

RECENT MUSIC

No. 30: By MARSYAS

"HOPING some abler pen than mine will take the matter up" is a tag I am often tempted to close this column with; but I always realise just in time that that would be a thing to be feared, not to be hoped for. And now my worst fears are confirmed, for a professor of music, Dr. T. Vernon Griffiths, has given a talk on "Musical Criticism." But no. This was not a talk on criticism at all, and I should be doing the speaker an injustice if I treated it as one. It was an exposition of a great music-maker's ideals for the conditions of the educational performance of music.

Dr. Griffiths began by showing us how the word *prevent* had become corrupted since the Authorised Version used it, and then said that *criticism* had become similarly corrupted. He quoted Sir Henry Hadow as saying something after this style: "The good critic neither advocates nor prosecutes; he only deviates from the strict course of justice to be merciful," and added (or this may have been a quotation, too); "The best critic is he who finds beauty where others have failed to see it." This was very flattering indeed! But as a definition, it rather depends on who "the others" are, I should say.

So if these things show what *criticism* really does mean then the word certainly has been corrupted since I first encountered it. And I notice that the Oxford English Dictionary is a guilty accomplice of the deed. The *Concise Oxford* calls a critic "one who pronounces judgement: censurer."

However, within 10 minutes, Sir Hadow was confounding his own judgement by talking of "our amateur composers who boast etc. . . . they are

THE CHURCHES SPEAK

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fog lies upon the battlefield. No doubt the principles of the Atlantic Charter are right. No doubt the practises and principles of the Axis are as false as hell. If we practised our principles, "a little one would chase a thousand." It is because we give lip service to the better, while we yield yeoman service to the worse, that the pass is sold.

Victor Hugo's explanation of Napoleon's fall was this, "He quarreled with conscience." The same explanation will be the epitaph on the dishonoured tomb of the Fuhrer.

WE cannot claim Christ for the Allies. He claims the Allies and the Axis for Himself. Doubts about the issue of this war are based on our divided allegiance. There are rotters in the community, human vultures batten on the blood of the brave, there are go-getters, decent and selfish, who shed no blood of sacrifice, and there are those who live by the law of love. To multiply these last is the object of this campaign.

the vampires, the real traitors, the real obstacles to progress." What was Hadow doing here but prosecuting and very properly?

Then Dr. Griffiths spent a time on musical forms; played a bit of Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* to show that "although it is 250 years old, it still retains its undiminished popularity." If this composition had been the object of frequent assaults by critics, I would understand the need to vindicate it. He also showed how the minuet-and-trio form achieves its balance, and how the *Londonderry Air* (which he played), reaches a climax. I mention these things to show what I mean when I say it was not really a talk on criticism. For though one might think that the subject matter (or *substance*) of musical criticism is Music, paradoxically, it is not. It is Criticism. There is only one thing that Music is the subject-matter of—Music itself.

SOMEWHERE else in the talk, Dr. Griffiths quoted Percy Buck as saying that the critic should know all the surrounding circumstances of the performance, the condition of the piano used, the acoustics of the hall, and such-like. But to know all is to pardon all, and to pardon all is not criticism.

As for the critic "setting aside all personal antipathies" (Percy Buck again), I certainly had better set aside my "personal antipathies" in dealing with that statement. For what are "antipathies" but active or "nascent" expressions of *taste*. And of what value is criticism, or comment of any sort, in the absence of taste?

As an exposition of Dr. Griffiths' ideals, the talk was excellent. He works in what I shall call the pre-critical field of music. His work is in making good music come alive for (and through) children. In that sense, his music is truly "The Music of the Future." But I have twice protested against bringing child performers within the line of fire of musical criticism.

ANOTHER Professor took the air in the same week, Professor F. Sinclair, speaking in the Campaign for Christian Order, and the unsuitability of the music chosen brings that broadcast under my department. First we had that pretty boating-song (*How Lovely Are the Rowing-Boats*), from Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*, and afterwards a shocking setting of Psalm CL. I had feared it was by Dvorak, but was relieved to later learn that it was Cesar Franck's. It was very crudely sung. Now why couldn't they have paid a tribute to the Professor himself, the leading Handelian of the land, the Samuel Butler of our day (only a musical simile, not a literary one)? They might have sung *See the Conquering Hero Comes*, at least.

A curious thing: Professor Sinclair asked "Who Wants Freedom?" Two minutes afterwards, 2YA gave full names, and close personal descriptions, of three boys missing from a boys' home.

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