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Books

WORDS AFTER MUSIC

PLEASURES OF MUSIC, an anthology of writing about music and musicians from Cellini to Bernard Shaw, by Jacques Barzun; Michael Joseph. English price, 21.-.

(Reviewed by Owen Jensen)

A WELL-CHOSEN anthology is something more than a mere collection of literary extracts. It is a declaration of the editor's taste and very probably the exposition of an idea. Jacques Barzun's collection of writings about music and musicians fulfils both these conditions. Mr. Barzun's taste is for talking about music and his book is presented with the simple and obvious argument that writing and talking about music has as much to it as the pursuit of the same pastime in literature, art or anything else. In his admirable introduction, "Music and Words," Mr. Barzun deplores—not before time—the attitude of those who "are so deeply revolted by nonsense that they deny the possibility of even talking about music; those who claim that music is an 'experience apart which words can never reach.'" The fallacy of what is often a form of musical snobbery—this reluctance to admit the validity of discussion about music—is convincingly demonstrated by the delights of the writing included in this anthology.

Jacques Barzun's selection is made with remarkable eclecticism. Fiction, criticism, music and drama, composers and performers, premières, the musical life, instruments, fantasies and confessions, letters, maxims and good stories—the whole field of music is drawn upon, but with no evidence of preference or prejudice other than the unifying theme that everything in the book represents the particular writer's interest in music. Interest may not always, of course, imply enjoyment as, for instance, when Sydney Smith wrote

to Lady Holland politely but firmly refusing an invitation to the opera: "Semiramis would be to me pure misery. I love music very little—I hate acting; I have the worst opinion of Semiramis herself, and the whole thing (I cannot help it) seems so childish and so foolish that I cannot abide it"; or Macaulay who dismissed wild adulation of Paganini with: "This eloquence is quite beyond me." Nor does Mr. Barzun forbear to quote the fancifully inaccurate writer like Dickens who described the 'cello playing of one of his characters in *Dombey and Son* as gliding "melodiously into the *Harmonious Blacksmith* which he played over and over again until his ruddy and serene face gleamed like true metal on the anvil of a veritable blacksmith." The book includes some of the best writing about music and musicians, like Stendhal's brilliantly penetrating study

of Rossini, Samuel Butler's ruminations on Handel, or G. K. Chesterton's amusing but apt observations on "Music at Meals."

No one need have more than an intelligent—even if uninformed—interest in music to enjoy sampling *Pleasures of Music*, borrowing, as Jacques Barzun expresses it, "a little of the sacred fire from the spot where it is really burning" and discovering "the cause why music was ordained." And after all, as the inscription on the title reminds us: "Nobody is ever patently right about music."

HER MAJESTY

ELIZABETH OUR QUEEN, by Richard Dimbleby; Hodder and Stoughton. English price, 12 6.

IT would be hard to better this book as a popular, well-written, well-illustrated, suitably dressed, handy and low-priced biography of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, and as an exposition of the practical, moral and mystical significance of the Crown in the political and social life of Britain and the Commonwealth. Richard Dimbleby is one of the most experienced and sure-footed of broadcasters on great occasions: he was on this duty at Princess Elizabeth's wedding, and at the funeral of King George VI. He is equally skilful in this wider and more difficult field, the life of Royalty, the history of the Crown, and authorities on the Constitution. All this he weaves into a human narrative. He is warm but not effusive, and not uncritical, as when he contrasts the old Royal theory, practised in lesser degree by George V, "that strength of character could be fashioned only by severity and repression," with the methods applied to Princess Elizabeth.

On the eve of the Coronation, this book has a very special appeal, but I think it will be re-read from time to time, and appealed to in family dis-

cussions on fact. There are two main impressions in my mind: the closer connection today between Throne and people, and the burden of office. The two conditions are connected. The way in which King George VI, when Duke of York, mingled with boys in camp, was indicative of the change. So were Princess Elizabeth's travelling in public conveyances, her visits to law courts, where the fact that she heard an unsavoury case was considered an advantage, and her training with the A.T.S. in the war. The conditions in which she approached motherhood are also cited as illustrating the spirit of a freer age.

On the load of unending duty piled on the Sovereign, and the strain caused by lack of privacy, Mr. Dimbleby is outspoken. Once when someone commented on the strenuousness of a tour, Princess Elizabeth replied: "At times like that you just have to forget about feeling tired." New Zealanders (and everybody else concerned) please note.

—A.M.

THREE LIVES

I LIVE AGAIN, the memoirs of Princess Ileana of Roumania; Victor Gollancz. English price, 16 6. THE LAST YEARS OF NIJINSKY, by Romola Nijinsky; Victor Gollancz. English price, 15.-. MY FORTY-YEAR FIGHT FOR KOREA, by Louise Yim, with the editorial assistance of Emanuel Denby; Victor Gollancz. English price, 18.-.

THESE three autobiographies are records of personal toughness and devotion—to an ideal of royalty, to a genius and to a country. They are interesting because of their subject-matter but none of the three is written with any style. The best autobiographies are not written by the best citizens. Living is one art; writing is another.

I Live Again has an odd period air. It reads like a new edition of one of those stories of ex-kings, ex-queens and ex-duchesses which were a staple product of the lending libraries in the nineteen-twenties and early thirties. How avidly the memoirs of Marie of Roumania were read a generation or two ago! The same reading public one imagines will respond to this more up-to-date account of royal vicissitudes in peace and war. Princess Ileana addresses herself to an American public to whom she writes down with care and consideration. She assumes that her readers will be sentimental and ignorant of European history and custom. Who is to say she is wrong? One is tempted to remember the wisecrack, "To be a Roumanian is not a nationality: it is a profession."

The Last Years of Nijinsky is the harrowing recital of a wife's loyalty to the shell of a genius. Romola Nijinsky tells the story of what happened between 1919, when her husband went insane, to the year of his recent death. Although the dancer's wife is bitter about the falseness of old friends, she did nevertheless receive help and assistance from many dozens of people during the 20 years she cared for Nijinsky. Romola Nijinsky does not seem to have realised that many fellow-Europeans were also personally familiar with suffering between 1919 and 1947. However, if it is to be effective at all, devotion must be combined with toughness and insensitivity to anything other than the object served. Romola Nijinsky could not only afford to be friendly with people who could be useful to her. She was giving so much to one person that she could only take from the rest.

Louise Yim is tough, too: she is also the most likeable of the three writers under review. This remarkable and heroic woman is today the only member of her sex in the Korean Legislature. She was the official delegate of the



"The spirit of a freer age"