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about Kiwis  
in war  
and peace

# A GUN IN MY HAND

by

GORDON SLATTER

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## BOOKS

# The Great Dr Burney

DR BURNLEY'S MUSICAL TOURS IN EUROPE, edited by Percy A. Scholes; 2 vols. Oxford University Press, English price £5.5.

(Reviewed by J.C.B.)

WHAT an astonishing family were the Burneys, with their assortment of talents!—Fanny the novelist, the diarist; James the sailor, who went out with Cook; Charles the scholar; harpsichordists, minor artists, vivid letter-writers—but at once we are off on the entrancing ways of irrelevance that open before all writers on any Burney. The Burney now before us is Dr Charles, the Great Dr Burney, the Progenitor, the familiar of Johnson and Garrick and Lord Sandwich and Mrs Thrale and—irrelevance yawns again. This is Dr Burney the musician, practising, critical, pedagogical, who wrote that *General History of Music* in four considerable quarto volumes, which appeared from 1776 to 1789 and has instructed us ever since; the Burney to whom the encyclopaedic Dr Scholes gave the same loving care his hero extended to the whole field of harmony.

Dr Burney was not content to be a "mere" historian, a man of the library and the written record; his field being that of harmony (and also, it is true, of counterpoint, and the instruments of the Greeks and Romans, and the mechanics of ancient organs, and plain-song and notation) he was a strong believer in the preliminary puff, the trailer, the discreet self-advertisement. And—there can be no doubt about it—he was a charming, knowledgeable, universally interested, self-sacrificing, and very determined man. How else could he have put up with the fearful travelling conditions of 18th century Italy and Germany, doing it (for he was not rich) on the cheap—put up with the shocking roads, the dizzy mountain-passes, the bug-ridden inns, the voracity of innkeepers, torrential rains, shortness of food, insolence of officials?

That, certainly, was only one side of it: Dr Burney had an eye for natural beauty as well as his letters of introduction, he had the Plan of his history, he had his facility in languages, he had his charm: he passed from town to town meeting all the right people, singers, composers, players on instruments, librarians, dilettanti and cognoscenti grand-dukes and archdukes, poets and peasants, ambassadors and artists. He met archbishops, and he met Voltaire, he met Padre Martini and two or three Scarlattis and Farinelli and Jommelli and Piranesi and Hasse and the chevalier Gluck and the Emperor and Metastasio and C. P. E. Bach and Rousseau and—in fact he met everybody, heard Frederick the Great play the flute, visited innumerable operas and church-services and museums and libraries and art galleries, bought books, manuscripts, drawings and was presented with many more, made incessant notes, wrote away at his journal—did enough, in fact, to lay a modern traveller with all the advantages of cars and planes and *Wagon-lits*, flat on his back a dozen times with sheer exhaustion.

Of course Dr Burney had a mission, a consuming passion. He was collecting material for his great History, he was pumping everybody hard; in the cause he was prepared to listen even to the

French operas, the detestable howling of French singers, he would take the outrageous as well as the elegant, the dull with the spirited. How could anyone stand up to the quantity of music he stood up to? He was a conscientious man. He had a wonderful gift for observation, a good memory; his devotion to exact detail could make him tedious, but he could also write exceedingly well. He wrote, as preliminaries to his History, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (1771) and *The Present State of Music in Germany* (1773). From the first he excluded, on the advice of friends, all his miscellaneous travel observations, a rich harvest more welcome to us now than the names of half a hundred minor Italian musicians. Fortunately he left manuscripts. Dr Scholes put the whole thing together, edited it with accomplished learning, and here we have an 18th century panorama that should delight any reader who will skip a bit, who can afford to buy it, is able to borrow it from the library, or can scrounge a review copy. For as Burney said, "Though I love music very well, yet I love humanity better." In Italy, of course, it was difficult to distinguish between the two.

## BATTLE OF DUNKIRK

THE NINE DAYS OF DUNKIRK, by David Divine; Faber & Faber, English price 21/-.

ABOUT half the space of this book is taken up with a detailed account of the "nine days" during which 338,000 British and French troops were evacuated in an extraordinary variety of British and Allied shipping—destroyers, merchant vessels, ferry steamers, Dutch barges, and about 600 small craft of all kinds. Since then the myth has grown up that this was mainly accomplished by "the spontaneous action of innumerable small craft sailing independently under the influence of an enormous enthusiasm from the ports of south-eastern England." Actually the operation was carefully planned and controlled by Admiral Ramsay from his headquarters at Dover.

Mr Divine's very full and critical version of the Dunkirk story includes an account of the battle that opened on May 10, 1940, and ended with the overwhelming defeat of the Allied armies with a rapidity for which victor and vanquished were alike unprepared. The errors of strategy made by each high command are carefully weighed in the balance. Gamelin's failure to anticipate that the German main thrust would come through the Ardennes at the weakest part of the French line sets the scene for a disaster which the vacillating Weygand, called upon at the eleventh hour to save France, can do nothing to retrieve. Fortunately for Britain, General Rundstedt halts his Panzer divisions on May 23—his order being confirmed by Hitler the following day—and thus allows the greater portion of the B.E.F. to escape. "Because the German High Command had not believed its achievement possible, there was no plan for the immediate further use of the armoured columns once they had reached the sea."

For many years I have waited expectantly for someone to take up the cause of Lord Gort, whose reputation had been left largely to look after itself. The British Commander-in-Chief now has an able champion in Mr Divine, who presents much well supported argument



LORD GORT  
Able championed

to show that his handling of the B.E.F. was masterly throughout, and that General Brooke (later Lord Alanbrooke) has claimed and received more of the credit than he deserves.

—R. M. Burdon

## ART AND MEMORY

THE STONE, by O. E. Middleton; the Pillgrim Press, 12/6.

A QUOTATION from Malraux set in the front of this collection of five short stories seems to imply that O. E. Middleton relies on memory for his source material. Certainly three stories hark back to early youth. So much has been said about New Zealand writers' obsession with childhood that it is rather refreshing to find Middleton un-intimidatedly boxing on and using the material of youth in such a natural, inevitable fashion. The strength of these short stories is their truth. As they say, they write themselves.

This does not mean that they are plotless "mood pieces" which get somewhere by the hen's method of going on scratching up the soil. All have a firm shape and are the products of deliberate art. At the same time, it is the evocation of our own time and place, small town or small farm, which will give most to readers in this country.

The longest story, "The Stone," is so packed with excellent material, it makes it clear Middleton could well handle a novel. It remains, however, a successful short story, not a novel *manqué*, and its plot, a piece of small-boy wantonness achieving its emotional impact ten years later, is among the best of any yet written in New Zealand.

A rather similar character, the old, wise Scandinavian or German, occurs  
(continued on page 14)



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