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RADIO VIEWSREEL What Our Commentators Say

Omar Where He Drank

IN *The Steps of Omar Khayyam* is a somewhat out-of-step production by the NZBS studios which I am told to my horror goes on for some fifteen half-hour instalments. The most that can be said of it is that its atmosphere (to one who has never been there) is authentically Persian, and that it provides a rich open-cast mine of quotation for students of the *Rubaiyat*. Omar appears as a nameless traveller, recently sacked from the Caliph's court for too oft consort with the fruitful grape, and when our story opens is striking a gong in approved ZB manner to rouse the faithful from their slumbers and shouting (as might be anticipated) "Awake, for morning in the bowl of night. . . ." Unfortunately, the habit of eastern metaphor has grown on Omar to such an extent that even normal questions about his life and health are likely to be answered in terms such as "The mill of Omar Khayyam's heart still grinds the flour of his life." Altogether it was a great relief to me and to all listeners when Omar, realising that time was slipping underneath his feet, whipped up his camels and made haste to start for the dawn of nothing. He will, of course, be back next week.

Woman Scorned

ALDOUS HUXLEY'S well-known short story *The Gioconda Smile* became a radio play with as little alteration as is required to transform a long evening frock into a short one. One perhaps regretted the loss of valuable material represented by the extra inches, but the essential shapeliness and aesthetic rightness of the original model were largely unimpaired. Janet Spence was acted by someone who, if she could not suggest the penholder mouth of Mr. Hutton's fancy at any rate made a good attempt at conveying by voice alone the Agrippina brow and the George Robey chin. Mr. Hutton himself was in the unfortunate position of having to proclaim in *oratio recta* the secret thoughts which his creator had permitted him to cloak decently in *oratio obliqua* (there is all the difference between thinking "What a queer face she has!" and in proclaiming it caddishly to an audience, like some villain in a third-rate melodrama) so that the Henry Hutton of the play seemed more unpleasant than his fictional prototype. However, since avoiding this distortion would have meant denying the listener so much of the original Huxley it was obviously better to sacrifice Hutton.

Vaughan Williams and Friends

FREDERICK PAGE in a recent piano recital from 2YA chose three pieces of music which I can describe as "noble." Nobility has always seemed to me to be the strong quality of Vaughan Williams's music, and when, as in the two of these pieces which were transcriptions of hymn tunes and chorales by Orlando Gibbons and Bach, the originals were majestic in style, the touches in the transcription which made them Vaughan Williams's own added to their stately seriousness. The third composition of Williams's was the "Lake in the Mountains," written,

I believe, for the film *49th Parallel*. This interesting little work was worthy of the other two. This broadcast was an excellent example of good planning; its description in the printed programme, however, was less than adequate.

Walter Midgley

I HAD overheard Mr. Midgley singing Bantock magnificently in the studio, and when 2YA's programme was suddenly changed to give an hour of a concert of his in the Wellington Town Hall, I listened with keen anticipation, but was bitterly disappointed. Mr. Midgley has a wonderful voice, controlled with exquisite precision, but he lavished it on a programme which it is impossible to forgive. It began with the hoariest of operatic war-horses — O' Paradiso, — Tiny Tim's Frozen Flower Song from Carmen, and so on, some sung in Italian and some in English. Mr. Midgley frequently treats the rhythm with contempt; in the aria from "La Boheme" his accompanist had a difficult time to follow him in singing which completely lost the flow of the music. I sat back, however, with the thought that here was just a bowing to convention, now we would hear some of the masterpieces of music for voice and piano sung with the glorious quality of a first-class tenor. What did we get? Another group of mutilated fragments from operas, completely unintelligible apart from their content, sung with piano accompaniment again. There I switched off. But if the newspaper reports of what Mr. Midgley later sang may be trusted, I missed little, since he descended to the most banal of ballads.

Burns Night

IN Dunedin it is unsafe to put on a Burns programme unless one is prepared for carping criticism from people such as myself, who canna thole Burns unless he is done according to their own dogmatic standards. I like Burns songs, when written in dialect, to be sung in dialect, and any ladylike performance in English by a singer of either sex is apt to meet with my stern disapproval. There are few performers, not possessed of a natural Scottish accent, who can ape it convincingly; and even more reprehensible than a Scottish poem done into English is a Scottish poem done half into English, the rest being given what is considered an authentic air by the introduction of a few "ains" and "herts" and "buddys." The only performances which pleased me entirely in the short programme of Burns Songs from 4YC were those of "Duncan Gray" and "O Whistle an' I'll Come Tae Ye." There was also, I thought, too much comment of the innocuous sort that spoils a programme; the listener always has the feeling that if the announcer

