

Television Drama by LIONEL HALE

A Play of Taut Nerves

THE other day I was sitting on the terrace of a French hotel, looking out over the placid Normandy coast, when suddenly someone pointed out that it was up those cliffs that the Commandos came in the Dieppe raid of 1942. The raid is recalled by H. E. Bates' play, *The Day of Glory*. Here is the English home from which came one of the R.A.F. men who took part in that Dieppe business, which cost so much and taught so much.

August, 1942. It is an odd house, the home of the Sandersons in the smiling south of England. H. E. Bates is not an author who looks always on the cosy side. He has a feeling for the strong, the active, the erratic; and one of the people in this Sanderson home is the war-wounded Colonel of the first World War. Astray in his wits, he still has (looking at the death of the young) the bitterest cry of the play: 'Delusion and blindness: I tell you. That's what's the matter with us. Delusion and blind stupidity and blind selfishness. My God, my God, wasn't I supposed to have been through hell twenty-five years ago so that this shouldn't happen?'

Nobody, in fact, could call this a comfortable play. But do we always want comfort to come seeping at us off our screens? Television is not really only there to let us put our feet up and let our minds down. *The Day of Glory* irresistibly puts us back in the war atmosphere of 1942. It is a play of taut nerves: Jack, the R.A.F. officer; his Polish fellow-officer, Radwanski ('Rad'), with horrible memories of German atrocities in Poland; a mother; a fiancée; and (as a centre of quiet in the middle of a hurricane of nerves) Julia, the wise and quiet and competent.

All this, judged by the normal standards of the theatre, is somewhat scattered. It is all the pieces of a drama. There is Jack: 'War inflicts plenty of wounds that are never in hospital records.'

And the Colonel, bitterly, on the raid: 'If it's

a success, I suppose they'll call it outstanding. Successes are always outstanding. If it's a failure, they'll call it glorious. A day of glory. Like the Charge of the Light Brigade.'

And Julia, summing things up: 'He wasn't flying for flying's sake any more. He was flying because he was beginning to see something more clearly and believe in it more deeply. He wasn't flying just because it was fun any more. It had stopped being fun. And there are thousands like him—flying in cold and darkness and flak and fire. Doing things that men have never done before. Burning alive. Being shot to little pieces against the sun. Going through hell and pretending to be light-hearted about it and pretending there's no future in it because they're too shy to talk of death.'

I said *The Day of Glory* was dramatically scattered. It remains for television to prove that its brilliant ingredients can be reassembled.

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What Happens to Love, written for the theatre, has been drastically reshaped for the screen. With a sort of beguiling documentary approach, it opens with a chairman dealing with the business of investigating 'the Subject of Love': and especially of Married Love and 'What Happens to It.'

This, wittily treated, is a play within a play. The two players who act out the stages of friendship, courtship, marriage, are themselves married, and after a little while their real selves emerge. They insist on playing not what is written for them, but their married life as it really was. (If this sounds confusing, don't blame me. Blame someone else—Pirandello, for instance.) One thing is perfectly certain, that in innumerable homes husband will turn to wife, and wife to husband, with the awful words 'That's just the sort of thing you do!' At all events, this comment on married life is put in new television terms, and with a very fresh fancy.