

ON NOT TAKING PAINS

BEERBOHM TREE, *His Life and Laughter*, by Hesketh Pearson; Methuen and Co., English price 25/-.

(Reviewed by Bruce Mason)

THE most unfortunate apophthegm in the English language is for me at this moment, Carlyle's celebrated dictum: "Genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains." What a dull, pettifogging universe is opened up by it! Or this, to which it is a corollary: "Consider the ways of the ant, thou sluggard, and be wise." Men of genius have rarely acted by them. Proust, perhaps, James Joyce, more certainly. But Shakespeare, Mozart, Dickens, Dostoevsky? Not a bit of it. And so to Herbert Beerbohm Tree, a man given to epigram, who wrote in his diary: "Genius is an infinite capacity for not taking pains."

It is clear, from Hesketh Pearson's lively biography, that Tree's life was built upon this maxim, and that if pains were taken, they were not by him. One of the great actor-managers, the greatest after Irving, he built the most sumptuous

theatre in London, Her (or His, according to the Royal incumbent), Majesty's, and there presented Shakespeare with an opulence unrivalled on the stage before or since. Yet his productions were never mere display pieces, and his *Twelfth Night*, *Henry VIII*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar*, brought Shakespeare to a wider audience than ever before, richly mounted, and splendidly performed. As an actor, he lacked the hypnotic quality which made Irving, seemingly, irresistible to his contemporaries.

Mr. Pearson compares the two at some length. Tree produced sixteen Shakespeare plays. Irving twelve. Neither was expert in the delivery of verse, in the manner of Forbes-Robertson, who had undergone the rigorous training necessary to achieve vocal climax through lengthy rhetorical crescendo. Irving and Tree therefore developed their own personalities, both to hide their technical defects, and enhance their merits. Irving's immense single-mindedness resulted in a stage personality so electrifying at its best, that audiences capitulated to its sheer mag-

netic power. Tree, incapable of such devotion, won an audience more by charm and power. Where one enthralled, the other entertained. Irving was undoubtedly the finer artist, but Tree had a captivating quality which endeared him to audiences.

As a man he was lovable and wilful, and extremely wayward with women, to whose flattery he was notoriously prone. As Lady Tree, after a good deal of suffering, ruefully commented: "With Herbert, a compliment always ended in a confinement." Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* for him and Mrs Patrick Campbell, and the chapter describing this production is the most entertaining in the book. A more unholy alliance could scarcely be imagined. They fought throughout rehearsals, snarling and bickering, and the play was an immense success. Tree was incapable of malice, and he spread round him a radiance to which all his contemporaries, in some measure, succumbed. It is a tribute to Hesketh Pearson to say that this radiance is everywhere seizable in his book. A man of great richness of spirit, and ripeness of character, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree was much mourned.

THE BRAVE SPRINGTIME

ENGLAND UNDER THE TUDORS, by G. R. Elton; Methuen, English price 25/-.
AN ELIZABETHAN, SIR HORATIO PALAVICINO, by Lawrence Stone; Oxford, Clarendon Press, English price 45/-.

THESE books, both good in contrasting and complementary ways, illuminate a period of great interest for modern Englishmen. The Tudor age was

tough, rich and creative, and for those whose minds adjust themselves with some difficulty to Britain's present status, Geoffrey Elton has given a penetrating account of her brave springtime. He is among those who have challenged established interpretations and re-examined basic evidence. His figures live, his judgments are clear cut and courageous, and his style, though marred by occasional congestion, is racy to the point of colloquialism. Other scholars will assault some of his conclusions with the same confident vigour with which he has demolished the opinions of his predecessors. Not all will fully concede his estimate of the crucial importance of Thomas Cromwell, or the view of history implied in the thick peopling of the stage with so many vital and active political individuals. Nevertheless, this book presents sharply, often wittily, and with a force which stops short of truculence, the salient features and broad character of Tudor England.

Lawrence Stone, on the other hand, has written a quiet, leisurely, life-like biography of an individual Elizabethan. Sir Horatio Palavicino was an Italian financier, in touch through family and business connections with the main trends of European economic life; trends explosively entangled with politics and religion. He was money-lender, speculator, public servant, a courtier in that small circle which exchanged personal New Year gifts with the Queen, intimate associate of the Cecils, father and



Beerbohm Tree

How clean
is your
denture?



...oxygen cleaning in

Steradent

is simple and effective

Just 20 minutes' immersion in Steradent daily is sufficient to keep your denture spotless, shining, completely deodorized and hygienic. Steradent "oxygen-cleans" your denture... that's why it destroys every trace of

stain and food deposit; cleans and purifies every little corner and crevice that you can never reach with a brush. You, too, should use Steradent. . . . It's the simple way to keep dentures really clean.

RECKITT & COLMAN (N.Z.) LTD.,
PHARMACEUTICAL DIVISION,
FORTH STREET, DUNEDIN.

ST.93.

Simply Shampoo
+Set

WITH CUR'ENE



Hair-waving
Cream
Shampoo
and your hair
becomes soft,
lustrous, and
easily-
managed.

Soapless CUR'ENE's rich hair-conditioning lather gently dissolves all clinging dust and dandruff... its soft thorough action treats and rejuvenates each separate strand. . . . Women who know insist on CUR'ENE . . . the super-concentrated cream shampoo now only 6/9



LARGE ECONOMY
SIZE 6/9
SMALL 4/-

Prepared in N.Z. for
Marlene's Inc. Chicago, U.S.A.
by Wilfrid Owen Ltd., Christchurch