MAURICE

GRIFFITH, one of Radio Normandy's resident announcers, reveals the emotions he experiences when he is on duty for the late-night transmissions, in this amusing article of truth and fantasy.



IME-11 p.m. Walking back over the hills surrounding Caudebec, beside forests of beech and fir which cling to the steep cliffs that overhang the Seine. The moon is bright, the air still and perfumed with new-mown hay; the heavy scent of honeysuckle hangs sweetly in the air. A streak of white cloud like a swan's wing forms a bracket around the constellation of

In a gap between the hills, a tapering lattice like a fantastic skeleton pulsates with milky light—the pylon of the Radio Normandy transmitter at Louveton

Now down the double hairpin into the town, in darkness except for lights in one or two windows. Another gleaming tower of bones—the spire of the church, tracery of stone instead of steel. Strange how they resemble each other, although built five hundred years apart! Bells and etherwaves-tortoise and hare !

Through the town, how my heels ring on the

cobble-stones! One, two; one, two, and the echo from the other side of the square syncopating.
"Little Sir Echo, how do you do?" In an hour's time I shall be playing that. How loud the stream is to-night, rushing through the culvert and between the overhanging houses! Wrought-iron gates, under the gilded "Radio Normandy" of the archway. Crunch, crunch on the gravel, makes too much noise, wake everybody up-walk on the lawn. "Defense de marcher sur les Pelouses."

There is nobody to stop me at this time of night.

Beneath the lofty plane trees to the studios, which look like tropical structures in this light. Boxes of geraniums glow blood red, the only point of colour in the nocturne of onyx and silver.

Open the door, switch on the lights, blinding and yellow after being in the semi-darkness for so long. Switches and more switches. The discs revolve like roulette wheels under the powerful green-shaded lights which hang low over the control table.

Here comes the French transmission, fading in as the receiver warms up. Check disaster.

Check discs and broadcast instructions-put everything ready. Twelve and a half minutes to -time for a cigarette before taking over. Open the windows and put out the lights, otherwise moths fly in. Over the lawns again, under the rose pergola to the terrace.

The Seine is like a mirror. The ferry is moored for the night, with one white light at the masthead. There goes a tanker up to Rouen, low in the water, one red light visible. Chug, chug of powerful

Diesel engine as it fights the current.

Broken reflections, a chevron of bow-wave the same formation as duck in flight. Downstream comes a Norwegian freighter, holds empty, hull high out of the water, moving swiftly to the open sea, screws thumping the surface and throwing up foam white like feathers-seem to have birds on the brain to-night!

There goes an Irish cargo from Limericktubby thing, but powerful, steaming up the river with a streak of black smoke from the funnels. I wonder what sort of weather they had off Land's

Time 11.54-back to the control room.

Door locked in case anybody walks in while the microphone is "alive"; windows closed against moths and motor-horns and ships' sirens. Loudspeaker off, headphones on. Script in front of me, bells ready. A minute and a half to go; I wonder if they will be on time. The French transmissions still have thirty seconds to go: "Et maintenant, mes chers auditeurs..." Zero hour. Heart beating a shade faster. Take a deep breath. Red light on, mike "live." "Bonne nuit"—there it is; wait five

Ding, dong, ding, dong! "This is Radio Normandy, wavelength. The time is a few "This is Radio seconds after midnight on the morning of. Signature tune . . opening announcement . . . fade in dance tune. Next part of the programme ready. Lean back for a minute.

A fter all the care I took there is a moth! A May have been sleeping all day, hidden under a ledge somewhere. Beautiful white, lacey thing; hope it doesn't land on the record. I wonder what would happen if it No time to wonder, cross fade next

cial announcement.

Outside the swan's wing has beaten northwards over the hills, and a shapeless black mass is The air is very close. hanging low over the river. A distant flicker of lightning floods the clouds for a split second and is gone. The trees hold their breath. Up at the transmitter the engineers curse the static: "Another storm; as if we hadn't had enough lately! If it comes as close as the last one did we might be forced to go off the air.'

Last commercial announcement; signature tune; fade for time gong. "The time signal for halfpast twelve. Working late? Remember, tea revives you. Radio Normandy." Play signature tune, the "Bells of Normandy"—"Dance music . . . two

foxtrots and a waltz.

Now I can lean back again; I take the headphones off for ten minutes. Loudspeaker on. "And they swam, and they swam, all over the Lucky little fishes, on a night like this!

The storm-clouded atmosphere makes the air sultry. Moths or no moths, I must have some air. Open the door. What rain! Like the tropics, and didn't even know it had started; can't hear a thing with headphones on. And the lightning. Every twig like fish-net against the sky, wet leaves gleaming like photographic negatives of

Fourth record. Curse these insects; there's a mosquito now, and a whole kindergarten of midges. I shall be lumpy in the morning. Last record;

running a little late—fade down.

"And now the International Broadcasting Company's transmission is drawing to a close."

Plenty of time; take it gently; it means something,

not just words.
"To those of you who are keeping watch on board the ships of the seven seas. "Three days to Limerick in a cargo boat-and one fraction of a second for my voice!

"To those of you who are rising . . . police ficers. . . " Even the one who gonged me for no officers. . . rear light on the Kingston By-pass; decent chap;

never heard anything more about it.

"Motorists..." Two in a coupé, returning from a dance; she says, "Nearly one o'clock;

that's Normandy closing down."

"To bukers and newspaper workers. . ." Did I ever know a baker? I don't believe I ever did except Heinrich, in Salzburg, but he doesn't speak English, unless he has learned it since.

"To young mothers, who tend their darling little

Maybe they don't always call them

darlings" at this time of night.

"Officers and men of the Royal Navy. ..." I wonder where Lofty is now—half way to China, probably. I must write to him. The strains of the Last Post fade under.

"Good night, and happy dreams."