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## RADIO VIEWSREEL

### What Our Commentators Say

#### Slender Thread

CENTURIES hence John Donne's chief claim to fame may possibly be the fact that he applied titles for two high-class 20th Century products, and both inspired by the same meditation. For *No Man is an Island* is the title and alleged theme of a new series of famous speeches heard over the ZB network on Sunday nights. Actually, we are perhaps guilty of stretching Donne's original concept of the interdependence of mankind to cover all the impulses of man towards man, and as it is almost impossible to find a famous speech that is not concerned with mankind in some way or another, Orson Welles has a wide field to choose from. He has chosen widely. First, the meditation itself, in Mr. Welles's best death-bed manner. Then the famous oration of Pericles, "The whole earth is the sepulchre of famous men," in Mr. Welles's best graveside manner. (Incidentally, I feel that anyone sufficiently ill-advised to suggest to Pericles that the bell that tolled for a dead Spartan tolled also for Pericles would have had some tolling done for him.) Finally the Gettysburg oration, which, though instinct with ideals of democracy and humanity, still seemed too abstract to fit into Donne's beautifully concrete image "every man is a piece of a continent, a part of the main." The second series of speeches seemed to straggle even further from the confines of the title, but between speeches a commentator did his best to maintain the now somewhat tenuous relationship, and the "white heat of resentment of injustice" was now considered passport to inclusion in the series. The result was that we listened to Emile Zola's Defence in the Dreyfus Case, a noble speech by a certain John Brown accused of smuggling slaves in pre-Civil War days (probably the only speech which John Donne would have thoroughly approved), and a somewhat jingoistic oration by Daniel Webster pleading passionately for union of North and South in order that "that gorgeous insignia of the republic" should continue to be treated with respectful awe abroad. Mr. Welles enjoyed himself, but listeners would have appreciated the programme more if it had been presented merely as one of Famous Speeches. The effort of bearing Donne's sentiments in mind while listening to others discordant with them spoilt the effect of what could have been a very impressive programme.

#### The Lady Vanishes

ALONE among my friends I did not see the film version of *The Lady Vanishes*, but feel I can now hold up my head after hearing the very competent NZBS production (adapted from the film adapted from the book). The plot is, naturally enough for an above-average thriller, complicated, and incidents explode one on top of another, but the listener had no difficulty in following the action. This was partly due to careful casting. It was naturally easy enough to distinguish Nazis from nannies by the foreign accent of the former, but the producer had a more exacting task when it was a question of making distinct to the audience each of the many characters speaking Public devotes of the film may have winced to School English. He succeeded, though hear such very unmellow players tack-

ling the Radford and Wayne-tailored roles of Caldecott and Charteris, and may have thought Margaret and Eric scarcely at home in their parts. But these were minor details. The plot, the brisk parry and thrust of the dialogue, and above all the wild war-whoops of the speeding train (atmosphere and pace ready-made for radio) carried the whole programme swiftly on to its dénouement. Bouquets to the NZBS for an hour of splendid entertainment.

#### Not Memorable

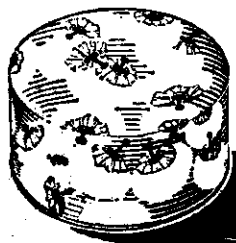
NOW that short stories complete with plots and trick endings have ceased to be published in the best magazines one sometimes wonders what has happened to all those disciples of O. Henry and H. H. Munro and even Somerset Maugham. Some of them perhaps write for the films, suffering their four-ounce baby of fiction to be nourished from the ever-flowing pens of Hollywood script-writers till the over-sized brat bears no resemblance to its original self. The rest, I have decided, write radio plays. This is regrettable, since there are no O. Henrys or Sakis or Somerset Maughams among them, and the surprise ending can usually be anticipated by even the least quick-witted radio listener. When one is reading a story, suspicions can be immediately verified, but in listening to a radio play (in which there is much more hanky-panky to be gone through) this is not possible. All this apropos of Gordon Daviot's *Remember Caesar*, which I heard from 2YA last Sunday. My only mistake lay in supposing Caesar to be a dog, whereas in actual fact (if one can use the term of an entirely fictitious production) he turned out to be a man. Let us hope that as far as this type of play is concerned the Ides of March will come.

#### The Bronte Goes to Woolworths

JANE EYRE is a good serial. Recollected in tranquillity the plot of the novel has its defects, but what seems melodramatic in printed form is merely good radio to listeners nurtured on *Rebecca* and *The Legend of Kathie Warren*; while *Big Sister* had far more to contend with than merely being expected to go through a form of marriage with a man who kept a mad wife locked up in the attic at home. In any case I have little sympathy with those who insist that their fiction be true to life, who seek to prune the wings of romanticism, and reduce to tattle-tale grey the stuff that dreams are made of. *Jane Eyre* owes its long-lived popularity to the fact that it is the love story *par excellence*. The formula has now been worked out. First, the attraction of opposites. As John P. Marquand's George Stanhope is fond of saying, there must be conflict. At last the lovers recognise their love, whereupon the happiness they crave is dashed from their lips. At the very end a certain measure of satisfaction is permitted to be salvaged from the ruin. Many since Charlotte Bronte have used the formula, particularly for radio serials. But lesser masters of the craft have multiplied the number of dashings and have squared things for their heroine by similarly multiplying the sum of happiness with which she is left at the end. Only



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