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BOOKS

Music of Two Spheres

THE ESSENTIAL NEVILLE CARDUS: Selected with an introduction by Rupert Hart-Davis. Jonathan Cape, London.

(Reviewed by Alan Mulgan)

TO the lover of cricket no more beautiful sound proceeds from any game than that of the bat striking the ball as a golden summer afternoon westers quietly on green, tree-encircled sward. He may be tone-deaf to the simplest tune, but this is real music. If he also loves music he may appreciate all the more the comments of the most lyrical of prose writers who have been drawn into the game's service. Neville Cardus has won fame as a critic in these two spheres, cricket and music, and now he has been paid the compliment of inclusion in a series of "Essential" books, selections from writers living and dead. His companions in the first batch are Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Richard Jefferies and Mary Webb. We have here a varied selection from Cardus's books on cricket and two hitherto uncollected articles from the *Manchester Guardian*, and four essays on composers.

There must be some lovers of cricket who do not enjoy Neville Cardus. I know one, a good cricketer, who is exceptionally knowledgeable in music. He "can't stand Cardus" because, he maintains, Cardus sentimentalises his favourite game. I see what he means. Cardus has often over-written. To adapt a Swinburne line, the ripe grasses of his lush fancy trammel his travelling foot. One becomes rather tired of seeing Mozart at the wicket when it is really Charlie Macartney. Sometimes Tennyson's subjects, such as the fishing in *Enoch Arden*, will not bear the weight of his loaded lines. Now and then Cardus is like that; his players resemble tourists coming aboard at Honolulu smothered in leis.

Cardus, however, is aware of this. "The first literary man to devote the whole of his stored mind and eager pen to the great English game" (his editor's claim), Cardus had to learn his job, and over the years he has pruned his style. He gave his approval "in part somewhat reluctantly," to his editor's choice for this book and, left to himself, would probably have refused entry to anything earlier than "Good Days," published in 1934. As the Graces introduced a new technique into batsmanship, Cardus brought a new spirit into cricket reporting. At one time a professional cricketer, he knew the technicalities. He was well read, with a host of apt allusions ready for use; he had been studying music for years; his mind was receptive and keenly critical; his sense of character was

acute; and his style was bright with imagery and spiced with wit. No writer has so successfully exploited the geographical and psychological aspects of cricket; such as the dourness of the Yorkshire game in contrast with Kent's pastoral beauty, and the individuality of players—graceful or utilitarian, humorous or grim, flowering public school or rugged rustic.

He has given us an incomparable gallery of portraits, from Grace to Bradman, and, from what he wrote of the New Zealanders in 1949, it is safe to say he will add one or two of our players to it.

These cricketers live because he sees clearly the man within the player, all different, every man with his idiosyncrasy, whether it is the unbending and disdainful determination of Jardine, the broad humour of Yorkshiremen, or the moods of George Gunn, of Notts, who, opening an innings on a sweltering day, played himself in easily, then returned a dainty catch to the bowler, and gave this explanation to his astonished captain: "Too hot, sir." Cardus loves this flavour of character, as he does the sun and the trees and the green grass — "the beautiful, beautiful game, that is battle and service and



NEVILLE CARDUS
Grass ripens under his feet

sport and art"—and he makes us love them all the more. Conviction that the skilled cricketer is an artist is something more than his chief contribution to the philosophy of the game; it leads us to think of games generally in terms of art. The great player of any game expresses himself in something the same fashion as the writer or musician, and, in doing so, delights us.

Though Neville Cardus has published only one volume on music, and the essays on composers are only a fraction of this book, music is his more beloved mistress. Because he is represented in a popular collection in company with Cardus the cricket commentator, Cardus the musical critic will widen his public considerably. The titles of his four essays are: "Franz Schubert," "Apology of a Wagnerian," "Strauss, the Tragic-Comedian," and "Edward Elgar." He writes about music as he does about cricket, with a scholar's knowledge, insight, sense of human values, verve and wit—in such a fashion that the unmusical can find pleasure in him. The study of Wagner is perhaps particularly important because there has been a strong reaction against that composer. "Today," says Cardus, "there is none so poor to do him reverence, except apparently Ernest Newman and myself." After two German wars many people find in much of Wagner's music the brazen proclamation of German ambition and the sound of heavy relentless German marching to conquest. Cardus defends Wagner on

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