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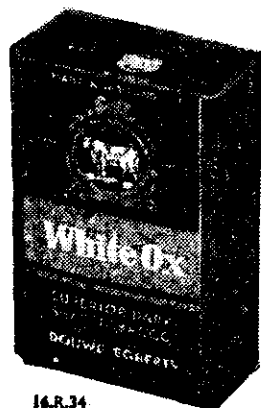
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Books

ASPECTS OF THEATRE

THE SHAW-BARKER LETTERS, edited by C. B. Purdom; Phoenix House, through Whitcombe and Tombs, English price 25/-.
THE ART OF THE DRAMATIST, by J. B. Priestley; Heinemann, English price 10/6.
LEAP TO LIFE, by John Wiles and Alan Gerrard; Chatto and Windus, English price 15/-.

(Reviewed by John V. Trevor)

ACTORS, producers and playwrights will find the volume of letters from G.B.S. to Granville-Barker (as he came to call himself by the time he wrote his memorable Prefaces to Shakespeare) quite the most important of the half-dozen volumes of Shavian letters so far published, though it is unlikely to be the last. He was a prolific and fascinating correspondent and it may even turn out that he will rank in literary stature as high in the field of letter-writing as in dramaturgy.

Almost all these letters are from Shaw to Barker, his replies presumably not having been kept, and the most important are the largest section, concerning the productions of his plays with which Barker was concerned, particularly the now historic Royal Court seasons of 1904-07. Shaw is writing, at the height of his powers as a dramatist, to a man whom he not only admired as an artist, but obviously held in strong ties of affection. It is a theatrical disaster (and a blot on Barker's character) that his second wife was able to break this friendship and hence the correspondence. She apparently disapproved of Shaw for his political opinions and also as a playwright; she detested him as a man. From the later letters, Shaw's affection remained unaltered, in spite of his continued friendship with Lillah McCarthy, the first Mrs Barker.

No play of Shaw's should be produced from now on without careful consideration of this volume, and no theatrical can but be stimulated, inspired, entertained, provoked and helped by it. Shaw is pithy, pertinent and almost infallible, not only in his particularisations about his own work, but also in his generalisations about acting, production and public reaction.

Barker's character is revealed obliquely and Shaw's estimate of his capacity in the theatre is somewhat iconoclastic. Barker was too milk and water for Shaw's taste, he wished for "worms" and not the "drunken, stagey, brass-bowelled barnstormers" demanded by Shaw. In an early letter Barker is advised to abandon acting and producing in favour of playwrighting, since he is "the only playwright with anything of the quality of Meredith's style." If memory does not deceive, this is a left-handed compliment, for surely Shaw wrote somewhere else that he found Meredith unreadable, disliking both his style and content?

The editing is sound and knowledgeable, if in places intentionally provocative; a reader will of necessity be driven to some of the biographies. Altogether a most valuable handbook and an essential volume of Shaviana.

In comparison, obviously, J. B. Priestley comes as something of a light-weight; more obviously still because the title is rather portentous. The basis of the book is the lecture given at the Old Vic, the first under the Hubert Henry

Davies fund, and Mr Priestley appears to be somewhat overawed by the assignment. His main thesis is "the delicate relationship between belief and disbelief" in play presentation. He says little that is new, for the subject has been well thrashed, but he says it well and makes his points clearly. The Appendices and Discursive Notes (as he calls them) make up over two-thirds of the total volume, and are more interesting than the lecture itself. Priestley is important as a successful modern dramatist and it is of definite value to have him dissect, most generously, details of his craft and that of others. His views on playwrighting, theatre trends, acting, production, criticism and audience attention are instructive and revealing. At a time when critics are crying that the theatre is moribund, it is good to see restated, and well argued, that dramatic experience can "refresh and even inspire men and women now lost in bewilderment and frustration."

Leap to Life is the story of first experiments in what may prove to be one of the vitally important aids in the reduction of juvenile delinquency. Youth Club leaders and all interested in, or associated with, the somewhat peripheral activities of the young, should study this book carefully and follow the subject further, preferably by experiment. Alan Gerrard has been able to interest "tough guys" in Dance Drama—roughly speaking, free movement and mime to music—and to raise enthusiasm even from illiterates and those classed technically as "backward."

The book is somewhat confusingly written and the work is still very experimental; the approach may well prove to be educationally and socially a real contribution to an increasingly menacing problem. The photographs are inspiring in themselves and a fuller and possibly more directly "educational" approach should follow in a further volume.

REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOUR

DAY OF INFAMY, by Walter Lord; Longmans, Green and Co., English price 18/-.

THE Japanese strike at Pearl Harbour on the morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941, destroyed both the might of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and the vestigial belief that chivalry has a place in modern war. Both American reaction and the quaint title of this book cry horror at Japanese treachery in failing to notify the U.S. of their intentions beforehand. As the pilots of the Imperial Navy made their near-perfect, textbook attacks on the base and on the aircraft lined up (to prevent sabotage) on the airfields, the Americans looked on in stupefied unbelief. Of the 600 people interviewed for this minute-by-minute account, only one seems actually to have recognised the enemy aircraft.

Later, when the stunned Americans began shooting, their aim reflected their

(continued on page 14)

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*THE age of space travel has started, it seems,
And is hitting the headlines in banners;
And what up till now have been nothing but
dreams
Will be catching the eye of the planners.
In the not-too-far-distant yet sweet by and by,
Though at present the thought seems a bold
one,
They'll be shooting so many new moons in the sky
That we may have to pull down the old one.
—R.G.P.*

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 22, 1957.