



BBC illustration

Sunday Programmes for Younger Listeners

IT would not need a Gallup Poll to discover that on Sunday evenings the audience of the Commercial stations is greater than usual. Those listeners drawn in from other eye-brow levels are not only in the generation that listens to *Take It From Here* and *Sunday Showcase*—discerning children are also aware that from 5.30 on there is likely to be a lively and interesting half-hour of adventure or fun. This Sunday (April 28) another flight of BBC programmes makes a landing on the Commercial stations, to start a hedge-hopping trip from one to the other that will last until October.

Those who have been with Alice on her adventures in Wonderland will be equally pleased to go with her *Through the Looking Glass*. This will be heard first from 3ZB and 1XH. Most children nowadays know how Charles Dodgson, don of Christ Church, Oxford, became the Lewis Carroll of the Alice books, how he told these stories to Alice Liddell, the daughter of the Dean of the College, and then set them down.

Alice in Wonderland was told first on a boating expedition, and expanded for publication later. In the following years he told Alice and her sisters many more stories, while he taught Alice to

row and to play chess. When he decided to make these stories into one book, he wanted to find a make-believe world which Alice could enter from the real one without going underground again, and he found it in the back-to-front world we see in the mirror. As in *Alice in Wonderland*, there are some nursery rhyme characters here—Humpty Dumpty, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and the Lion and the Unicorn—but there are also many more that are new to Alice, based on the pieces of the chess set.

Lewis Carroll himself once wrote down what he meant his characters to be like. Alice was "loving and gentle; courteous to all, high or low, grand or grotesque, king or caterpillar; trustful and wildly curious." Of the Queens he said, "Each, of course, had to preserve through all her eccentricities a certain queenly dignity. The Red Queen I pictured as a Fury, cold and calm; the concentrated essence of all governesses. The White Queen seemed gentle, stupid, fat and pale, helpless, and with a slow, bewildered air."

It is the Red Queen who explains that Alice is a pawn, and must travel to the Eighth Square, where "we shall be Queens together, and it's all feasting

TWEEDLEDUM and
Tweedledee about to
recite to Alice—an illus-
tration by Cecil Keeling

and fun." Alice had noticed that brooks crossed the countryside and divided it into Squares, and as she crossed from one Square to the next she discovered that they were all quite different, with very curious inhabitants. Finally she arrived at the castle, to the strangest adventure of all, the feast for Queen Alice.

Sovereign Lords, which starts from 1ZB on Sunday, comprises four plays about Kings of England: Alfred the Great, William the Conqueror, Richard Lionheart and Charles I. Geoffrey Trease, who wrote these plays, also wrote an introduction to them in the *Radio Times*. He said that he had been struck by a point Miss C. V. Wedgwood had made in a discussion; that we should try more often to look at historical events as the people of the time saw them, not knowing the end of the story in advance! "We all know

that William the Conqueror won the Battle of Hastings in 1066—and some of us think that is why he was called 'the Conqueror,' though, in fact, he had won the nickname years earlier for now-forgotten exploits in France."

"My point," he said, "is that nobody (even William) knew that he was going to win the battle until towards the end of that grim October day. It was a breathlessly near thing. It turned on half a dozen coincidences—a Norwegian invasion of Yorkshire, a change of wind in the Channel, and—yes—the random falling of an arrow."

Indeed, when William first planned the invasion, it must have seemed the wildest folly, with little Normandy attacking a bigger and stronger England led by a fine general (Harold) with a fleet, a corps of terrifying axe-swinging household troops, and all the vast manpower of the island to call upon. To appreciate the drama we should forget all we know today, the black type in the history book and the new chapter-heading. Mr Trease says: "Try to think yourself back into 1066—into that crop-haired, calculating head under its cone of steel helmet. Try to see with his eyes, peering shrewdly, anxiously, from either side of the helmet nose-piece, at the way the Channel wind is blowing the pennons, at the dust cloud on the road from London, at the slow decline of the October sun, and at the ships along the beach behind—the escape route if things go wrong!"

That is the viewpoint in all these plays. Of course, there is rich drama in the lives of nearly all the kings and queens of our history—Shakespeare was not the first playwright to discover that—and there is more than one way

of using it. It can be made into a pageant or a poem or a thriller; or the writer can try to get behind the helmet-visor or under the plumed beaver and give the "inside" view of the king himself.

Charles I did not know, when he hoisted his standard at Nottingham, that he would lose the Civil War. The Lionheart, weak with fever as his galley bore him away from the coast of Palestine, fully meant to keep his vow to return and deliver Jerusalem. Indeed, he had also been nicknamed "Richard Yea-and-Nay," because he was a man of his word. His Crusade, undertaken in a fervent religious spirit, had led him as well into a series of breathless adventures such as he loved. Alfred was not called "the Great" until many years later. Those who knew him gave him the title of "Shepherd of the English," for after he had protected his country from the Danes he had set about rebuilding it, and especially he worked for the increase of book-learning. What he was really like is veiled by the mists of more than a thousand years, yet sometimes we can still catch an echo of his voice in the writings that have come down to us.

To choose four "sovereign lords" from all the English kings cannot have been an easy task. Geoffrey Trease has chosen four of those who, with all their human failings, were capable of stirring our interest and sympathy.

Stations 2ZB, 4ZB and 2ZA will have a double bill, *Nursery Sing Song* and *Son of Jesse*. *Nursery Sing Song* has been made from a BBC North of England *Children's Hour* series. Violet Carson and Doris Gambell sing the songs, which are familiar to children and grown-ups all over the English-speaking world. There are old favourites, nursery rhymes, and folk songs from other countries, and some new songs.

Son of Jesse is about David, the shepherd boy who became a king. John Gattrell wrote this play, which is in verse, and he tells it. The first episode shows David watching his sheep and Samuel coming to see him. In the second, David kills a lion, and the third is about David taking food to his brothers at the war, where David offers to fight the enemy giant, Goliath. Finally we hear what happens in that fight. Ann Driver wrote the music, which changes from the shepherd's tunes to the more exciting music of the battlefield.

FROM A WINDOW

PASSIONATELY you weep
Lizard or butterfly,
And hearing that loud grief
That outraged cry,

*I look through glass to where
Your childish head
Bends impotent above
Its cherished dead.*

*And I too grieve, who know—
Even as my feet run
To comfort you whose tears
Rebuke the sun—*

*How weak the words whose wrath
Would put this foe to rout,
How frail the arms whose love
Would shut death out.*

—Ruth Gilbert

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