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W.58

RADIO REVIEW

Blank Butt One Better

I HAD heard enough of Clara Butt as one of the more picturesque figures in the recent past to look forward with lively anticipation to the NZBS portrait of her, broadcast in *Theatre of Music* the other Saturday. I was disappointed. It was a solemn, ecstatic tribute, full of throbbing voices telling us what a wonderful woman she was. To set the scenes there was as fine an array of radio clichés as I've heard for many a long day—the famous names arriving at a reception, the newsboy crying the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the triumphant successes, the royal commands. But there was emptiness within. No picture of Clara Butt emerged, no picture to distinguish her from a hundred other singers, certainly no picture of the woman who delighted in practical jokes, whose exuberant patriotism led her to wrap her majestic form in a Union Jack to sing "Land of Hope and Glory," who received Nellie Melba's famous advice to "sing 'em muck." None of this emerged, I ought to say, during the hour I was listening. It may have

done in the quarter-hour after I switched off, but I doubt it.

AFTER the above harsh words I'd better make amends with praise of another NZBS production, *Bonaventure*, by Charlotte Hastings. In this play the acting was rather better than the script, although that began very promisingly. A convicted murderer and her male and female attendants were on their way back to Norwich gaol after her appeal had been rejected when they were flood-bound and took refuge in a hospital run by nuns. The resulting tensions and revelations of character were coming along nicely when they were quietly dropped in favour of some slick detection by which Sister Mary Bonaventure cleared the prisoner. The suicide of the real culprit followed. It was certainly nice to know that the attractive person Peggy Walker made of the prisoner hadn't done it, but it seemed an almost cheating climax to what began so well. The production could scarcely be faulted, however. The atmosphere was beautifully built up, and I forgot for once that I was again listening to William Austin, Davina Whitehouse and co. This strengthened my belief that the most unfortunate result of the over-use of these players is on them rather than on the listener. They seem so seldom to have the energy to show their full capabilities, as they did this time.

—R.D.McE.



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Joyce Gives a Party

JOYCE GRENFELL requested the pleasure of our company for three-quarters of an hour on the National Programme on March 10. I was delighted to accept, for as readers of this column will know, Miss Grenfell is a favourite hostess of mine. But I'm afraid it was rather a dull party, and Miss Grenfell was not really on form. She was not helped by an announcer who called her successively Miss Grenfell, and once, disconcertingly, Grenwald, and the quality of her entertainment, styled gentle satire, was at times so gentle as to stir no response whatever. Her pert young girl telling her parents to grow up was an awful old chestnut, and the sentimental ballad is a genre which she is not equipped to deliver with any conviction. Her diction, too, though rattlingly audible in speech, is muddy in song. In adonoidal Cockney ("Me and my friend, we go out dancin'"), she was much better: far more her style, this. Oddly, she succeeded very well in a group of Virginian plantation songs. Her programme was preceded by a reminiscent talk about childhood, in which such themes as childish terror in strange surroundings, minor betrayals, and "yarns larv" were given a pleasant airing. But if her programme was a fair selection of the solo revue which she has presented in London and New York, I remain somewhat mystified by its success.

Bouillabaisse

IN most translations of French plays, dialect presents no problem. A French text becomes an English one, we accept the convention of Frenchmen speaking perfect English without demur, and the scrupulousness of pronunciation of French names may be left to the discretion of the producer. But in translating a regional, earthy comedy, such as Marcel Pagnol's *Marius*, what accent will you use? There was some confusion in the NZBS production. Dorothy Munro, as Fanny, succeeded admirably

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