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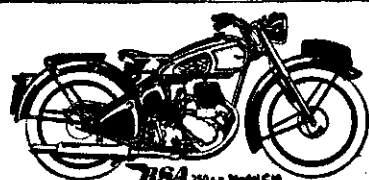


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BOOKS

Rhapsodist and Visionary

DELIUS. By Arthur Hutchings. Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London.

FREDERICK DELIUS was the last of the great romantic composers, but his genius was the final blossoming of a dying flower, and the course of musical history would have run almost as it has done if he had never been born. He seemed to derive from no one, influenced no one, and the essentially rhapsodic nature of his musical architecture shows how utterly foreign to him were the principles of classical structure. As a man—the son of a Bradford wool merchant—he was a rebel and a wanderer who hardly revisited the land of his birth, a recluse who lived for 45 years in France without achieving recognition there.

In this biography a picture is built up of the man—the Nietzschean artist-superman, intolerant of other people's religious or artistic opinions and haughty towards his social inferiors, who endured with Miltonic fortitude the blindness and paralysis of his later years. But the picture is not a very vivid or intimate one; the writer doesn't seem to be greatly interested, except in an academic way, in Delius the man. On the other hand, the picture of the composer is probably the most comprehensive that has yet appeared. It is built up by a series of critical analyses of the individual works, and it succeeds precisely because these analyses are painstakingly critical, and are written by one who has not succumbed to the fatal charm of Delius's music.

We learn that much of the trouble with the operas was a failure to use suitable libretti, that his methods were unsuited to the concerto form, and that his songs and chamber music have more in them than we think. Most important of all, the old fallacy that Delius could not write for voice is exploded, and the *Mass of Life* is revealed as his most ambitious, if not his most successful, masterwork. The critic is less successful, however, when he is away from the music itself, and when he links Delius with mystics like Vaughan, Blake, and Wordsworth, we begin to wonder just where this type of criticism is likely to lead. Delius was a great visionary, and he did capture the spirit of the English countryside in a way no other composer has, but his lack of sustained intellectual power makes many of his aspirations after immortality only partially successful. He will probably be remembered more for short extracts like the *Walk to the Paradise Garden* than for any general philosophic attitude as deduced from his *Mass of Life* or *Appalachia*.

When we reflect that it is barely 14 years since Delius died, we cannot yet expect a full assessment of his stature, but what does emerge from this book is that Delius, for all his lack of theory, for all his limited range, his mannerisms, his "decadence," and his musical isolation, is the only modern English composer who can really approach Elgar in greatness. Unfortunately the first 60 pages of this biography seem to have been too hurriedly written, with the result that a lot of people are going to be dissatisfied with them, but the critical bulk of the work makes it indispensable for any



FREDERICK DELIUS
An old fallacy is exploded

complete understanding of Delius's music. The profusion of music type and photographs, and the catalogues of works and recordings, give completeness to a competent and timely study.

—P.J.W.

WITHOUT A MYTHOLOGY

THE WOUNDED PRINCE. By Douglas le Pan. Chatto and Windus.

THESE poems by a Canadian are not strongly marked with a local pattern. Douglas le Pan is conscious of living in a country, as he calls it in the title of a poem, "without a mythology," but he is not self-conscious. He is not striving, with angry zeal, to reclothe the old Adam in a maple-leaf kilt, in the same way that a few years ago some New Zealand poets devoted a good deal of will-power to the creation of a local mythology. Mythologies are, I feel, a spontaneous growth. Le Pan is content to meditate on his country and its vastness "where time is worth nothing" and

..... the wilderness
Will be a garment innocent and lustrous
To wear upon a birthday

he is content to conjure up without special incantation the old travellers, the *coureurs de bois*,

Who put their brown wrists through the
arcs of the woods,
And were lost—sometimes for months.

Canada, where "the tartan of river and rock spreads undisturbed," is all the time at the back of his thoughts, but his speech is English. He is a literary poet, and the wounded prince,

Wild Hamlet with the features of Horatio,

was born English, whatever may be the accidents of geography. "In the eye is the wound," but has le Pan himself suffered any serious hurt? I do not ask that disparagingly, but in mere curiosity.

Douglas le Pan has immense assurance; he feels little need to jab the reader with the shock of surprise. When the word is unusual, it still appears confidently natural. He is, in his least ambitious moments, as subdued as Andrew Young. That does not mean that his choice of words is commonplace, but rather that he feels strong enough to

(continued on next page)