

## The Great Melba

MELODIES AND MEMORIES. By NELLIE MELBA. New York: George H. Doran Company. 1926. \$5.

Reviewed by J. RANKEN TOWSE

THIS is a charmingly written book, of its own peculiar kind, and constantly entertaining, especially for those who delight in lively gossip about the magnates of the musical and plutocratic social worlds, even if it does not offer much that is new or highly important. And it reflects the personality of a gracious, simple, natural, unaffected, and highly gifted woman. About the public lives of the greatest operatic artists, and Nellie Armstrong, or Melba, was a reigning queen of song for many years, there must always be a certain degree of sameness. Similar records of success in triumphs in the great cities of civilized countries, popular demonstrations, social courtesies in high places, intoxicating adulation, luxurious or exhausting travel. In all the honor, pleasures, trials, rewards, and hard work of her profession, Melba had her full share, and she talks about them very pleasantly and modestly, with an agreeable spice of observation and anecdote, but there will be no attempt here to follow her musical career precisely or in detail. Her story will well repay the reading.

She was a fortunate woman from the first, although she did not reach the summit without the usual preliminary struggles. She owed her health to her free country life in Australia, and her character to her kindly canny, practical, plain-dealing, and hard-headed Scotch father. Her voice, of course, was nature's own rich endowment. When, after a year of wedded life—about which she says little—she made her first public appearance in Melbourne as a vocalist, in 1884, and met with a favorable local reception, her cautious parent was willing to take her to London, but indulged in no hallucinations. It is interesting to note, as she tells very honestly, that she failed to impress either Arthur Sullivan or Randegger. Wilhelm Ganz was appreciative and organized a concert for her, which proved a complete fizzle. Then her father, as a last chance, agreed to let her study on the Continent, allowing her a certain sum of money, adding that if this was not sufficient, the experiment must end, and she must return home. So, in fear and trembling, she went to the famous Madame Marchesi, who, at first, significantly enough, told her not to shriek, but presently, after making her sing softly, waxed enthusiastic over the beauty of her voice, and promptly undertook her tuition. Before that was completed her financial resources were very nearly exhausted, but she had learned to be thrifty, and pinched resolutely until she had reached her goal. She gives an entertaining account of Marchesi's methods and humors, and a vivid sketch of her in decrepitude and decay. And she draws a delightful picture of Gounod, with whom she was a favorite, in the triplicate part of teacher, singer, and actor.

By this time she was fairly on the road to success, but nearly missed it, for Max Strakosch, who had accidentally heard her singing, inveigled her into signing a ten-year contract which for her would have been most disadvantageous. But from that the sudden death of that enterprising impresario released her, and after her brilliant début in Brussels, as Gilda, in "Rigoletto," the world was practically at her feet. Nevertheless, soon afterward, owing to lack of publicity, she had a disheartening experience, in London, at Covent Garden.

That check was retrieved, a year or two later, when, fresh from continental triumphs, and fortified by critical rhapsodies, she returned to the British metropolis under the social tutelage of Lady Grey, an aristocratic leader. This time she was fully recognized as one of the greatest singers of the age, and thenceforth her career was one of uninterrupted prosperity. Wherever she was seen and heard, she conquered. Of her professional life it is scarcely necessary to say more.

Her social experiences are of greater general interest. She mingled everywhere in the most glittering social circles. The frank and simple Australian girl seems to have been surprised to find that even royalties, in undress, behaved very much like ordinary well-bred men and women. She was deeply impressed by the dignity of the "little black figure" of Victoria, before whom she sang at Windsor, when she had to repeat her program, be-

cause the Empress of Germany had gone out for a walk. She was amazed at the prodigality displayed at the "Arabian Nights" entertainments given by English society in the eighties, and describes vividly the melancholy contrast presented by "post-war" conditions. Her keen sense of dramatic contrasts is exhibited in her sketch of the flamboyant Bernhardt in her brilliant heyday, and old, haggard, bedizened, dying but still defiant; and again, in her picture of Oscar Wilde, in his glory, and a beggar in the streets of Paris. In that city she shared in the joyous revelries of Dr. Sagan. Anon we find her, with the De Reskes, in St. Petersburg participating in the gorgeous hospitalities of the Grand Duke Alexis, and dazed by the splendor of the Russian ballets, or singing duets with King Oscar in Norway, or with Tosti in a gondola, on a midnight frolic through Venetian canals.

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In America her first reception in New York was chilly—she was unknown to the 400—but soon she was winning the customary ovations here and in triumph progresses through the country. She waxes eloquent in praise of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In San Francisco, in Spanish war time, she created a frenzy of enthusiasm by singing the "Star Spangled Banner" in "Il Barbière." Presently she is back in London to enjoy the gaiety and bonhomie of the Edwardian regime, to flit to Berlin, where she seems to have failed in homage to the bumptious Kaiser, and to Vienna where she charmed the melancholy Franz Joseph from his long retirement after the assassination of his empress. Then, after an absence of sixteen years, she went to Australia to cheer her sick old father, and he idolized by her compatriots. Her description of her home-coming and the reflections excited by it are among the best features of her book. It was in Melbourne that she encountered Kitchener, who asked for "Home, Sweet Home," and was moved to tears. That was a tribute to be proud of.

She gives a splendid account of Oscar Hammerstein, and of the famous war between the Manhattan and Metropolitan Opera Houses in which she played so prominent a part, but on this there is no space to dwell. Back in England she tells of the gloom caused then by the death of King Edward and of the growing apprehension of impending war. When the storm broke she, like other devoted women, played her part by singing far and near for the benefit of the sick and wounded. Of this ghastly period she has all too little to say, but she comments feelingly on the dismal changes in English social life which she experienced, after the restoration of peace, in returning to London to find Covent Garden "full of ghosts."

In one way, full of varied and pleasant gossip as it is, the book is disappointing. Of solid substance, fresh details, or originality of viewpoint, it has not much to offer. But, as has been said, it leaves the impression of a charming woman.

## In Tudor Times

A HISTORY OF ENGLAND FROM THE DEFEAT OF THE ARMADA TO THE DEATH OF ELIZABETH, with an Account of English Institutions During the Later Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries. By EDWARD P. CHEYNEY. Vol. II. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1925. \$6.50.

Reviewed by WALLACE NOTESTEIN  
Cornell University

PROFESSOR CHEYNEY succeeds in making local government interesting. His plain, unvarnished tale of events holds attention, but he is most easy to read when he tells us of the duties and activities of the lord lieutenant, of the sheriff, of the high constable, the constable, the surveyors of the highways, the overseers of the poor, and of the churchwardens. There is no book in English where there is so adequate a description of the "Tudor maid of all work," the justice of peace. That official who was usually a small country gentleman, had in some instances been to one of the Inns of Court for a term or two, but in more cases had picked up his legal knowledge from reading Michael Dalton's "Country Justice," or some other book of first aid to rural magistrates.

The justice needed to know all things. Before 1603 there had been passed some two hundred and ninety statutes which involved the duties and obligations of the justice of peace, one-fourth of them

enacted during the reign of Elizabeth. The justice had to know about regulating the "spawn and frien of fish," he had to suppress "fond and fantastical prophecies," he had to prevent riots, enforce laws about contagion, keep an eye on gipsies, stop unlawful games, of which there were several in the merry England of Elizabeth before the fairies lost command, to punish or set on work vagrants and sturdy beggars, and to care for forty other matters that required time and attention to details. However faithful he was, he did not know what morning he might get from the Privy Council at London a series of special instructions for some emergency real or imagined, or receive for some failure of duty, their sharp rebuke. His was a hard-working life, and his reward the estimation in which J. P.s were held by the community. By some witchcraft the English government was able even down to the nineteenth century to convey enough local prestige to its justices of peace to get much work done for nothing. Yet the J. P.s were not very important, and Dorothy Osborne, that best of all feminine letter-writers, was wary of a husband whose aim reached no further than to be a justice of peace.

The playwright who gave us Justice Shallow and Justice Silence thought them ignorant fellows, but unhappy experience may have colored his view. Whatever his training, the justice was often a man who had a good deal of common sense and discretion. His weakness—and this Mr. Cheyney has not said, but I think he would agree—was that he had a perfectly natural tendency to favor his own class. If Sir Robert Throckmorton thought that his two daughters, who were behaving strangely, were bewitched by Goodwife Samuel, Sir Robert's neighbor and friend, before whom the case was first brought, was likely to credit the evidence of his fellow gentleman as against that of the goodwife. The J. P. was honest enough and often high-minded, he meant to be fair, but he was loyal to his own kind. Galsworthy in one of his most thoughtful plays has examined that sense of loyalty to class in modern English life; it was just as strong in Elizabethan days. The government of England by gentlemen, the passing of which we are perhaps witnessing, was probably as successful a method of government as was ever practiced, but had one flaw: gentlemen, like other kinds of people in many countries and times, looked at government through the eyes of those they met from day to day.

Mr. Cheyney has evidently been long interested in the story of that sometime favorite of the Queen and of gods, and at all times of men, the second Earl of Essex. In this volume, he traces the decline and fall of that nobleman, tells the story of the Irish expedition, of the Earl's imprisonment and of the abortive rising that led to his execution. Through a subject that has been the occasion of great controversy and around which there has risen a thick mist of tradition, he proceeds unafraid and with authority. It is a topic meant for one who holds a nice balance of judgment, Mr. Cheyney's eminent virtue in historical writing. If he discards some of the episodes that have gathered round a figure almost magnetic of romance, he retains that sympathy, surely allowed an historian, for a man more brave than wise, whose struggle against fate furnishes fit theme for the Tragic Muse.

We must all regret that Mr. Cheyney has not found it possible to deal with other aspects of late Elizabethan days, with the Church, with the Universities, the Inns of Court, with social and intellectual life, topics upon which his unusual acquaintance with the plays and other literature of the time would have served him well. Who knows so well as he about economic conditions under the Tudors, yet in this volume he has said all too little.

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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## How One Catches Socialism

MY APPRENTICESHIP. By BEATRICE WEBB.  
New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1926. \$6.

Reviewed by PHILIP COAN

MRS. WEBB belongs with Rousseau, Henry Adams, and certain other exceptional persons, who have had something to say about themselves. Like these others, she throws some light on the problem of why we hold the opinions that we do hold. Some day soon, investigation will no doubt rear the causation of opinions into a science; one presumably half natural history and half dynamics. Mrs. Webb started life as one of numerous daughters of an English banker family of position and fashion. She became a social investigator, an advocate of the sweeping social reforms carried out since in England, and finally an outright socialist. She effected, in fact, a complete change of base in regard to her attitude toward society. The frequency of similar cases renders the thing no less remarkable, and all the more interesting.

Most persons, undertaking to explain an opinion held, have no other art than to present the arguments in its favor. They lack the self-revelatory gift. Beatrice Webb tells us that having neither the talent nor the training of a philosopher, she "expresses the faith she holds in the simpler form of personal experience." Surely also it is the more readable form. The sheer generalities of the subject would quite fail to apprise us how this banker's daughter, instead of being securely married in the moneyed class, should acquire a disbelief in bankers, and a hostility to the system that bred them. Women of the same social group, a generation or so earlier, were renouncing their inherited advantages for the sake of religious aspirations; will women of that class, and men for that matter, obey five years from now a tide urging them into the creed of Fascism? Apparently other things than the strict influence of reason, mould opinion. Men will have to catch these elusive influences, and kill them by looking them in the face, before they may hope to become responsive to pure reason in shaping their views of great common questions. This book, written by a rarely keen and scrupulous spirit, tells more of the influence of proletarianism on thoughtful folk of the last forty years than any other recent work readily named.



"I am translating 'Faust,'" writes the young Beatrice of fifteen years; "putting the introduction piece out of the question, which is fearfully blasphemous, it might almost have been written by a good man, as a satire on the philosophers of the present day." She had been to America, and was "fascinated" by Joaquin Miller, "a hater, because a stranger, of the civilized world." As she developed, the old story of brains without a domain enacted itself. She was familiar from childhood with the persons and converse of intellectuals—Herbert Spencer, for instance. She wrote in her diary a review of each serious book she read. And yet—what should she do with her brains? Sometimes she was to become a landscape painter; sometimes matters of religious faith obsessed her, especially a doubt of the moral tenability of the doctrine of the Atonement. It may be left to the reader of the book to consider for himself whether the half-pleasure that a keen and insufficiently absorbed mind may take in knocking over its own intellectual property influenced the young lady now and then. There were seasons of unhappiness over truths ousting beloved falsities. There were egos; Mrs. Webb acknowledges two, the ego that affirms and the ego that denies; but one suspects yet others, who played their parts as luring demons of introspection. Sometimes long plunges into social amusement absorbed importunate impulses for a while. After frivolity came sessions of almost Puritanic repentance.

She did not run to an incorrigible pursuit of successive illusions, like Escholier's Mme. Lestelle. She had far too much sense to dull disappointment with a resort to substitute illusions for those that were broken. When she replaced Christian belief with a religion of humanity, she was rather amending or salvaging all that a sober analysis left her of her old faith. Humanity thus became by—would the psychologists call it sublimation?—the substitute for a lost divinity. And soon the young

seeker found that among the poor were performed acts of courage and abnegation, acts that argued them worthy of a place at the human table. Moreover, the poor, even in Whitechapel, were commonly cheerful; and we all know of the process by which the pensive in the long run yield their places in the sun to those with an affinity for light and life. One suspects a sense of insufficient joy of living in these thinking aristocrats. As for the fear-of-selfishness motive, one of the commonest affecting upper-class folk who turn Socialist, it appears here and there, moderate but not to be mistaken.

More than a mere record of complexes, some will insist, of this story of half the life of a wonderfully clever and useful woman; and indeed it affords a historically valuable record of her doings and those of many others. But really legible revelations of the minds of thinking folk are rarer than accounts of their acts.

## Imperialism

DOLLAR DIPLOMACY. By SCOTT NEARING and JOSEPH FREEMAN. New York: The Viking Press. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by REXFORD GUY TUGWELL

Columbia University.

WE hear, it is true, a good deal less than we used to about the "destiny of nations" and "places in the sun." We came down pretty hard on Germany, among others, for that kind of thing in 1918. But I think a good case could be made for the assertion that nothing has changed except possibly the phraseology we customarily use. We should not now expect a responsible official, for instance, to say in a Chamber of Commerce address that it is only a question of time until such and such will "come under our banner." Messrs. Nearing and Freeman remind us that no longer ago than 1912 Mr. Elihu Root did say those very words, and with specifically mentioned reference. We perhaps are more careful now about the language we use in public. But did the war really change imperialism very much? Take our own case, for instance. The British Empire is of course the classic example for Americans to cite; but we Americans need no longer go abroad for illustrations, if we are even a tiny bit self-examining.

How is it in Haiti, San Domingo, Cuba, Nicaragua? Under what circumstances did we acquire—and do we keep—the Philippines? And what are the implications of our attitude toward Mexico and other Central American republics? Not only that—though these are the worst examples pointed to by the anti-imperialists—there is our steady and resistless economic penetration in China and in South America. And do we or do we not begin to hear of the "Americanization" of mighty England herself?

How does it all come about? Are we a people who believe we have the finest art, philosophy, culture in the world? Most emphatically not. We are over-willing indeed to grant these supremacies to Europe; we are so modest in these matters that we are far from having a desire to propagate them. We are not above talking about "educating" our backward dependencies. But we do not pretend that we could teach Europe, for instance, anything. Our imperialism, except for a brazen outburst in 1898 and a little later which was a pretty frank taking advantage of the blowing up of the Maine, has been less a frankly official sort than, for instance, England's. Our situation is simply that of overflowing riches within the control of a few organizations which, playing the capitalistic game according to the rules, invest the surplus where the returns promise well. This and the natural pressure of great producing organizations for markets accounts in large part for the phenomenon.

Messrs. Nearing and Freeman make all this quite clear. And they do it in a dispassionate but completely overwhelming manner. Their points are fully made, so that their book is a useful summary of the economic relations we have gradually built up. One imperialistic crisis was that of '98. But there was a strong reaction against that; and most of the impetus fizzled before much advantage could be gained. Another, of a somewhat different sort, came with the War of 1914-18, however. It was a war we did not make and it was a matter of pride with us that we had nothing to gain from it. But marvellously enough, as the matter stands today, we have acquired all the capital our Allies had invested with us over a century, and they stand pledged to

pay us in annual increments, running to 1980 or 1990, some half billion dollars a year. Besides all this, we, in a sense, dominate the commission which has a strangle-hold on German industrial life. All this happened, not because we started out to do it, but because we happened to be rich and Europe happened to be needy—and because they insisted on the costly extravagance of war.

The story of all this is told with great lucidity and with admirable restraint and compression. It would be easy to sentimentalize this whole situation. This the authors have not done, though their attitude is clear enough. As a matter of fact, one who knows the facts concerning the partition of Africa, the subjugation of the Near East, and the terrorization of China, cannot help feeling that the people of the United States have less on their consciences than any other industrial nation. But this does not excuse our small sins and ought not to close our eyes to what may happen if our imperialistic jingoes have their way, say, in Mexico in the very near future, or even if we follow less inflammatory leaders in the way we are now going.

Messrs. Nearing and Freeman are Socialists, and they probably feel that imperialism is merely one other unfortunate aspect of capitalism. In this, I think, even a capitalistic apologist would have to agree with them. Under our present system it is difficult to see how the necessary rubber, hemp, sugar, vegetable oils, coffee, spices, and tropical fruits can be got without that investment of capital abroad which is the essential element in economic penetration and which may so easily lead to political domination. Where I have always felt the anti-imperialists have erred has been in their refusal to state alternatives. Either we have got to do this kind of thing or go without these indispensable raw materials. Somehow, they vaguely hope, most of them, that it can be done otherwise. Messrs. Nearing and Freeman, however, having no sentimental attachment to capitalism, are not afraid of the alternative. They think we ought not to get reluctant oil from Mexico or sugar from the Philippines. Even if it ruined our economic arrangements here at home, that would not seem to them an irreparable loss.

As a matter of fact we may as well face the situation, all of us, that we shall continue to get from Mexico on fairly easy terms. And the same is true of other products from other weaker states. We will not let anyone weaker than we are hold us up because we shrink from the possible consequence—the use of force. Perhaps as an economist I state this matter more baldly than most readers will like to see it stated. As a matter of fact I believe Mr. Root put the matter honestly and truly. We may not like it because of moral scruples; we may not think a single American life worth all the bananas in Central America. But if it requires some such sacrifice to keep up the flow of bananas—cheap—we stand ready now, as a nation, I am convinced, to make the sacrifice. We should not make it, if, when the time came, it were clear that the shooting was all about, perhaps; but it will not be. There will be honor involved then and bananas and profits on bananas will be conspicuously absent from public mention. Nor is it clear to an economist what can be done about it. Inevitable is a weighty word, but how else shall we name it? Unless we do what Messrs. Nearing and Freeman would like to have us do—give up the whole mess and start over—what other way out is there? And even then! Perhaps, some anti-imperialist will tell us how we are to get oils, and sugars, and fruits from reluctant señors—or are socialists not fond of coffee, sweets and riding in automobiles?

The Mediæval Academy of America has recently been incorporated with the purpose of conducting and promoting research, publication and instruction in all departments of the letters, arts, science and life of the Middle Ages. The president is Professor E. K. Rand of Harvard. The officers include business men and artists as well as students of ancient and modern languages and literatures, mediæval religion, philosophy, history, art and education. The Academy maintains a quarterly journal, *Speculum*, of which the managing editor is Dr. F. P. Magoun, Jr., Harvard University. Any person in America or elsewhere interested in membership in it may obtain further information from the office of the Academy, Room 312, 248 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts.