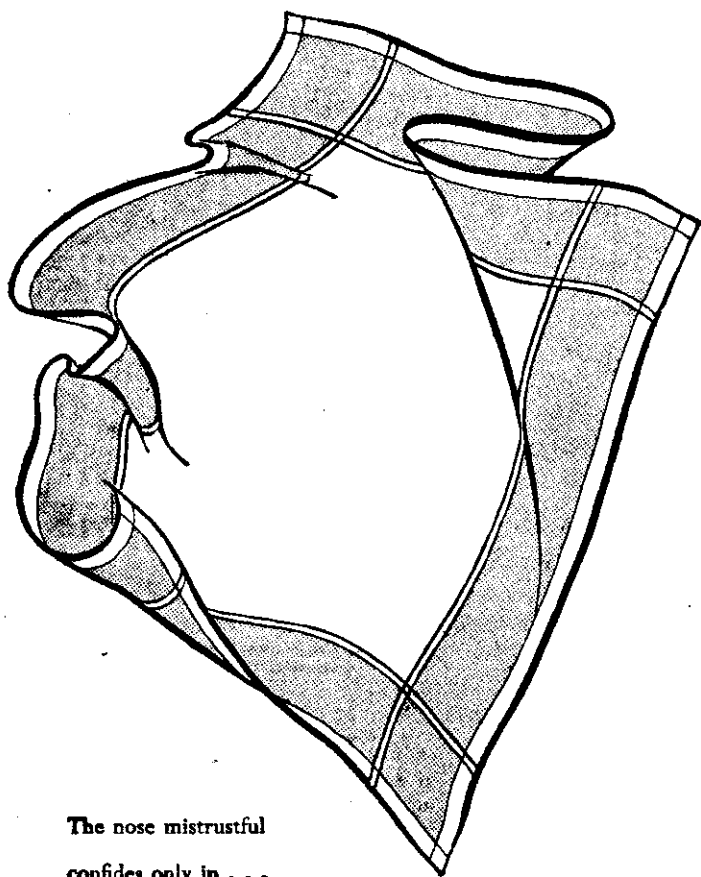




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(VOLUME V.)

By JOAN EVANS

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The following is an extract from the review of Volume V, which appeared in the Times Educational Supplement, dated 25th November, 1949: "The Oxford History of English Art is a most ambitious undertaking, not only because no such broad yet detailed survey of English Art has previously been attempted, but also because certain long tracts of the subject have only recently been explored by scholars. This volume is certainly a model for the rest in the matter of setting the existing monuments in relation to the general history of the time. About a hundred illustrations make an excellent anthology of the various styles of the period in many different arts."

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RADIO REVIEW

Oboes and "Oother Looud Muzik"

"THIS Pageant waz clozd up with a delectable harmony of Hautboiz Shalmz Cornets and such oother looud muzik," says Robert Laneham describing an entertainment for Queen Elizabeth in 1575 at Kenilworth Castle.

The oboe, originally a "looud muzik" instrument, has travelled a long way from the days of Queen Elizabeth. The double cane reed was one of the oldest methods of making a musical sound for an instrument consisting of a pipe with a series of holes in it, and the double reed of the oboe is still one of the trickiest sound producing devices.

"For forty years I have been blowing into it," said one great oboist, "and still I don't know what is going to come out." The oboist can play like an angel on a reed in the evening; the next morning he can pick up the same instrument for rehearsal, and sound like a peevish child. It may be the uncertainty of this kind of life which contributes to the orchestral tradition that oboists are "queer." I have heard much debate as to whether they become queer because of the effect their unreliable instrument has on them, or whether they have to be queer before taking up with such an ungrateful mistress. I suspect, however, that this tradition is on a par with the one held by woodwind players that the strings are conceited, or by strings that the woodwinds are soul-less. One thing the oboist must be, however, is nerveless. The string player can give a creditable performance when almost overcome by nerves, but the first tightening of the oboist's lips upon the reed which he holds between them will result in reducing his tone to a strangled snort.

For all its difficulties (not of execution, in which it is fairly easy) the oboe seems an ideal instrument for recording and broadcasting. Its somewhat dry and incisive voice comes very clearly and purely over the air. I believe that this is due to the relative lack of overtones, compared, for example, with the violin. There are some splendid executants recording today, most of them playing in the French tradition, more gentle and melancholy than the more incisive and harsher German method.

But overshadowing all there is one great name—Leon Goossens, the greatest woodwind player now living. His mastery of tone colours is amazing, the exquisiteness of his phrasing a miracle. He is never less than superb, and has put his art on a number of recordings which are treasured by their owners. My favourite is that of the Mozart Oboe Quartet with three members of the Lener String Quartet. I have never liked the Lener's playing of Mozart because of what I think is their over-sentimental approach, but Goossens vitalises the strings. The little work is Mozart at his sunniest: it has an open-air feeling about it and the little tunes bubble from the oboe like sunbeams on a stream. It is



a work to love, and Goossens's incomparable playing does it full justice.

Now my reason for writing this is that recently a young woodwind player said to me that he had heard a recording of Goossens and had been so struck with it that he had bought it with one or two other examples of his playing and was studying them. And it reminded me that now the influence of a great player is world wide, thanks to the gramophone and the radio. This lad could get no tuition for his instrument, the clarinet, nor could he have got a teacher if he had wished to learn the oboe or the bassoon.

This difficulty would be removed if the Broadcasting Service founded a training school for woodwind and brass players as a complementary activity to the National Orchestra. The players of the National Orchestra travel so much that they cannot teach. Whence are our future wind players in the National Orchestra to come? Must we always continue to send overseas for replacements? A symphony orchestra cannot be maintained in a country as small as New Zealand without making some provision for the training of local young people as potential replacements, for key wind players in particular.

—D.M.

Moss-gathering

EVERYONE has one book in him, good or bad—the story of his life—which is, indeed, the only story some novelists ever give us, however many novels they write. That these lives of others have a strong fascination for us is shown by the popularity of even the most indifferent autobiographies of lords, actors and navvies at lending libraries. A good illustration of how attractive a personal narrative can be was given by Charles Fuller in his series of Talks, *A Rolling Stone*, which finished recently at 1YA. Although Mr. Fuller's full life has included many occupations, ranging from the London Metropolitan Police Force to refrigerator-selling, nothing very sensational has happened to him. But what made these talks so pleasant to listen to was the very averageness of the experiences and the smooth conversational manner in which they were presented. The illusion was created of a friendly fellow sitting opposite you in an armchair, with a glass of beer in one hand, chatting amiably and diffidently

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 20, 1950.