

"The Mayor of Casterbridge"

A TRUE incident—the sale of a wife—which took place at Weyhill Fair in the last century, is the basis of Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which New Zealand listeners are to hear in a BBC transcription. On this incident Hardy based a drama of the retribution which, after 20 years, may strike down a man who had seemingly outgrown his youthful wildness and become a most respected and respectable citizen. From its inception in a booth at a country fair, the story expands till it is not so much a chronicle of individual lives as a panorama of life itself.

Before the novel appeared in 1886 Hardy feared it would not be so good as he meant. He was troubled about the probability of some of the incidents and thought he had spoilt the story by making it fit the conventions of serial publication, with a strong incident in each instalment. He may have felt, too, that he had lost his touch, for in the seven years since *The Return of the Native* he had not published a successful major work, and he had been seriously ill. But he need not have worried. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is one of

his greatest works—a tragic drama of great power and range.

Desmond Hawkins, who adapted the novel for broadcasting (he also adapted *Far from the Madding Crowd*) has written a study of Hardy. "In at least one sense," he wrote in the *Radio Times*, "*The Mayor of Casterbridge* stands apart from Hardy's other novels. The central figure—the Mayor himself, Michael Henchard—is not young, nor idealistic, nor particularly worthy. Except in the prologue, he appears before us as a middle-aged man of vehement temper and strong passions, haunted by a single reckless deed of folly which drives him to actions of increasing violence and ultimately to his ruin and death. Hardy's other tragic heroes—Angel Clare, for example, or Jude—make considerable demands on our pity: we have to concede that life must have been very disappointing for them. Henchard makes no such demands. He goes down with the wild, magnificent obstinacy of a bull in the open arena."

Mr. Hawkins sees Henchard as not primarily a good man or a bad man, but as one who displays with exceptional vividness the forces which struggle for mastery within a human being. Heightening his tragedy are the characters around him—Susan, the wife he has



BBC photograph

HEDLEY GOODALL AND BARBARA JEFFORD, who play Michael Henchard, the Mayor of Casterbridge, and his daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, in the BBC dramatisation of Thomas Hardy's novel

wronged; the gay and sparkling Lucetta; the young Scot, Farfrae, who becomes Henchard's rival in trade and in love; and Susan's daughter, Elizabeth-Jane.

Hardy wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in very short chapters and changes his scene almost continuously from chapter to chapter. Mr. Hawkins thought this treatment would sound

scrappy on the air, so he tells the story as Elizabeth-Jane might have told it. "I confess she intrigues me in the book," he says, "because all the other characters seem to revolve round her, while she herself remains in the shadows and sometimes appears to go unnoticed even by her author. If anyone could tell us fairly and dispassionately what happened in Casterbridge, it would be she. I have therefore chosen her as my story-teller. Inevitably I have taken a few liberties with the book, but none, I think, which should offend its many admirers."

As a Wessex man, and one who has drawn so much on traditional English melodies, Ralph Vaughan Williams is ideally qualified to write the incidental music for this new Hardy serial, and he responded enthusiastically when the BBC asked him to do so. He showed the craftsman's practical approach to the job. (In fact, when composing for radio he likes to work with a stop-watch in his hand—a habit he acquired in writing film music.) The main theme is founded on the composer's setting of a folk song which introduced, on 'cellos, his *Fantasy on Christmas Carols*. This sombre theme, with its underlying feeling of a relentless fate, has an adagio variant which is identified with the characters of Elizabeth-Jane and her mother—a peaceful, almost feminine theme mainly used when Elizabeth-Jane's calm voice, as narrator, has ushered in a new phase of the story. This theme, though secondary, is important, for Mr. Hawkins wished to convey in the narration the impression of emotion recollected in tranquillity. A third theme, less important, is a discordant variation on a drinking song, used to convey the nightmare effect of Henchard's awakening to a realisation of what he has done in selling his wife.

Owen Reed, who also made *Far from the Madding Crowd*, produced *The Mayor of Casterbridge* with a cast of West-country actors—Hedley Goodall as Henchard, Beatrice Beavan as Susan, and Barbara Jefford (who has played opposite John Gielgud at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre) as Elizabeth-Jane.

The Mayor of Casterbridge will start from 2XN at 8.15 p.m. on Sunday, December 23, and will be heard later from other stations.

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scriptwriters six weeks of taxpayers' time to write, especially when one gets paid for it. Or shall I resolve to try to write a programme?

MY resolution (to write pars less acerbic) proved so easy to keep that it obviously echoed some subconscious urge towards tolerance not unconnected perhaps with the approach of middle age; the years which, though powerless to provide me with a philosophic mind, have at any rate given me a philosophic outlook. Of course, my personal opinion is that I'm not so readable as I used to be, but who wants to stride to fame over a fellow-artist's lacerated feelings?

—M.B.

TO continue gradually detaching myself from this world; delightedly exploring the speculations of other minds; marching cheerfully towards that moment bringing

Farewell to seeking, doubt and grief,
False hopes, despair, and half-belief.
What lies beyond that final door
I then shall know; or know no more.

PLEDGED to detachment from this world, impressive stacks of Hansards were taken away—appropriately enough—by gentlemen who remove rubbish. Eight months' devotion to detachment; then sacrifice of serenity on the altar of friendship; a wild plunge into electioneering. Rising from sackcloth and ashes, begin again the climb to the ivory tower, murmuring, with Swinburne:

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free;
I thank with brief thanksgiving,
Whatever gods there be.

—J. Malton Murray

I SUBMIT practical resolutions, capable of fulfilment unlike my usual private impossible resolves. Next year I shall sleep longer; I shall spend less, but more regular, time on

housework; and more time among horses (this has nothing to do with racing), and gardens. How benign, how delightful, life will perhaps be.

I MADE four resolutions: the first, to sleep longer, I broke in favour of the fourth, to spend more time in gardens (mostly in my own); the second, to spend less, but more regular, time on housework, I broke—that word regular was the trouble; and the third, to spend more time among horses (nothing to do with racing), I most happily kept. In such a tight schedule something had to go; and I can always try again with those tender annuals, my sleep and housework resolutions.

—J.E.B.

ORGANISE an economic community of friends who will each specialise in one spare-time activity—shoe-repairing, film-developing, house-painting, laundry-work, window-cleaning, typing, and every other job which it is impossible to get done or ruinous to pay for. Thus reduce the present dissipation of everyone's leisure into fifty odd-jobs all badly done. Also adopt bulk-buying within this community.

THE system made no provision for evaluating and recording the work done by various members. We needed an Augustine currency and have begun printing notes. Thus we shall all have two more jobs instead of other people's fifty, and two incomes, one of them tax-free. We hope eventually to make our

SINCE vows (I said) are made to break
I formed the resolution
Of trash and Tommy-rot to make
A daily contribution;
In retrospect, it must be said
That, far from promise-breaking,
Quite contrariwise instead
I kept the undertaking.

—H. B. Fell

currency interchangeable with that of other private groups which are doubtless springing up all over the country.

—Augustus

TO strike the happy medium between effort and relaxation, so that having done a satisfactory amount of work increases the pleasure of taking things easy.

AS is the rule with makers of resolutions (the floor of hell, etc.) I slumped badly and loafed for three months; however, in sheer disgust at having to put up with my own ego so much I snapped out of it without the aid of any resolution and am now working.

—F. L. Combs

("To construct fifty-two Crossword Puzzles within the first month of 1951 so that my week-ends for the rest of the year may be gloriously untrammelled; to please everyone by using no anagrams, no quotations, no dictionary definitions, no references to films, plays, books, sports or hobbies with which some addicts may not be conversant; and NEVER, in ANY circumstances, to add to the Editor's worries by missing the mail.")—Ed.)

WHAT happened to my Personal Resolution? Was I able to carry it out, and if not, why not?

Was I rash enough to make one? I must have done, to have the Editor ask these embarrassing questions twelve months later.

What on earth was it? I can't find a copy of it anywhere, and I stopped hoarding my *Listeners* some time in 1945 when they overflowed from the shelves in the garage, so I can't look it up.

But speaking from past experience, I should say I broke it before January was over.

—R.W.C.

POSTSCRIPT.—No resolutions are being solicited for 1952.