

BBC'S BOLD VENTURE

"The Man Born To Be King"

WITH considerable boldness the BBC some time ago broadcast a series of radio plays covering the Life and Death of Christ—specially written for the purpose by Dorothy Sayers. As these plays have now reached New Zealand in book form, our readers will be interested in this estimate by "Artilex" in the "Manchester Guardian."

IT must be some time since anything either in the realm of art or of theology has given rise to such widely different reactions as the play-cycle on the Gospel story by Miss Dorothy Sayers for the BBC (and now published by Victor Gollanz). I may perhaps claim to have brought to the criticism of the plays that mysterious thing, an open mind, for I was never able to listen to them over the air owing to the time when they were given, and the comments of friends ranged over the entire gamut from enthusiastic praise to violent disapproval. On the other hand, I have almost always disliked novels based on the Gospel story, since they have either set my teeth on edge by introducing what is called "a strong love interest" (I remember one very bad example which sought to explain Judas by making Mary Magdalene in love with Christ, and Judas jealous) or been so utterly dull and lifeless that, in the nice French phrase, they "did not permit themselves to be read." So my delight in these plays should be counted in their favour.

I cannot understand how anyone can read the foreword by Dr. J. W. Welch

(continued from previous page)

long mouthfuls of flame and intoxicated by her aura of fire. They are the true and original Kanakas—that is, neither Melanese nor Polynesians, but the last immigrants into the Pacific, big, copper men from Ceram and Celebes, who arrived about the third century of our era (it is calculated), and then passed south to live in Samoa alongside the Polynesians for a whole millennium of warfare, until about 1200 A.D., the latter at last drove them out. Some came south to New Zealand with The Canoes, where their descendants form a visible strain in the Maori race. Others went to Raratonga, others to Espiritu Santo, others back to their original Gilbertian starting-points astride the Equator.

In the last century, missionaries and administrators have done a very good best for them, and "blackbirders" a very bad worst. Indeed, only the fact that they were of greater toughness than neighbouring islanders saved them from near extinction. ("Recruiting" by blackbirders for Central American plantations reduced the Ellice people from 20,000 to 2000!).

The complete coconut-matting suit of armour of a typical Gilbertese warrior stands erect by its own strength in the Auckland Museum, head hidden in visored helmet, and arm waving a sharks'-teeth club. These days they are getting a taste of our more modern methods.



MISS DOROTHY SAYERS
"... no hint of irreverence"

or Miss Sayers's own introduction without realising that for many people, and those just the people whom the Churches find the hardest to reach and to interest, the broadcasting of these plays must have been something in the nature of an evangelistic mission of quite exceptional power. I cannot find the least hint of irreverence in the handling of the story, and I am sure that for thousands of listeners it must have meant the first realisation that the Gospel story did really happen and that it has some contact with life.

What Miss Sayers says on page 19 about the way in which a loose and sentimental theology begets loose and sentimental art-forms I have often tried to express by saying that what is good art cannot be bad theology, nor what is bad art be good theology, since both are rooted and grounded in human nature. And a full and wholly orthodox theology stands up to Miss Sayers's artistic handling of her material splendidly. And the notes on the characters which were given to the producer with the script do add greatly to the interest and value of the book.

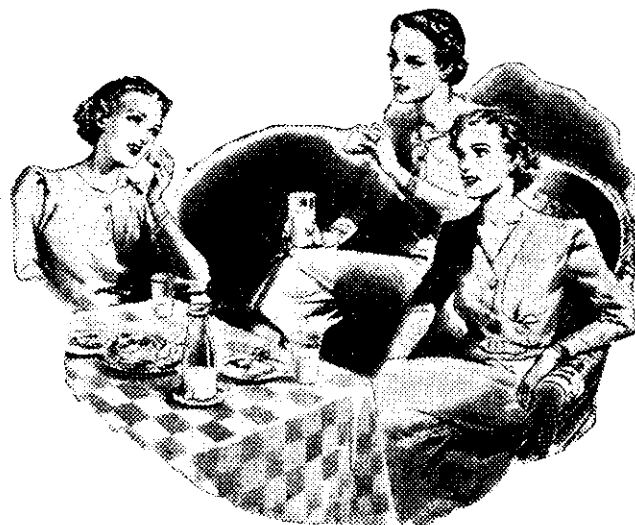
Arguable Points

I do not, of course, pretend that I agree with all Miss Sayers's interpretations of the characters and events. She would not, I am sure, either expect or wish anyone to do so. With so many characters which "flit, unheralded and unpursued, through the pages of the Gospels," it is inevitable that different people should sometimes take different views, and I have always maintained that readers of the Gospels have not merely the right but the duty to give free range to their imaginations on all matters left open by the narrative. My St. Matthew would be very different, and I have always held that St. John was not more than 19 at the Crucifixion. But there is one point upon which I am quite unconvinced. No Bishop of Ripon nor all the bishops on the bench will make me identify Cleopas (Cleopater) with Cleophas (Clopas) or believe that the unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus was a woman. But that is a detail. Though Miss Dorothy Sayers wrote as an artist and not "to do good," I should not be surprised if her work has done more good than any preacher of missions in the last half-century.

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ADULTS—Choose as a basis for Lunch: Milk, cheese, egg (if any), fish or meat, peas, beans, lentils. If you do sedentary work or are putting on weight, go for Vegetable Salads, and go easy on fancy foods. If you take your food to work, remember that a well-chosen home-packed lunch can be more nourishing than a conventional hot meal. See below.

CHILDREN—A good school lunch needs:

- Two or more SUBSTANTIAL sandwiches—wholemeal for health, white bread for variety—with fillings of meat, egg, fish, liver, bacon or peas, beans or nuts or cheese alone, or with lettuce.
- One sweet sandwich of dried fruits (dates, raisins, etc.), banana, chopped apple, black currant jam.
- Something to chew after lunch—raw fruit or vegetables.
- Milk as a drink—school milk if available—if not, a bottle from home.

Mothers! Prepare school lunches at home so that you can be sure your child is getting the right kind of lunch.

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