-strychnine sentences. However, as time went on, it began to seem as if the Man in Black's personality were overpowering the dramas he compered. The latest Appointment heard apparently had nothing to do with Dickson Carr: by one Robert Barr, it was a rather dreary tale about the Danish underground chivvying a female quisling—undistinguished in plot and devoid of character. The Man in Black, however, gave of his best, with no other result than to make the whole thoroughly top-heavy.

### Go to Bed!

THE first broadcast from 4ZB of *Here's Health* was better than I had anticipated. We have been given such a lot of popular propaganda, in various ways, about the high spots of the world of medicine, that there can be scarcely a reader or a listener who does not think he knows all about the sulpha drugs, penicillin, and the medical possibilities of atomic research. It is good, therefore, to find a programme beginning on a lower note, and dealing with something so prosaic as the common cold. You might not think it possible to devote a quarter-of-an-hour to the common cold; you might shrug it off with the suggestion that there's not much one can do about it anyhow. In that case, you're the bait this session is angling for. You are the central figure of the plot as given here—the man who went to work with a cold, forgot to sneeze into his handkerchief, passed his malady on to the office staff and his children, and ended up in bed, where he should have been from the start. This sort of person is a Menace, and the programme told him so in no uncertain terms, while giving him advice about how to build up resistance and what to do once the cold is upon you. The one thing it didn't specify was what the average boss would say (the fiction boss here portrayed was obviously a minority representative) if his employees stopped away and went to bed at sign of the first snuffle; no mention was made, either, of who was going to pay the sufferer's wages during his time off.

### Vernacular

AS I begin this paragraph, my set is discoursing another cheerful but somewhat artificial attempt to revive the broad-bottomed vitality of music-hall. Stanley Holloway is in charge and a good time is being had by all. But when shall we make such direct and living popular song out of the immediate material of our own time? As usual,

what little progress is being made in this direction is the work of negroes, the latest recruits being those of the British West Indies and Trinidad in particular. Few of those who happily bawl "Rum and Coca-Cola" probably know this engaging ditty for what it is—a debased but genial version of the native calypso, written by I know not whom under the wartime impact of American garrisons on island life. A point of local colour is that the extraordinary vowel sounds which issue from the Andrews Sisters in their rendering are believed to be American efforts to reproduce or parody the long A which the negro voice has developed under British influence in these islands. These ladies in "Rum and Coca-Cola" have another relevance to the problem of modern vernacular song; when they come to deal with the mastering human passion, they desert the usual dreary romantic bleatings and venture to be healthily and heartily suggestive. This impulse, I think, should have further release. It plays so important a part in existing vernacular song among soldiers, students, and ordinary respectable citizens, that there can be no conceivable harm in letting it loose, within the bounds of natural harmlessness, on the popular air.

### Opera in English

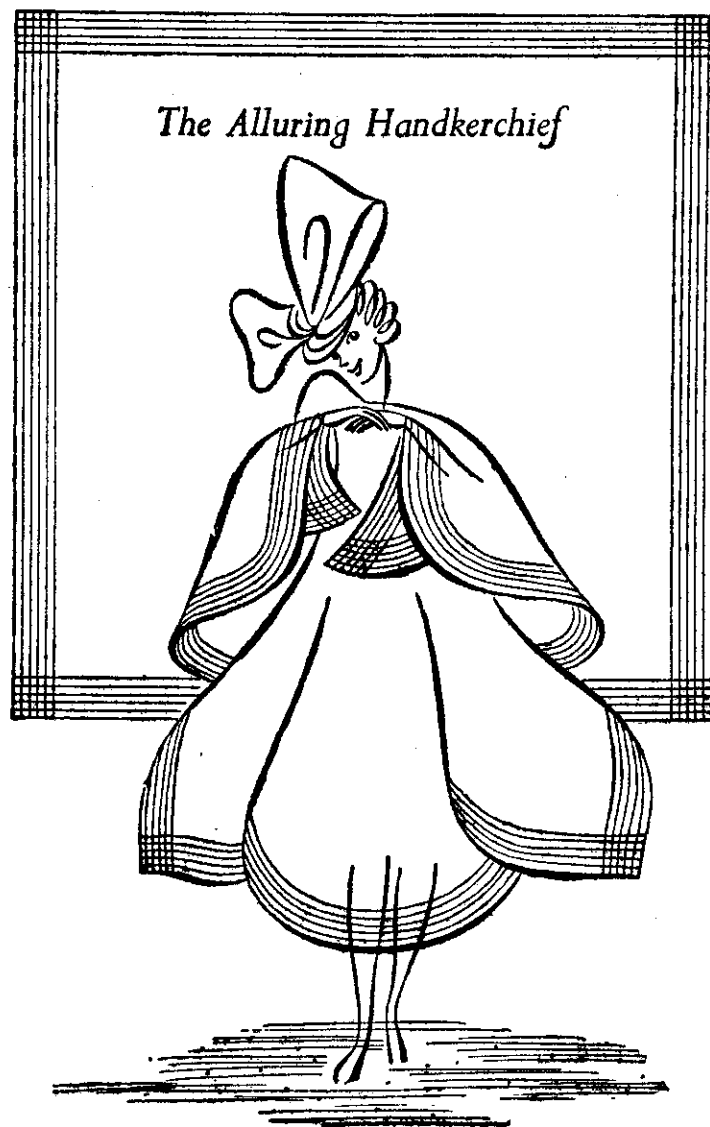
UNDER this title a series of Joan Hammond recordings came recently from 3YL. Translated opera has been fairly common on the Christchurch air recently; there was the relayed local *Carmen*, and there is a scarred veteran, whose title I can never remember, involving Dennis Noble and Webster Booth in a passage from *La Boheme*. But, taken by and large, opera in English is not as a rule successful. For one thing, the translation almost always bears the stigma of the pre-modern idea of Literary English, with its archaisms and unnatural idiom. Operatic Italian is, in all conscience, a sufficiently melodramatic and unnatural business—since all the human and dramatic side is for the opera-lover nothing but a pretext for the music—but there is something about the English words "Ah! 'Tis Gone" or "Thou May'st Learn to Hate Me" which somehow will not do; one feels like a student of Greek tragedy confronted with the less fortunate works of Gilbert Murray. Again, the Italian tradition in opera, from which all these translated works come, is much at variance with the English outlook, so that a translation has always something of the "deary deary dear, this is none of I" look about it. Last of all, when the words are intelligible I, for one, am more than ever aware of opera's too common disdain for everything within its own body which is not music. Benjamin Britten, I see, in composing *Peter Grimes*, got someone to write the libretto for him in modern English irregular verse. Perhaps this will solve the difficulty, and raise the words and actions of the characters to something like the same level of dignity as the music.

### DIV. SIGS. REUNION

A Dominion reunion of members of 1st N.Z.E.F. Div. Sigs. will be held in Wellington during Easter, 1947.

Those who wish to attend should send address to the secretary, Oliver Foote, c/o Justice Department, Wellington.


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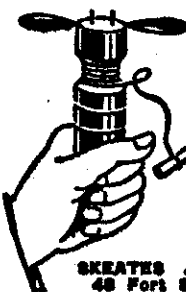
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