

DICKENS AND MUSIC

CHARLES DICKENS was no musician; efforts to instil music into him as a boy were hopeless. He tried to learn the piano in his schooldays and then took lessons on the violin, but his teachers gave him up. It was not until many years later that he made his third and last attempt to become an instrumentalist. During his first transatlantic voyage he wrote to a friend saying that he had bought an accordion. He gives the following description of the musical talents of his fellow passengers on the return voyage:

"One played the accordion, another the violin, and another (who usually began at six o'clock a.m.) the key bugle: the combined effect of which instruments when they all played different tunes in different parts of the ship, at the same time, and within hearing distance of each other, as they sometimes did (everybody being intensely satisfied with his own performance) was sublimely hideous."

He does not say whether he was one of the performers.

Dickens refers in his novels to a great many vocal and instrumental works and these are of some historical importance, for they reflect the general condition of ordinary musical life in England during the middle of last century.

In his book *Charles Dickens and Music*, James T. Lightwood does not profess to have chronicled all the musical references, but he lists more than 160 of them. Much as he loved music, Dickens could never bear the least noise while writing, and he waged a fierce war against church bells and itinerant musicians.

But Dickens was all for music in its right setting. He was a personal friend of the great performers and critics of his day, and practically everything he wrote contained a ballad, or some reference to musical activity.

Listeners to the four main National Stations will shortly hear (in the *For My Lady* session) "Charles Dickens and Music," introducing songs, solo instrumental, and orchestral items. The session will be heard in the 4YA programme on Monday, March 31, from 2YA on Monday, April 28, 1YA on Monday, May 26, and 3YA on Monday, June 23. It will also be heard as an evening session from 2YD, beginning on March 31.

(continued from previous page)

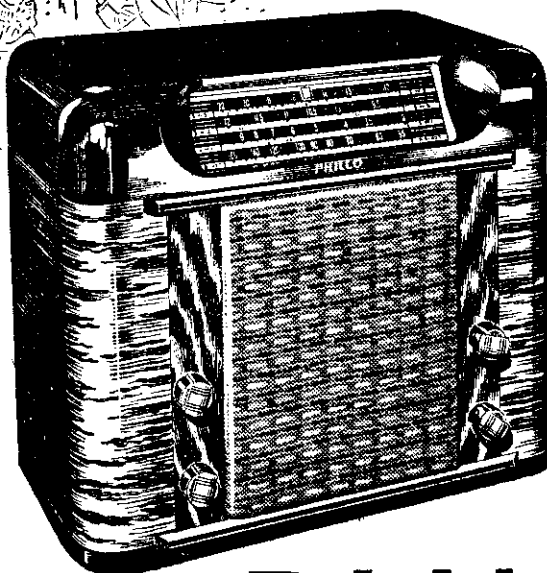
Mr. Short uses the term "vaudeville" in as wide a sense as possible: he makes it include everything popular from Gilbert and Sullivan to Annette Kellerman diving into a tank. The only thing left out is the circus. He is an indefatigable gleaner of phrase and anecdote. He is astoundingly industrious and comprehensive: his index fills 16 pages and includes thousands of entries. He sketches the rise and fall of famous theatres, the exploits of managers, the virtuosity of writers and composers, and the glittering careers of stars.

Don't look to this book for scandal. It doesn't worry about the love life of the ladies of the chorus. Here, in one of Ernest Short's brief glances at such matters, is the refreshing comment of a music-hall singer on her supposed amours, "Wonderful constitution they must think I have!"

—D.O.W.H.



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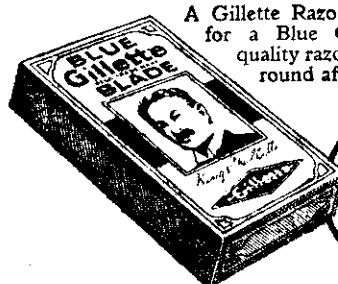
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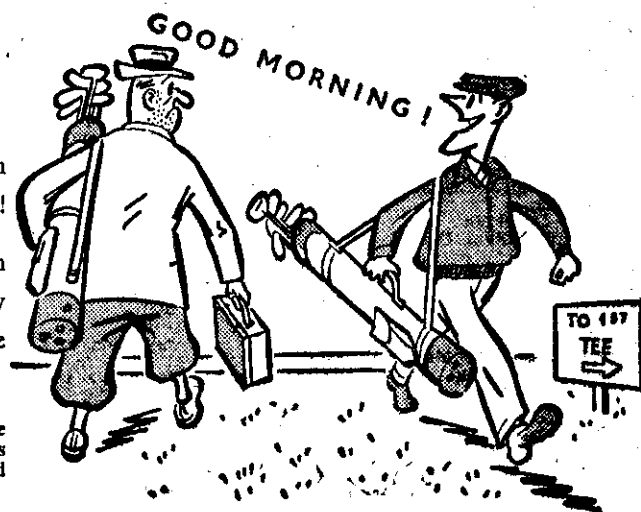
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