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RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say

Battle of Britain

AN outstanding piece of documentation which, in another medium, would have satisfied the aesthetic conscience of Mr. Grierson was *The Battle of Britain*, heard from 2ZB the other Sunday night, an hour-long BBC production written by Chester Wilmut. This programme took a piece of recent history (which, because of its closeness to us, we have hitherto known only as a one-dimensional event) and rounded it out to its authentic proportions, evaluating its causes and effects in the light of facts that have only recently come to light. The result seemed to me to have the authentic ring, both as history and as radio art. The theme was the air battle for Britain of August and September, 1940, but the author went back to 1936 to trace the pattern of victory from the action of the Air Ministry in deciding on the eight-gun fighter, on the establishment of a chain of radar stations, and on the setting up of Fighter Command. Mr. Wilmut deserves great credit for his refusal to exploit unduly the romantic and heroic aspects of one of the most heroic periods of recent history. To have told his story in terms of production rates and casualty statistics, in extracts from war diaries and official memoranda without impairing the heroic effect is a feat in keeping with the best traditions of the British documentary.

Marian Anderson

LAST Tuesday's *For My Lady* session from 2YA (Marian Anderson in the *World-Famous Artists* series) was one of the most moving and impressive I have yet heard. But the credit for this was entirely Miss Anderson's. Her voice has to me an almost embarrassing faculty for tear-jerking, so that although I have heard "My Mother Bids Me Bind My Hair" scores of times—and even sung it myself with cheerful disregard of its emotional content—I cannot hear Marian Anderson sing it without feeling as moved as Wordsworth by his *Solitary Reaper*. The disadvantage, of course, is that the more complete the sway exercised on the listener by the *World Famous Artist* the more likely one is to feel conscious of any lack of artistry in the accompanying script. Since the whole programme has to be fitted into 20 minutes it is understandable that the spoken comments must be bald and biographical rather than interpretive, but in this elevated milieu it is hard to forgive and forget phrases such as the youthful Marian "joining in for all she was worth."

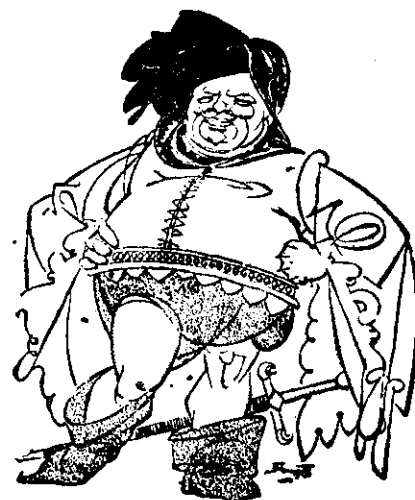
Direct Inaction

LONG absence has made *ITMA* merely a Tomtopian memory to 2YA Saturday nighters, and we have become more or less resigned to exchanging Handley's direct assaults upon our listening virtue for the less immediate demands made upon it by W. W. Jacobs (NZBS interpretation). On a recent Saturday, the entertainment was still somewhat in the W. W. Jacobs tradition, and had the great advantage of giving the NZBS cast yet another chance of displaying their neatly appliquéd nautical-regional accents, which so far show few signs of wear. The play was *Hunger Strike*, by H. McNeish, a prize-winner

in a recent NZBS play-writing competition—understandably so since from the point of view of craftsmanship it is a very sound piece of work. My only quarrel with it is from the viewpoint of programme timing, since it burst upon me at a time when I was well inoculated against sea fever by the NZBS's frequent foragings in this field. Looking in vain for anything indigenous in *Hunger Strike* (the idea of having a hunger strike came to the crew via Gandhi, and the play was not intended to throw light upon dark places in New Zealand's mercantile history) I was almost tempted to feel nostalgia for the good old days when no piece of New Zealand writing was complete without its tui.

The True Sir John

IN his series *Masterpieces of Music*, Professor V. E. Galway, Mus.D., recently presented listeners with Elgar's symphonic study, *Falstaff*. Coming in close proximity to the talks on the *Revival of English Music*, this orchestral masterpiece was welcome as a further illustration of what speakers in this series have been telling us—namely, that the "land without music" is so no longer, and that at the beginning of the



modern renaissance of English music the grand name of Edward Elgar stands as one of the main stems of the ever-branching tree of musical evolution. As Dr. Galway pointed out, the average person's mental picture of Falstaff is the caricatured buffoon of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, whereas the Sir John portrayed by Elgar is the Falstaff of the historical plays, of whose fascinating character listeners who don't read their Shakespeare will have caught a glimpse in the film *Henry V*. In the symphonic study, the full orchestra paints as vivid and varied a picture as the genius of Elgar could conceive; all the incidents of Falstaff's troubled career, from tempestuous beginning to grim and stricker ending, are here portrayed as to the life. As Dr. Galway said, *Falstaff* is not the kind of music we can appreciate at first hearing, and much careful listening is necessary before its full beauties are revealed; here is an opportunity for 4YA or 4YO to repeat the work before this performance, and Dr. Galway's explanatory notes (including his fine reading of Shakespeare's "death of Falstaff" lines) have faded from listeners' memories.