orchestra as we knew it." It is, he says, " too slow, too placid, too comfortable—in fact, it is altogether too smug and self-satisfied."

Now, I ask myself what orchestra this pioneer can be referring to? Is it the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra? Is it the London Philharmonic? Is it the Berlin Philharmonic? None of these orchestras is perfect; neither is Mr. Jack Hylton's; but for me it is Mr. Jack Hylton's orchestra that is " too slow, too placid, too comfortable—in fact, altogether too smug and self-satisfied."

In addition to which I have to say that I find the music played by Mr. Jack Hylton's orchestra extremely boring and monotonous compared with most of the music played by the orchestras which I have named above.

I doubt whether Mr. Jack Hylton can be as remarkable a musician as he is a writer. Consider this paragraph of Mr. Hylton's:

" Industry stands for speed and action and efficiency. Business men know the customer is always right."

The novelty of that sentence stuns me. Here is another equally stunning:

" Women *have* legs. Parsons *do* smoke and drink and appreciate a good story. Sunday sport is *not* immoral. Poets no longer drivel about eyebrows or sonnetise a daisy-chain. Authors tell the truth. Painters paint what they see. The press is for the common people."

Is not that thoroughly highbrow in sentiment? You could find these sentiments (they are hardly " thoughts ") in any of those highbrow reviews whose names Mr. Jack Hylton has possibly never heard of but which are, nevertheless, his spiritual home. There he will find the same cant about modernity, about the newness of the new and the oldness of the old. Even the illusions are the same: " authors tell the truth." Oh, innocent highbrow, living, like all highbrows, in a desert of sham idealism! Who are these " new " authors who tell the truth, the truth which Rabelais or Ovid or Aristophanes or Plato or Boccaccio or Chaucer or a thousand other writers of the past never knew! Let Mr. Hylton name them! And I will venture to bet that their " truth " is about as new as Mr. Hylton's music.

I will tell Mr. Hylton exactly what is the matter with him. Nobody would think the worse of him for not being a great man, but at least he might be a modest man. When Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein suggested to Berlioz that he should print the text of his opera *Les Troyens*, which he had written, Berlioz refused, saying that to print the text alone would be to show literary pretensions which he could not claim. The music of Berlioz is still newer than anything Mr. Hylton has composed or will ever compose; it will still be " new " in the sense of being fresh and original when the music of thousands of Jack Hyltons of next century is forgotten. If Mr. Hylton were to think twice before putting pen to paper again he might come to the conclusion that it would be more becoming for him to remain silent. The lip-service he pays to Beethoven, Mozart, etc., in his article is not homage, for homage involves respect and modesty—that is to say, *conduct* as well as words.

W. J. TURNER

A COUNTRY PUB

IT must be forty years since my aunt began to keep the pub of which I am writing; and less than five years since she ceased to be the landlady of it. It is, and has been for all my lifetime and perhaps hers, too, a small, very low-roofed pub with a thick crust of dark bird's-nest-coloured thatch, whitewashed walls, and long, rather prim bow-windows in the early Victorian manner. The sign, *The Chequers*, is set in the top of a white pole, which rises in summer from a lake of marigolds in the garden at the front of the house. The Bedfordshire fields slope upwards on all sides, straight from the pub doors, so that the place looks more squat than perhaps it really is. On the stream that flows past the garden railings there is a perpetual procession of white and brown ducks, which waddle about also among the hens in the pub-yard; so that the garden-paths, the thresholds and the yard itself are covered with hen and duck droppings and little coveys of white and brown and red feathers that float and bounce against the earth like angels of fresh thistledown.

Like the pub, my aunt does not seem to have changed in my lifetime. I see her dressed in perpetual black: not the black of crepe or mourning, but a kind of rook's black, shining and silken, the black of authority and austerity. She is a sturdy, stocky woman, with a face of apple red intersected by many little veins of darker red and purple. She seems to be for ever frowning in reprimand. In reality she is smiling, not so much with her mouth as with her eyes. They are bright grey eyes and are framed in an infinite network of little creases and wrinkles. And she cannot keep her mouth still. It twitches. It is as though she would like to laugh but will not, as though she has schooled herself, as the landlady, not to make a public exhibition even of an emotion like laughter.

I do not know which was best known, my aunt or the pub. Very likely they were synonymous, and reflected each other's reputations. Certainly the pub reflected the character of my aunt. It was not prim, and I am pretty sure it was not always proper, but it had about it a kind of austere homeliness. The floors were of polished brick, the tables were scrubbed like bleached bones, and the lamps shone like altar brasses. There were three rooms—the bar, the smoke-room, and the parlour—and they had characters of their own. And just as I see my aunt in perpetual black, so I never think of the pub without remembering the mild beery smell that all her scrubbing could never wash way, the odour of lamp oil and the faint fragrance of old geraniums sun-warmed in the summer windows.

It has always been a modest and dignified little pub, of a better class than an alehouse, and yet never in danger of being mistaken for a hotel. Occasionally, in the shooting season, my aunt let rooms; in the summer she was busy with teas; and again in the shooting season she would have orders to provide cold lunches for the shooting parties that met in the woods that top the crests of the slopes all about the parish. " The gen'lemen," my aunt would call them. " I've a lunch on for the gen'lemen." And she would make my mouth water by the hour as she sat in the back room telling me what she provided for the guns: cold veal pies, cold chicken pies, bread and cheese, home-cured ham, cheese-cakes, barrels of beer, flasks of coffee, bottles of brandy. God knows how many shooting lunches I've eaten in imagination as I sat there in the back room with her.

Not that I have never eaten meals there in reality, too. Tea would be laid on summer afternoons on the long table in the back room, the windows would be open on to the garden, and the smell of thyme would come in and mingle itself with the smell of tea and seed-cake and butter and that eternal soft beery smell that nothing could drive away.

There was always a perpetual coolness about the rooms at the back of the house. They faced north, over the yard that was more like a farm-yard than a pub-yard, with its long since disused stables and the pigeon-house without pigeons and the gate leading straight into the sloping fields. They were rather dark and shadowy rooms, the whitewash faintly smoke-stained, the glass-ringed tables of scrubbed deal not reflecting even what little light there was.

It was the front room, the private-room, that was the glory and pride of my aunt's house. As I see her in black, so I see this room in perpetual sunlight. It was a museum. I can think of no other way of describing it. Into it my aunt had put, year after year, all her cherished belongings. The faded gold-and-blue wallpaper was hung with the faded portraits of my family in all its branches, from stupefied-looking gents in dicky-bits, down to my mother in a neck-ruffle as the belle of her day. There were various portraits of my deceased uncle in various attitudes of vague alarm or pride or dreaminess or statuesque melancholy. There were countless wedding groups and cricket teams, the women wearing the oddest

pancake hats, the cricketers all looking slightly boss-eyed, unreal, and extremely proud of their pimple cricket caps and their waxed moustaches.

The furniture of the room was of some wood that was neither maple-wood nor walnut, but somewhere between the two: a delicate deep-golden wood, highly polished and grained and beautiful. The chairs, upholstered in black American leather, were slippery as a straw-stack. One sat in them, and gradually, slowly and serenely, one slipped out of them. The table, covered with little wool mats, was of the same wood, a perfect golden oval, on which a beer-stain would have been a sacrilege. On the mantelpiece were more photographs, generally head-and-shoulders portraits of the dead or sepia miniatures of small Victorian infants who looked as if they wished they had never been born into the world. And on the mantelpiece also, and also on all the tables and niches and whatnots and tea-caddies, were countless little vases and trinkets of porcelain and milky glass, and shells and shell-boxes from distant seasides. And finally, in the long bow-window, the geraniums. They were very old plants, and they had grown up into miniature trees covered with flowers of hunting-pink or scarlet or wine, and here and there with white flowers blotched and streaked with purple and rose. They were so tall and thick that they might have kept out the sunlight. For some reason they never did. It filtered through their leaves and blossoms in long shafts, not only lighting up the room, but warming it, so that it had that strange fusty smell of things preserved for countless years.

I don't suppose the port at *The Chequers* was ever more than four-and-six a bottle, or the sherry. But if anyone wanted port or sherry to drink I fancy they were shown into this room, like honoured guests. Other rooms could have their public ribaldry and darts and arguments and eating-matches. But not this room. It was select and private. There was a kind of musty holiness there among the trinkets and the geraniums.

I say eating-matches. Once, in the early days, my aunt had tolerated an eating-match. Great crowds came to see two men sit down to a couple of mountainous steaks in the smoke-room. My aunt was an excellent cook, and the two men ate and continued to eat until she, fearing to have a corpse, if not two, on her hands, hastily and prematurely declared the winner.

It was, I suppose, nothing unusual. All sorts and classes of men called at my aunt's pub, regularly or casually; the gen'lemen themselves, labourers, butchers and bakers, blacksmiths, peddling drapers, poachers, commercial travellers, shoemakers, and always strangers who came once and never came again.

And if I remember any one thing about the place more than another it is the arrival of three strangers who asked to be shown into the private-room on a summer Saturday evening. I see them now, with their black bowler hats pushed back on their sweat-ringed heads, their coats open, their watch-chains dangling, and I can hear my aunt saying:

"And what could I get you, gen'lemen?"

"Whisky," one said. "And a jug of water."

"Ditto."

"Ditto."

And when my aunt had taken in the whisky and the water and the glasses I chanced to go along the passage and see them sitting there at the private-room table, their hats still on, their chairs tipped forward, their voices lowered, all watering their whisky with a kind of parsimonious secrecy and making strange patterns with their fingers on the table-top between the intervals of raising the water-jug and drinking.

Who were they? What were they doing? They seemed to me then, and still do now, something like a cross between Nonconformists out for a drink on the quiet and bookmakers who had welshed and had come to celebrate their luck or drown their horsey sorrows. Whoever they were, they sat there hour after hour, still talking, still making their patterns on the golden table-top, still watering their whisky, only getting up and pushing their chairs back and their hats forward when the sun had gone from the geraniums and the summer twilight had begun to fall.

And when I remember the pub they are an inseparable part of it, just as that shining black is inseparable from my aunt, the sun from the geraniums, and my aunt and the pub itself from the gentle countryside I know so well.

H. E. BATES

PLAYS AND PICTURES

"Queer Cargo"

There is nothing queer about the play at the Piccadilly Theatre—nothing, indeed, that is even surprising, save in the first ten minutes or so, while you adjust your mind to the demands of the unregenerate theatre spread before you. Five blue pearls are there, and pirates upon the China seas with a hint of the British Navy at the foot of the cast. But the hope of healthy melodrama is fulfilled too generously. Vibart, the pirate (Franklyn Dyall), speaks with a strong French accent, wears immaculate clothes, and is as chivalrous as he is ruthless. Honest Capt. Harley (Barrie Livesey) is full of tantrums and scruples. Charmian, his destined mate, is full of smiles and fears, and there is also a comic missionary with his sister aboard. Were cruelty to players an indictable offence, the management would stand within the danger of Robert Hale and Drusilla Wills for these last two—a heartbreaking waste of talent. It would be impertinent to praise any performance in this stale hotch-potch except, perhaps, that of young Mr. Barry Sinclair as a coward with a bad conscience. He it was who sixteen years earlier had plucked the life-belt from the shoulders of the wounded Vibart, then serving on a British "Q" ship . . . one pictured his baby fingers—he could not on the face of it have been more than four—fumbling with the tapes. This discrepancy apart, Mr. Sinclair shows emotional strength and imagination in the only part which slips at moments out of drear convention into the orbit of humanity.

"Cleopatra": By Hollywood Out of History

There are no bath-tubs in Mr. Cecil B. de Mille's new "bath-tub epic" at the Carlton; Miss Claudette Colbert as Cleopatra, unlike Miss Claudette Colbert as Popaea, does not disport herself for our benefit in an ocean of milk; but otherwise the production is as lavish, exuberant and picturesque as any admirer of Mr. de Mille's magisterial showmanship could possibly have anticipated. At its best, the entire film is one long orgy: almost naked girls, discreetly but expressively plastered with strands of clinging seaweed, are drawn up from the water in enormous nets, while a second bevy, clad in well-tailored leopard skins, scratch, claw, roll on the marble pavement and jump through blazing hoops, pursued by a Herculean ringmaster. Needless to say, there are the usual chariots: galleys go up in flame: and, to end it all, Anthony, desperate and deserted, is seen exchanging back-chat with the whole Roman army, including Octavian, Enorbarbus and other exasperated Roman patriots, gathered beneath the ramparts at his feet. As a film supposed to bear some vague relation to the facts of history, *Cleopatra* beats every record. Impossible to be more inaccurate, to be more vulgar—and yet, as one remembers it, there is something good-natured, naive, and indeed almost touching about the spectacle that disarms any attempt at serious criticism. Let us regard it as a kind of Hollywood pipe-dream. Through the gimcrack magnificence of its various sets stalks an English actor, Mr. Henry Wilcoxon, a fine rugger-playing English schoolboy, somewhat inappropriately cast as a noble Roman lured by Miss Colbert to doom and disgrace. Miss Colbert herself looks very pretty; but her accent is scarcely suited to a tragic rôle.

THE COMING WEEK

SATURDAY, August 25th—
Promenade Concert, Queen's Hall, 8 p.m., every night except Sunday.
Dorsetshire Labourers' Centenary Commemoration, Dorchester, till September 2nd.

TUESDAY, August 28th—
R.H.S. Flower Show, Horticultural Hall.

WEDNESDAY, August 29th—
National Co-operative Exhibition, Crystal Palace.

THURSDAY, August 30th—
International Co-operative Alliance Congress, Central Hall, S.W.1. Till September 7th.