

# The Singing Puritans

**THE PURITANS AND MUSIC IN ENGLAND AND NEW ENGLAND.** By Percy A. Scholes. New York: Oxford University Press. 1934. \$8.50.

Reviewed by CARL ENGEL

EVER since Adam and Eve got the first dispossession notice, their progeny has striven to regain entrance into the ancestral home. These efforts, vain though stubborn, have led to the strange notion, entertained by a good many people, that the surest access to a heavenly paradise is by way of hell on earth. Their faith in compensation, personal and everlasting, is absolute. It helps them to regard the vicissitudes encountered in this "vale of tears" with equanimity, even with cheerfulness, except that cheer is so apt to degenerate into unseemly mirth. To avoid this danger, they are at pains to surround their life of virtue and purity with an air of dignified gloom and to fortify themselves behind self-denials and discomforts.

No fault could be found with such views or practices, were it not that those who hold them or indulge in them are recurrently beset with the urge of making everyone else share them. This frequently leads to unpleasantness. The would-be-reformers and the not-to-be-reformed ruffle each others' temper. They malign, if they do not kill, each other. And thus the men and women, whose strict tenets earned them the proud appellation of Puritans, have come in, from time to time, for some unmerited slander. Particularly the Puritans who settled in New England during the first half of the seventeenth century and their descendants have long, and not unjustly, enjoyed the reputation of having been intolerable prigs and tedious killjoys. But along with deserved opprobrium there has been a good deal of excessive vituperation. Among it is the general and now ancient accusation that the Puritans loathed and prohibited all music.

Now comes along an English musician and musicologist, Dr. Percy A. Scholes, who has probed deeply into the saga of "The Puritans and Music in England and New England." At last the true facts are laid bare. Dr. Scholes, in giving us what he modestly calls "a contribution to the cultural history of two nations," has written the most exhaustive and yet comprehensive book on a chain of interrelated subjects, each one of which has been responsible for a considerable literature. The list of works consulted and actually cited by Dr. Scholes in the course of his book covers fifteen and one-half pages and comprises about 750 titles; it goes back to original documents and scrupulously distinguishes between the genuine and the spurious. When the sifting is done, Dr. Scholes comes to the only possible conclusion, namely that "most or all evidence to the effect that the Puritans objected to music evaporates when carefully examined."

Dr. Scholes subjects to a rigorous inquiry the ordinances of early New England dealing with dancing. Here also the picture he unfolds, based on first hand material, is far less grim than the one universally accepted as true. Life in the colony was not joyless, wholly ruled over by narrow-minded and jaundiced bigots. "Dancing, yea though mixt" went on merrily. Before Increase Mather's death, his son, Cotton Mather, was taking dancing schools for granted in the education of well-bred children. Dr. Scholes adduces even one example of a "dancing minister"—Timothy Edwards, father of Jonathan—at whose ordination "a dance was held at his house!"

The only real concern of the Puritans seems to have been that music and dancing should not detract from the observance of church duties or lead into immoral conduct. In this respect they did not differ from other religious sects, past or present, which aimed, or aim, to combat the natural inclination of mankind toward laxity of morals and abuse of pleasures. Dr.

Scholes exclaims: "The more I study the Puritans the more I am at a loss to find their Puritanism!"

That Dr. Scholes took up the study of Puritans at all, was owing to some references to their reputed peculiarities that he read in a recent book by an American writer. These references were in line with a common belief, held by the majority of authors dealing with the period and the subject. A notable exception was that great American scholar and sagacious musicologist, Oscar G. Sonneck, who in his "Early Concert Life in America" (1907) had expressed the hope that the time would come when "some historian" would "unearth and collect the data pertaining to our musical life before 1700" and would expose as fallacious and ridiculous the accredited opinion that Providence had been prompted "to send to our shores, out of all the millions who inhabited Europe, just those few thousand beings who had no music in their soul." This historian's advent we can now hail, and we applaud the thoroughness, the brilliance with which he has blasted that old fallacy. It was eminently gracious, and proper, that Dr. Scholes should have prefixed to his book a dedication to the memory of Mr. Sonneck's. And the father of American musicology would have been the first to acclaim the English colleague to whom we owe the definite and complete clarification of a badly gnarled and knotted question in our own musical past.

## Life in Old Russia

**THE RUSSIAN JOURNALS OF MARTHA AND CATHERINE WILMOT.** Edited by the Marchioness of Londonderry and H. M. Hyde. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1934. \$9.50.

PRINCESS DASHKOV was an enterprising and interesting lady of Catherine the Great's time. She helped in the coup d'état which made Catherine Empress, was president of the Russian Academy, a friend of Voltaire and Diderot, and wrote several plays. She met the Misses Catherine and Martha Wilmot, ladies of an Anglo-Irish family, at one of the European watering-places, and invited them to visit her in Russia. They undertook the journey from Ireland to Russia during the Napoleonic Wars, spent several years there, and thanks to their distinguished connections, met and saw pretty much everybody and everything from the Court and Kremlin down.

Their diaries and letters home, previously in the possession of the historian, W. E. H. Lecky, and after his death, deposited in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, are now published for the first time. They are leisurely but lively impressions of an age in which people took time and care in such writing and they give an intimate picture of polite life in the Russia of 1803-1808 as seen by two vivacious young Westerners who were charmed with much they came across and yet always conscious of an Asiatic strangeness—and savagery—underneath the Frenchified surfaces of the upper-class Russia of that day.

## Aristocratic Century

**THE AGE OF REASON.** By R. B. Mowat. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1934. \$2.50.

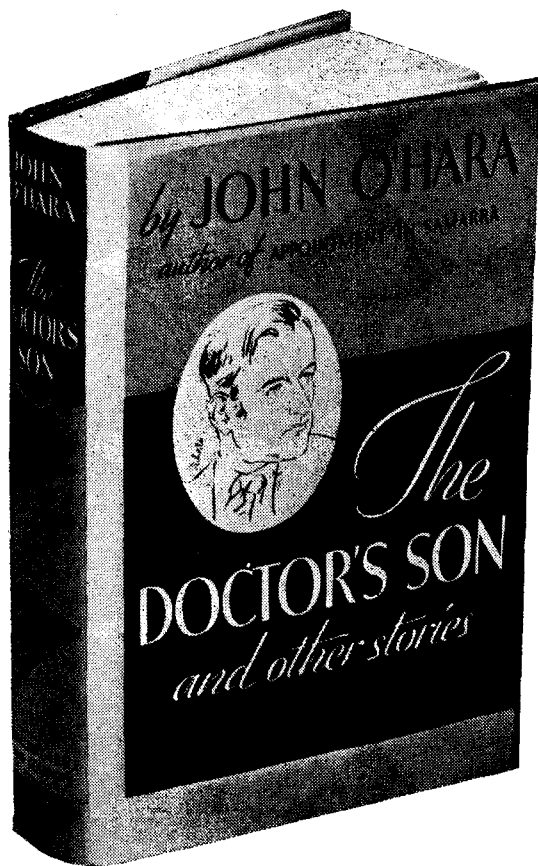
Reviewed by DAVID OWEN

PROFESSOR MOWAT'S thesis can be briefly stated. In the Continental eighteenth century he discovers a historical period ready for rehabilitation, an age that has suffered at the hands both of moralists and historians. Exemplifying some of the most admirable of qualities—tolerance and cosmopolitanism, to mention two of them—the men of the eighteenth century were well on their way to solving the problems of society. Their slow but steady advance was abruptly cut off by the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, which afflicted Europe with a hypertrophied nationalism and induced, at least in England, a premature industrial development. The age was neither decadent nor stagnant. Rather was it a summation of pre-industrial culture, a fruitful equilibrium between town and country, classicism and romanticism, philosophical utopias and "spotted actuality."

That the century produced a fine blossoming of aristocratic culture cannot be doubted. It was a cosy, cultivated, aristocratic society, which believed in Progress and sensibly left the business of war to professionals. Nor was the old Régime itself, if one can believe recent studies, as rotten a political fabric as republican historiography would have us think.

What bothers me is not that Professor Mowat has painted a glowing picture of the century for which he has such genuine affection, but that his composition is so lacking in draughtsmanship. To put it bluntly, he has avoided most of the difficult subjects which are essential to a fair estimate of the century. There are accounts of the enlightened despots, sketches of those picturesque scoundrels Casanova and Cagliostro, and entertaining chapters on the salons, the opera, and the academies. The treatment of the benevolent despots, of Frederick the Great especially, is disappointing. Professor Mowat's conclusion that "Frederick was a bad man, absolutely without moral scruple" is reminiscent of the wayward authors of "1066 and All That" who found that monarchs fell easily into two classes, Good Kings and Bad Kings. A just emphasis is given to the cosmopolitanism of the century, when to be an intelligent member of the upper classes was to be a citizen of the cultivated society of Western Europe.

But a survey of such subjects, even though we add to them chapters on prisons, the peace movement, and religion, does not lead to such conclusions as the author draws. Nowhere, for example, is there an attempt to gauge the condition of the peasants or to test the validity of state economic policies. If any class was proving itself a dynamic force, it was the bourgeoisie. Yet, of expanding commerce and the interests of the men who were guiding it one gets only the feeblest inkling. "The Age of Reason," as an analysis of a period, cannot be compared with such a study as G. N. Clerk's "Seventeenth Century."



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## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE THIRD OMNIBUS OF CRIME Editor: Dorothy L. Sayers (Coward-McCann: \$2.50.)	52 contemporary short stories, 21 of detection and 31 of horror. Selected and prefaced by the Queen of Goose-flesh.	Superb collection. No shopworn antiques, new vivid stuff. Perfect editor. Sure destroyer of sleep.	Nightmares
MURDER CUM LAUDE Joel Y. Dane (Smith & Haas: \$2.)	Trio of super-grisly campus killings lead Sgt. Hartly to death's door before he gets his man.	It's a darn good yarn that keeps the Honorable Court up until 1.55 a.m. to finish it.	Summa cum laude
THE ELEVENTH HOUR J. S. Fletcher (Knopf: \$2.)	Cathedral verger slain, ancient jewels vanish, various clerics held suspect while Camberwell and Chaney snoop.	Absorbing story moves steadily against lovely cloistered background with logical sleuthing and end that lives up to title.	Excellent
THE PAPER CHASE MYSTERY A. Fielding (Kinsey: \$2.)	Counterfeiters, stopping at nothing, murder 3 in Switzerland and London and Inspector Painter just saves No. 4.	Action runs quickly enough with required measure of thrills, but casual nature of whole thing is disappointing.	Only fair
THE BRAIN TRUST MURDER "Diplomat" (Coward McCann: \$2.)	Big Brain Truster loses head (literally) at Washington party, but Dennis Tyler keeps his and country is saved.	Gore-bespattered mixture of voodoo, intrigue, gossip, and trick sleuthing which doesn't quite convince.	Shocker



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# Of Time and the River



Photograph by Ossip Garber

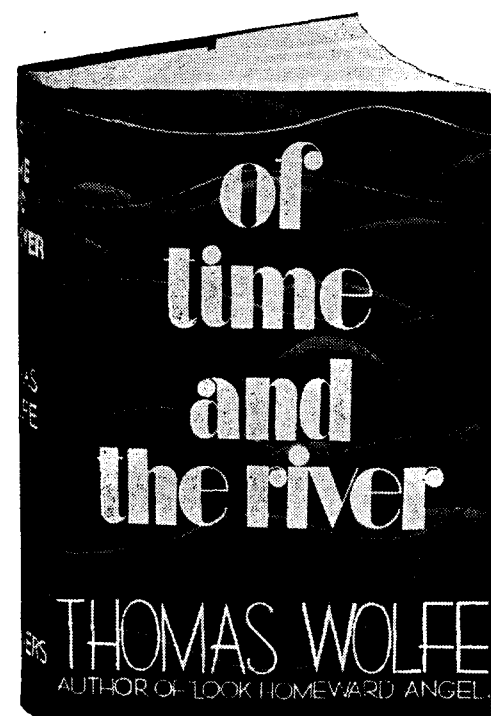
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