



HORNBLOWER...

danger and tempest and battle at sea. Into these accounts Forester weaves an extensive and authentic knowledge of the structure and working of ships. An old-timer in sail would find it hard to fault Forester's manoeuvring of his vessels. His language, too, is always correct. He is never guilty of calling a seaman a sailor or a shroud a rope. Discussing *Horatio Hornblower* in the *Radio Times* last year, the veteran naval writer "Taffrail" says: "I have not searched through the Hornblower books for nautical solecisms or errors in seamanship; but I have not detected any." This from a writer who has admitted that "any description of life afloat, ancient or modern, bristles with

pitfalls for the unwary, and the least slip, the slightest nautical blunder, is apt to evoke the wrath of peppery master mariners. I have been severely taken to task for mentioning a full moon when it should have been in its first quarter."

But the drama and the authenticity of Forester's novels does not altogether explain the huge popularity of Hornblower. True, most of the books are about war, and war has ever provided exciting material for the story-teller. But love also has always inspired the art of story telling. And Hornblower is nothing if not human. His natural susceptibility, too, is abetted by the distance and the comparative unattractiveness of his wife. Like many men, Hornblower is incomplete. He demands the affection that perfection cannot win. It is not in his nature, for instance, to find pleasure in achieving things he can do. "His ambition," says Forester, "was always yearning after the impossible, to appear a strong, silent, capable man, unmoved by emotion." In his anxiety to appear this way to others he often manages to appear faintly ridiculous, but he commands the devotion of all who serve with him, and that, for the captain of a ship, is an important matter.

Like his own unforgettable character Hornblower, C. S. Forester attained success early in his career. His first really successful novel, *Payment Deferred*, was published in 1926, when he was aged 24. This became successively a play, then a film with Charles Laughton in the leading role.

Forester was born in Cairo, but was edu-

cated at Alleyn's School and Dulwich College in England. From there he went to Guy's Hospital to study medicine, but in an examination failed to identify a single bone in the human body. He transferred his attention to writing. After service in the infantry in World War I, he became for a time a newspaper correspondent in Spain and Czechoslovakia, but soon returned to England and settled down to writing his adventure stories. By the time his Hornblower series began to appear he was already a successful novelist. His *Brown on Resolution*, for instance, succeeded both as a book and as a film.

During World War II Forester worked for the Ministry of Information, making lecture tours and writing film scripts. But the work for which he will be best remembered is *The Ship*, a stirring battle report which resulted from an action by British cruisers against an Italian squadron in the Mediterranean. Forester also made a voyage with a ship of the U.S. Navy, but during this he became ill and has been partially paralysed ever since.

Since the war, however, Forester has not allowed his disability to interfere with his writing. He has produced several additions to the Hornblower series, as well as the somewhat deeper novel *Randall and the River of Time*. Whatever he writes, Forester is not likely to lack an attentive audience. Churchill has said, "I find Hornblower admirable, vastly entertaining," and many thousands of readers throughout the world will agree. Perhaps the best tribute to Forester's ability, however, was an incident which occurred during the war. As

"Taffrail" tells it, two destroyers in the Mediterranean were in trouble after battling with the enemy, and one signalled to the other—"What would Hornblower do now?"

The BBC itself was so impressed by the Towers production that it made one of its rare purchases from an independent producer, and has broadcast Hornblower in the Light Programme. After the first broadcast *The Observer's* radio critic Lionel Hale said: "It was a most gallant shot at a famous character—and acted with great authority by Mr. Michael Redgrave." The series has also been broadcast by the Columbia Broadcasting System in the United States and is being heard currently from commercial stations in Australia.

Each programme of the radio *Horatio Hornblower* is complete in itself, but there are continual changes of character and setting. Permanent cast members include Michael Redgrave as Hornblower, Donald Bissett as Bush, Jack Fraser as Brown, and Elizabeth Kentish as Lady Barbara. The show is produced by Harry Alan Towers, and the music composed and conducted by Sidney Torch. The latter directs a group of top-ranking musicians chosen from the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

The initial programme in the series deals with Hornblower's unhappy attempts to adjust himself to the life of a landlubber, and his constant yearning to be back to sea. Eventually the Admiralty recalls him from retirement, and the end of the first episode finds him fighting in the Baltic. The stories range from exciting battle scenes to quieter episodes dealing with his domestic life and his entertainment of the disguised Tsar of Russia aboard his ship. Listeners will hear it all from the edge of their chairs.

NOW and again an author creates a character who seems not merely convincing, but actually living. That character becomes a citizen of his country of origin; people write letters to him; biographers tell the story of his "life." Dickens created one such man in Mr. Pickwick, Conan Doyle another in Sherlock Holmes. Only two years ago the Borough Council of Marylebone acknowledged the latter's reality by exhibiting his relics at the site of the flat in 221B Baker Street. About the same time *The Listener* had a visit from the man himself. He was interviewed, and the interview published. There is even a trace of him still in the office—an index-card labelled "Holmes, Sherlock," in the files, midway between "Holloway, Stanley," and "Holyoake, K. J."

More recently another character has risen to join the company. He is a naval officer, introspective and susceptible in character, but courageous and capable of bold action when the occasion demands. His name: Horatio Hornblower.

This redoubtable officer has risen to reality through the medium of a series of novels by C. S. (for Cecil Scott) Forester, an ex-infantryman who is today's foremost teller of naval tales. Soon he will be heard from New Zealand stations. At 9.0 p.m. on Friday, July 3 the four ZB stations and 2ZA will begin broadcasting *Horatio Hornblower*, a Towers of London feature based on Forester's novels and adapted for radio by Philo Higley.

Hornblower made his first, strictly-correct bow to his public in 1936, when he appeared in *The Happy Return*. He was then at his full stature. He was Captain Horatio Hornblower, R.N., none other. It was not till much later, after Hornblower had risen to "Commodore Sir . . ." and "Commodore Lord . . ." that Forester began filling in the early gaps and Hornblower the "snotty" began having trouble with the buttons of his cuffs.

The attraction of the Hornblower stories is, of course, largely due to their swift-moving action, the excitement of

