

MOTH

*HURRY, my plane, hurry the altitudes of air,
Burrow, bury your sweet nose in this soft earth
In the sky, snow, hills for my bright deer,
Great drifts banked, baked rows of bread
Rolled for your keen teeth, slip of life,
Bird, light in this wide waste, dead.
Snow-flats and no tide of wind to ride,
My, bride, pillowed on a breath, a pulse,
No paths upon this crust of sky, no blood besides
The provocation of your flight, child, daughter
Of silver, fire. Without your shivering wings,
O who will walk on this white water?*

—Keith Sinclair

Break It Up, Girls

THE Wednesday Women's session from 2YA continues to provide an example of the solid merits of the planned discussion as opposed to the airy-fairness of sessions of the Brains Trust type, where an off-the-cuff loquacity is pretty well the only quality demanded of a speaker. The ladies do their entertaining formally. Each question is assigned to the member of the panel best qualified to deal with it. (Moral questions seem the prerogative of Mrs. Sullivan, health is dealt with by Miss Somers-Cocks, and children-and-the-home topics wing their way to Mrs. Garland.)

The first speaker delivers a neat three-to-five-minute speech in nicely rounded periods with a lot of thought showing through; then, approached by the Chairman, the other members add their contribution. This thoroughness is of course achieved at the sacrifice of some entertainment value, and there are times when the listener would welcome the introduction of a few verbal fireworks into the gentle glow of female cerebration.

Those Sealskin Trousers

I SUPPOSE it is illogical to demand of a radio play less talk and more action, but I felt ensnared in verbiage when listening to a re-play of Eric Linklater's *Sealskin Trousers*, partly perhaps because this is another of those plays wherein the beautifully chiselled phrase is forced to contend against the roar of the surf and sundry other studio effects. Baldly speaking, the story is a vice versa version of the Forsaken Merman, for the beautiful but short-sighted Elizabeth leaves her pedestrian lover to become the bride (or worse) of one of the sealmen. Now if the sealman had been a simple-hearted one-cylinder-brain type like Tarzan this would have been understandable, but with his physical perfection goes a tendency to talk about glands and the Primordial Initiative. Elizabeth in her intenser moments sounded exactly like Hotchkiss, so that one expected her to say "Oh Thomas" instead of "Oh Roger" at any moment. And I thought it positively sadistic of the author to leave his hero (the groundling) shrieking his desolation from the cNff top, when it would have been so much more comfortable for both hero and listeners if he could have been got back to the mental hospital in which the action (such as it was) began.

—M.B.

Stage Directions

IN the past stage directions have had fascination only for the few. For those who merely see a play they natur-

ally do not exist; and even for most readers of plays they are, if of any length, no more than a boring interruption to the unfolding of the plot. Too many dramatists have turned their directions into mere catalogues of chairs and tables, exits and entrances, for the benefit of the producer, or else followed the bald example of the master of their craft—"Illyria, the sea coast," or "London, a street." As early as Sheridan, however, a new light dawned ("enter Tilburina, stark mad in white satin"), and by this century it has become rather the fashion for dramatists to turn their directions into literary compositions. Shaw uses them shamelessly to lecture us a little more: Barrie, sheltering behind parentheses, pokes whimsical fun at his characters. On the radio the voice of the commentator, providing continuity, gives a new and unexpected life to this literary game. I noticed Barrie's stage directions cropping up in the play *The Will* from 3YA on December 6, where they lent occasional charm to a rather mediocre play, expertly put together but full of stock characters and with a mechanical plot.

Bottleneck

COMPTON MACKENZIE recently complained in *The Gramophone* that all the ingenuities of the engineers had not rid the gramophone of its fundamental difficulty—that of making large bodies of sound issue with verisimilitude from a small box. The same is true of our radio sets. There is a technical problem, and there is a psychological problem. From the first of these—the problem of sound waves issuing from a small centre instead of from a diffused area—there may be some scientific way of escape. But when, for example, radio or gramophone tries to condense and re-issue the sounds of a full orchestra, the psychological barrier is insuperable. To produce Beecham and the Royal Philharmonic out of a 10-inch speaker is like conjuring a genie out of a bottle. We do not really believe what we hear. Even when, as on a Sunday from 4YA, the conjurer reproduces the voice of the maestro himself, uttering his familiar paradoxes and absurdities, the illusion of reality can hardly be sustained. The bottleneck is too narrow. Chamber music is simpler. It is not hard, on Tuesday evenings from 4YC, to imagine, say, the shadowy presences of the Philharmonia Quartet, bowing away busily in the corner behind the loud speaker and producing the sounds that issue so mellifluously from the speaker cone. Shut your eyes, and the problem of the bottleneck almost disappears.

—K.J.S.

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