

RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say

Titania

WAFTED on drifts of Mendelssohniana, and preceded by what seemed like a good five minutes of BBC build-up, Titania appeared to take her place in 2YA's Friday night series *Shakespeare's Characters*. But, like Cluny Brown, she seems to suffer from the fact that nobody (except possibly Titania herself) seems to know her place, least of all the gentleman responsible for the script. The announcer's introductory remarks are extremely poetic. He describes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Shakespeare's Moonlight Sonata, declares that the moon or moonlight is mentioned 42 times therein (we have not checked this), that Titania is the personification of this moonlight, "Diana translated into Warwickshire." The gentleman whose remarks conclude the programme (is it the same gentleman?) stresses the everyday-ness of Shakespeare's fairies. They do not vanish into thin air, he points out, but into the oven, the milk-churn, the gossip's bowl. So here in the one programme we have presented to us the two conflicting theories held by critics in regard to the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Are they of the earth, earthy; are they merely, to quote Ivor Brown, "ourselves in our livelier, more fantastical moments?" Or shall we believe, as Agate and probably Peter Pan would have us believe, that Shakespeare's fairies are more than mortal? Titania herself proclaims herself a spirit, yet appears to have worldly interests. I think she would rather be regarded as near-mortal than non-mortal. Certainly she would lay no claim to the title of the Diana of Warwickshire (her references to the moon are always detached and not always complimentary) unless Diana is used, as King James used it in his *Daemonologie*—"That fourth kind of spirits, which by the Gentiles was called Diana . . . how there was a King and Queen of Fairy . . . how they naturally rode and went, and did all other actions like natural men and women." But whatever Titania's status her voice was music, and through the music she speaks for herself, making it clear that, in spite of the lapse of years neither she nor her creator has need of apologists. It is perhaps excusable if the BBC's poetic eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, finds it difficult to find a suitable resting place between earth and heaven.

Topping

I FIND it difficult to believe that the NZBS production of *The Adventures of Topper* now being heard over the ZB's has been adapted in any way for New Zealand consumption from the original American radio script, so perfectly does it conjure up memories of both book and film. Mr. Bernard Beeby, the producer, stated in a recent *Listener* interview that the main parts have been given an atmosphere acceptable to New Zealand audiences, but I still maintain that the atmosphere is the work of Mr. Thorne Smith (confidentially, it's a little stale) and that its acceptability depends on our being men-of-the-world rather than New Zealanders. However, perhaps Mr. Beeby

has allowed for the fact that we are less men-of-the-world than our opposite numbers in the States. "Topper" would seem at first a surprising choice for radio since its humour, so well exploited in the film version, depends on things seen and unseen rather than things heard. But the radio script is competent and one seems to miss nothing of the plot's absurdities. Technically the NZBS production studios have excelled themselves, and if our loftier self does suggest that all this talent would have been better employed on Shaw or Ibsen, in our normal moments we do not begrudge either ourselves or the cast their half-hours of good fun.

Messer Marco

IN preparing *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (which has just finished its Sunday morning run from 2YA) the BBC was evidently of one mind with Doctor G. M. Smith in believing that there is no such thing as absolute truth, and that in any case it's much more important to be interesting. On this basis they produced an excellent programme, though it is difficult to see why it would not have been equally excellent if Uncle Joseph had been replaced by Uncle Maffeo. However,



there is perhaps little hard substance of truth left in the story as corroded by time and contemporary reportage as that of Marco Polo, and it is sufficient if an account of him achieves imaginative reality. The BBC programme had validity gained without the sacrifice of romanticism, an effect due largely to the peculiar timelessness of its narrative style, the beautiful balance of its sentences which made even well-worn phrases ("This day we make history") sound Delphic rather than sententious. It was a programme worthy of that traveller who, says Masefield, "created Asia for the European mind."

Profusion Unlimited

SOONER or later, in the heart of each one of us who is not as insensitive as ferro-concrete, there must well up a great cry at the serials of to-day—this thought, couched in the language of strong emotion, struck me after listening to the two thousand and third episode (or near enough) of *The Amazing Duchess* (3YA, Tuesday and Thursday at 10.10 a.m.). Not that *The Amazing Duchess* is anywhere nearly so bad as many other soap-operas which charity and a slight knowledge of the law of libel compel me to leave unnamed. It isn't. There is an occasional flavour of gusto and reality about it; the characters have their troubles, but we are not harrowed by a constant suc-

cession of unhappy love affairs, motor accidents, desperate illnesses of only children, business failures, and the mental derangement of close relatives, nor at the end of each episode are we left with the heroine hanging over the crater of an active volcano while the villain jumps on her fingers and twists his black moustaches. Elizabeth Chudleigh, Duchess of Kingston, is very nearly human at times, which is a considerable feat for a serial heroine, but surely she could have been brought to life in a quarter of the number of episodes. However, if we insist on having as many serials as we do have in each day's programme, we cannot expect them to have artistic worth, because there are not enough good writers in the world to produce them. It is a matter of having either a few good serials, or thousands of inferior ones.

World Affairs

WICKHAM STEED is, as Somerset Maugham once said of himself, quite an old party now. Newspaper editors usually don't live long in South America because of firearms and the Latin temperament, nor in Britain and the U.S. because the life hardens their arteries quickly, but Steed, for some years editor of *The Times*, seems to be an exception. If Steed says on Sunday that Byrnes acted with patience and moderation in the latest crisis with the Russians, Mr. Brown, walking through the park to his Hereford Street Office on Monday morning, tells Mr. Fothergill that Byrnes has really been very patient with the Russians over this business. One can agree with Mr. Brown, and all the others who take their gospel according to Steed, that he marshals his material well, has an authoritative microphone manner, and commands the sonorous prose rhythms of his generation, yet he cannot give a complete picture. No man could. He and all other men are limited by their environment and their prejudices, their tastes and inhibitions, too limited to broadcast every week to an audience which as a whole is neither well-informed nor highly critical. The only way to give listeners more points of view, more light on more facets of the problems of world affairs, would be to have a panel of broadcasters working in rotation: Steed or A. J. P. Taylor from England, Raymond Gram Swing from America, perhaps a Russian, introduced from Moscow by our Minister, and possibly (let us whisper it) even a New Zealander.

Perennial Problem

THIS time of year is particularly suited to the broadcasting of such talks as those given by J. D. McDonald on the perennial topic, "So You're Sending Your Child to Secondary School?" Parents read, from time to time, much upon the question of what to do with the child who has just passed the sixth standard; information and misinformation is showered on them by well-meaning relatives and friends; sometimes, by the time the actual moment of decision is reached, parents have arrived at the state of not being able to make up their minds one way or the other, and the offspring often makes up the parents' minds for them by taking a job in the meantime and presenting them with a *fait accompli*. Mr. McDonald intends his advice for such parents, as well as those whose minds are already made up. His first talk included a straightforward ac-