



BBC photograph  
VAL GIELGUD  
"The radio plays are slicker"

BBC Third Programme. The late Lady Eleanor Smith's preoccupation with the circus is manifest in her book, which is a factual and surprisingly unsentimental description of life all the year round with Reco's travelling circus. Photography by John Hinde is colourful and ties up with the text by showing the characters working at their various jobs.

Desmond Shaw-Taylor contrives to pack an enormous amount of information and interest into *Covent Garden*, the latest addition to the *World of Music* series. As he says, in this instance the play is *not* the thing, so that the "mighty ghosts of Garrick, Kemble and Mrs. Siddons seem to flit across the pages" with what the author admits to be an almost indecent speed. But there is ample recompense in reading of Malibran, Patti, the de Reszkes, Melba, and so many others, as well as having the whole enlivened with such stories as that of John Templeton's property moustache which, in the middle of an aria worked itself into his mouth, and when the singer flung it away in fury, clung "like an octopus" to the strings of the first violin, an effect which caused the house to "rise in a body and cheer."

If these two are easy to bite into, the next are slightly doughy in texture. With all the goodwill in the world, I cannot find much to cheer about in the one-act plays. Norman Holland approaches reality in *Liberation*, a story of post-war France and the plight of a young woman who became the mistress of a German officer when her neighbours were steadfastly working for the Resistance. Joe Corrie's play is fairly run-of-the-mill, but it is alive and amusing in a "Hobson's Choice" sort of way. *I Will Arise* by T. B. Morris could be a good spectacle, though rather pretentious for the scope of a one-act play. *Jenny in the Orchard* by Charles Thomas is light fantasy and could be effectively staged. For the rest—*A Space Ship* outwelling Wells; *Down to the Sea* whose excuse for publication could be that it shows just how much potted O'Neill ("Dat ole daval sea") and Synge ("There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea") can be put into one act. Harold Brighouse washes it all down with some unwhimsical Barrie-water. Knowing his taste, experience and enthusiasm we cannot blame J. W. Marriott for the deficiencies in the current

collection. It is apparently the best of a bad job, but we can hope, fervently, for a better group next time.

The radio plays are better because they are slicker: two from England, two from France, and one from Australia—the last being the most English of the lot. I thought the *Puppet Master* would make good listening, also the *Silent City*, though I could have spared the last few lines. The fact that *Life Goes On* has long been accepted as one of the more apparent of natural phenomena and one rather baulks at having it revealed yet once more as a world-shaking scientific discovery.

The best for the last, and here is something to get your teeth into, *Imaginary Conversations*, written specially for the Third Programme by some of our finest contemporary writers. In lots of ways these transgress all accepted laws of radio writing in that few sound effects are used, there is no plot, and no action except in the words themselves. Only two in the eight approach anything that could be called dramatic in orthodox manner. Those by Herbert Read and G. W. Stonier were written to commemorate Shakespeare's birthday and are imagined scenes from *Hamlet*. Stonier especially seems to have had no less a person than Will himself looking over his shoulder. Of the others we have Prince Rupert and Dr. Evelyn, imagined by C. V. Wedgwood; Aristotle discussing beauty and art with Protagoras (Herbert Read again). Rose Macaulay's wry commentary on Milton; Sean O'Faolain letting Cardinal Newman meet Charles Kingsley in a railway train four years after their famous controversy; V. S. Pritchett bringing Dostoevski and Turgenev to life, and Michael Innes letting us listen to Boswell and Dr. Johnson visiting Scotland and Lord Monboddo.

In their separate introductions both Val Gielgud and Rayner Heppenstall compare the job of a radio producer with that of a midwife, and although the five radio plays cannot be placed in

(continued on next page)



"THE CUNNINGHAMS," David Ballantyne's first novel, will be reviewed by J. R. Cole (above) in the ZB Book Session on April 24, and following the review David Ballantyne will be interviewed by Frank Sargeson, who is to chair the session. Other books which will be reviewed are: "The Golden Warrior," by Hope Muntz; "Elizabeth, Captive Princess," by Margaret Irwin (both reviewed by Prof. F. L. W. Wood), and "The Silent Traveller in Edinburgh," by Chiang Yee (A. R. D. Fairburn).

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