

proprate symbol for Empire at its zenith, along with jubilees, Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, and the old, indomitable Queen. Roy Leywood, donning waxed moustaches, was a fruity, roguey-poguey compère to Clara, and to history: all twinkles and "the ladies, God Bless 'Em!" and Beatrice Jones sang many of Clara's most famous songs. I am hesitant to point out the disadvantage of this, since Beatrice Jones sings very well, but it is no organ voice, and could not help letting the imperial side of the programme down a little. One bad error of taste was having Davina Whitehouse clucking one moment as a society ninny making little woolly toys, and the next, asking us to hear her reading seriously, Wilfred Owen's great poem, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*. She read it well, but the juxtaposition was unfortunate. The programme declined towards the end by an extremely self-conscious account of what Clara meant to them by some Australian admirers. The accent was inaccurate, and artificial roughness laid on with a trowel. Yet the programme was excellent in intention, and I hope there will be more like it.

—B.E.G.M.

Guide to the Inferno

TO the BBC for recording Laurence Binyon's translation of Dante's *Inferno*, and to the NZBS for broadcasting it, a sincere vote of thanks. The presentation of five cantos a time each week from 1YC has been among my most memorable listening experiences. By comparison with Ciardi's and Sayers's translations, which I've been using as a guide, Binyon's version seems a shade inflated, but it has nobility and dignity and a fitting vividness in the descriptive passages. Esmé Percy makes a rather quavery Virgil, but Marius Goring is astonishingly good as Dante, completely subduing his very distinctive acting personality to the demands of the poetry. What a distance our radio has covered since the days when spoken poetry consisted of "elocutionary entertainment." When we can hear one of the towering masterpieces of world poetry beautifully read in its entirety, it is indeed hard to be patient with those who complain of the mediocrity

★ The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN ★

AS a change from the loud bassoon and the soft complaining flute, we have this week been inundated with the sounds of the full-blooded flugel, the euphonium and baritone. The New Zealand Brass Band Contest is responsible for this awe-inspiring music—and music it is, whatever the band-misanthrope may think to the contrary. I will admit the fact, just as countless bandmasters bemoan it, that the repertoire is full of transcriptions, selections and other second-hand or shop-soiled items, because the serious composer is hard to persuade that a brass band can be artistic, even if he knew the techniques of band composition. It is contests such as these that go a long way towards showing how musical bands can really be: and for the most part, the music chosen for them reflected such considerations on the part of the selectors and conductors. It is no coincidence, I am sure, that the band which won the Hymn Test played no Sankey and Moody ditty, but a noble tune of Sibelius: and, in fact, the judge commented and commended them on their choice—a step, I feel, in the right direction.

Again, the B grade test, impressively played by the Napier Band, was an over-

ture "Orion," by Granville Bantock, who has done much to rescue the repertoire from the slough of "selections." His clever and well-worked scores on classical subjects suggest a small Renaissance in themselves. On the other hand, the A grade test, the Prelude "Blackfriars," by Edric Cundell, was designed to show off the bands more than the composer. It is a loosely-knit picturesque piece, full of brilliant effect and colourful padding woven in without seam; and as far as it goes, the Auckland Fire Brigade Band made the most of its mysterious rumblings and crashing consequences. As for the solo and "chamber" items, I cannot accustom myself to their elephantine gambollings: but even these, in the right players' hands, sound almost convincing. A long life to the contests. I say, and bad cess to their detractors!

Leaving the brass, we heard a recording of a new (1952) Concerto Grosso by that most original of conservatives, Bloch, in John Gray's monthly review (YC link). You'd think it was rather old hat to string together an Italian type fugue, a Griegish andante, and other somewhat outmoded movements: but the whole is quite novel and satisfying. In fact, there hasn't been such a striking rejuvenation since Faustus.

of all radio material. The *Inferno* may not have won many new listeners for 1YC, but those who caught it must, like myself, have been grateful that, however unprofitable the roundabouts, the swings still show a handsome return.

New Composers

I REMEMBER first coming across the name of Charles Koechlin in a book on contemporary composers by Wilfred Mellers, and later reading Koechlin's own study of his beloved master and teacher, Gabriel Fauré. But I had never heard a note of his own music until the recent YC broadcast of *The Abbot* in a *Music from Overseas* session. Difficult at first to catch on to, as so much modern French music is, this clearly deeply felt,

mystical work gained in appeal as it progressed. I found myself thinking of both Wagner and Fauré during this composition for chorus, organ and orchestra, and feeling that, as with their music, the apparent amorphousness of Koechlin's would, on closer acquaintance, resolve itself into a memorable pattern. There was a sense of quiet exaltation and contemplative stillness at its heart, things rare in modern music. These *Music from Overseas* programmes are introducing us to many contemporaries, like Koechlin, of whom we have merely heard. Not all grateful listening they prove, but there are many delights there, and the introductory comments, informative without being too wordy, give just the right amount of help to enjoy them.

—J.C.R.

INFLUENTIAL INVALIDS

THEY STAYED IN BED is the title of an unusual BBC talk by Cecil Woodham-Smith, which will be heard from 2YC on March 23. Like most of us Mrs Woodham-Smith was brought up to believe that you could never get anything done by lying about. However, she discovered that this simply wasn't true, and she shares this knowledge with listeners in her talk about four famous 19th century men and women who lived like invalids and yet made history.

Florence Nightingale, after her great work in the Crimea was accomplished, returned home to what she called the "slow torture" of Victorian family life, with its endless fussing, interminable chatting, and complete lack of privacy. Faced with this, she collapsed and retired to the privacy of her bedroom with heart disease, to stay there for fifty years. From there, she ruled what amounted almost to an empire, influencing Cabinet Ministers and Viceroy, writing reports and innumerable letters,



FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

and accomplishing a "staggering amount of work."

Without literally going to bed, Charles Darwin was able to manage an equal amount of work. Convinced that he had

heart disease, he spent most of his life on a sofa, spending only two hours a day in experimenting and writing. The long hours he spent in meditation on his invalid's sofa enabled him to reach his bold conclusions.

Harriet Martineau was different. For her, the six years she spent as a solitary invalid, in lodgings away from her family, gave her the strength to lead a vigorous life as a writer and economic thinker. She became the first woman to write the leaders for a newspaper, the *Daily News*. Another writer, Elizabeth Barrett, believed she had a disease of the spine, although her doctor had never found anything wrong. But she, too, retired to solitude—and freedom—in a darkened room. She was, of course, a poet, and it may well be, says Mrs Woodham-Smith, that to produce poetry she needed the timelessness and silence, the dust, the ivy clambering up the window, the atmosphere of a Sleeping Beauty's chamber. But a short time later she rose from her couch to elope with Robert Browning and lead a happy married life.

It would seem that none of these Victorians was looking only for an escape from life. They sought instead a climate where they could work, and so—they stayed in bed.

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