

The Dedicated Artist

LETTERS OF JAMES JOYCE, edited by Stuart Gilbert; Faber and Faber, English price 42/-.

(Reviewed by James Bertram)

WHAT manner of man was the author of *Ulysses*? Let him deal with some of the legends himself: "My family in Dublin believe that I enriched myself in Switzerland during the war by espionage work for one or both combatants. Triestines . . . circulated the rumour, now firmly believed, that I am a cocaine victim. . . In America . . . I was an austere mixture of the Dalai Lama and Sir Rabindranath Tagore. Mr Pound described me as a dour Aberdeen minister. . . One woman here originated the rumour that I am extremely lazy and will never do or finish anything. (I calculate that I must have spent nearly 20,000 hours in writing *Ulysses*.) . . . There is a further opinion that I am a crafty simulating and dissimulating Ulysses-like type, a 'jeune jesuit,' selfish and cynical. . . The truth probably is that I am a quite commonplace person undeserving of so much imaginative painting."

In this magnificent collection of letters—surely the most important publication of its kind since the Notebooks of Henry James and the Journals of Gide—we have for the first time an authentic Portrait of the Artist, at work and at home. Joyce's position in world literature is now secure. But few can have expected to discover, behind those labyrinths of words that still astonish by their complexity and their elaborate coherence, such a simple, fallible and immensely likeable human being.

For whatever the prejudices with which we approach Joyce, these letters are completely disarming. He is far and away the best commentator on himself: and unlike his expositors, he is never pretentious. He knew from the start that he had extraordinary gifts, and was determined to make the fullest and most original use of them, despite poverty, illness and the entrenched opposi-

tion of Church, State and public morality. About his art he was not humble, but he was never arrogant, and he never ceased to try to make his intentions clear. In these letters, for example, the whole scheme of *Ulysses* is unfolded, to different correspondents, at almost every level of intelligence. It is clear that his greatest concern was to be understood, and the frankness and lucidity with which he supplies interpretations on request is in striking contrast to (say) the mystifications of Yeats, the academic coyness of Mr Eliot, the hieratic shrillness of Ezra Pound.

And if the artist at work is here most agreeably clarified, so too is the family man. This volume has as its frontispiece that incredible period photograph taken in Paris in 1924—it shows us a cocky little 20th century D'Artagnan; Mrs Joyce is drawn up like a high priestess of suburbia; a pretty daughter looks sulkily temperamental; the handsome son, wasp-waisted and killing in spats, is a Frenchified dummy. How different all these people appear when we have read these affectionate family letters: the devoted, long-suffering wife of genius; the daughter, tragically slipping into a dementia where only her father's voice can reach her: the son, struggling to build his career as a singer, sustained by the unflinching encouragement of a true connoisseur ("I know little about literature, less about music, nothing about painting and less than nothing about sculpture; but I do know something about singing, I think"). The picture that emerges is one of a completely united family, and it is Joyce—the heretic, the enemy of society—who holds it together.

Few men have suffered more for their art than Joyce: in the end he had recognition everywhere, except in his own country. His most constant patron was Harriet Shaw Weaver, and it is his regular letters to her which establish the framework of this collection. But to an extraordinary range of occasional correspondents he has, as might be expected, an inimitably lively range of tone and style. The family language

was Italian, and it dances along; the letters to his daughter, at the end, are the gayest and most moving of all. I shall be very surprised if the publication of this volume does not win Joyce a whole host of new readers. A great artist, it is now clear, was also a great and lovable man. And it will no longer be possible, even for the Irish, to throw dirt on the finest national and international writer their country has produced.

TOYNBEE ABRIDGED

A STUDY OF HISTORY, by Arnold Toynbee, abridgment of Volumes VII-X, by D. C. Somervell; Oxford University Press, English price 25/-.

THE last four volumes of Professor Toynbee's *Study of History* have not, I think, lent themselves to abridgment as readily as the first six, mainly because their theme is less capable of lucid exposition. The fault, therefore, does not lie entirely with Mr Somervell if the present summary is less adequate than its predecessor. After examining the causes leading to the rise and fall of past civilisations, Toynbee begins, in the second part of his work, to assess the services rendered to mankind by civilisations in the period immediately preceding their disintegration. He finds that universal states, or empires in decay, have provided the conditions under which one or other of the higher religions has been born to flourish and endure. Having made this discovery he announces his change of approach to the whole problem of universal history in the following words: "Instead of dealing with churches in terms of civilisations, as hitherto, we shall boldly make the new departure of dealing with civilisations in terms of churches." What was originally assumed to be the end now becomes merely the means of achieving an end. With this postulate in view Toynbee proceeds to discuss contacts between civilisations, the laws of God and nature in relation to human freedom, and, finally, the prospects of survival for a modern Western society which may, unless favoured by unique circumstance, be expected to follow the path of its forerunners.

The inquiry ranges round subjects so diverse that one is apt to lose the thread of arguments which seem to have little bearing on the central theme. Toynbee's path towards eventual conclusion is nothing if not devious. His zealous Christianity finds occasional expression in long sermons which a pragmatist might find irrelevant or an unbeliever might stigmatise as woolly. The *Study of History*, then, is not for the reader whose time or patience is limited. Its abridgment, however, caters for the man in a hurry, who will be well advised to begin at the end of the book where the contents of all 10 volumes are summarised within the space of a few pages: Mr Somervell is highly skilled in the art of condensation. Only a master of his craft could have performed the delicate task of reducing Toynbee's work to a simpler and abbreviated form while at the same time preserving its distinctive character.

—R. M. Burdon

WOMEN AT WORK

EXPLORING THE DEEP PACIFIC, by Helen Raitt; Staples Press, English price 18/-. WHEN THE WINDOWS WERE OPENED, by Elsa Pickering; Geoffrey Bles, English price 18/-.

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