

"WORLD THEATRE"

Introducing An Important Series of Broadcast Plays

BEGINNING on September 5 at 2YA, the NZBS will present from the main National Stations in coming months a series of radio presentations of world-famous plays, all of them major works of dramatic art and all of them unusual, from the radio point of view, in that they take at least a full hour to broadcast and, in some cases, nearly an hour and a-half.

Because of the importance of this series we have asked the Director of Broadcasting, PROFESSOR JAMES SHELLEY, to introduce it by means of two special articles for "The Listener," the first of which appears herewith.

FOR the past two years the Home Service of the BBC has presented under the title "World Theatre" a series of plays belonging to various countries and ages which are in one way or another interesting to students of the theatre. The Transcription Service of the BBC, convinced of the general popularity of these presentations, has selected a group of these plays to record for distribution overseas. So far five have come to hand and they will be broadcast from our stations shortly. The five are: *The Trojan Women*, by Euripides, which was produced in 415 B.C. in Athens as the first part of a Trilogy which won the second prize at the annual festival of Dionysus; *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, by Christopher Marlowe which was acted in London about 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada; *Hedda Gabler*, by the great Norwegian, Henrik Ibsen, which was written in 1890; *The Man of Destiny*, by Bernard Shaw, from his early volume *Plays Pleasant*, of 1898; and *L'Aiglon*, by Edmond Rostand, which was produced in Paris in 1900.



E. J. KING BULL, producer of "The Man of Destiny," by GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (right)

THE broadcasting of this World Theatre series affords us a good opportunity for discussing how far we are justified in presenting a work in terms of one medium which was intended for another. All these plays were written to be acted on the stage with the help of suitable visual settings in the presence of large audiences. How far can they be "put over" if we are deprived of the movement of actors and the visual stimulus of scenery and that raising of our emotional sensitivity which comes from



VAL GIELGUD, producer of "The Trojan Women," by Euripides (see cover), and of "L'Aiglon," by EDMOND ROSTAND (right)



the presence of a tense theatreful of people sympathetically attuned? To give an extreme instance of the difference between the possibilities of the two media, the stage and radio, we cast our minds back to the tragic poignancy of the prison-cell scene in Galsworthy's *Justice*—a scene so powerful on the stage that it brought about a modification of prison regulations in England. Such a scene cannot be presented on the radio for the very good reason that there is not a word spoken, and a mere narrator's description would carry no conviction whatever.

Consider too the scene in Shaw's *Man of Destiny* where much of the theatrically humorous effect depends on the actual bodily entrance of the Lady in the disguise of a lieutenant, a disguise which Napoleon instantly sees through but dare not at the time admit. Such a scene loses much when we are deprived of all but the voices, although in the case of Shaw, in whose plays a verbal sparring is so important a part, the case of radio is not so desperate. Faustus sees the vision of Helen of Troy in Marlowe's play, and utters one of the loveliest speeches in all drama, beginning:

Was this the face that launched
thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

Is the imagination of the listener equal to the quick recognition of Helen's presence without having seen her enter? As to the vision of Helen herself (played by a boy in Marlowe's time) maybe the radio audience has the advantage, since a stage Helen will always fall short of the Helen of the listener's imagination.

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