

The Real Mozart

THE LETTERS OF MOZART AND HIS FAMILY. Edited by Emily Anderson. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1938. 3 vols. \$6 each.

Reviewed by MARCIA DAVENPORT

LABOR on the life, works, letters, and memorabilia of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is always a labor of love. Mozart makes it so. He is no sacred, forbidding ghost to be fearsomely approached and summoned with bated breath from the shadows. He is today as he was a century and a half ago—a fascinating, brilliant, emotional, sensitive, fragile human being, vibrating with a consuming charge of genius; gay, mischievous, also noble and tragic; and richly rewarding of any devotion his fellow-man chooses to show. Mozart was—is—the sort of natural man, without bombast or apology, who commands the intense personal affection of all who know him well. I wrote once of him that “he exists for anyone to know, in his voluminous letters and his still more voluminous works.” This is today far truer for English readers than it could ever have been before, because of the extraordinary ten years’ labor of love of a reticent Englishwoman named Emily Anderson. She has finally published in three volumes “The Letters of Mozart and his Family,” which she has chronologically arranged, translated, edited, and supplied with an introduction, notes, and indices. It is entirely safe to say that no more important work in Mozartiana has been done in twenty-five years, since Ludwig Schiedermair brought out in 1914 the (at that time) first complete German edition of the Mozart letters.

Miss Anderson’s work is so exhaustive that each part of it requires special and separate commendation. Most important, the translation itself is masterly. Not only are Mozart’s letters appearing here for the first time anywhere in absolutely unpurgated, uncut, and uncompromising form, but they are set over into delightful English with a vivid and subtle grasp of Mozart’s personality and idiom. The translation is fearlessly literal, even to the reproduction of the filth, mostly in four-letter words, with which Mozart as a youth filled his letters, not only to his little fat girl cousin in Augsburg, but quite casually to his parents and his sister as well. No more severe dispellent will ever be found for the few scattered remains of the popular sentimental nineteenth-century legends. But, in these early communications, it is not only Mozart who emerges into startling contemporary reality, but his father as well, for this edition includes all the letters of the entire Mozart family during the span of Wolfgang Mozart’s lifetime, and concludes

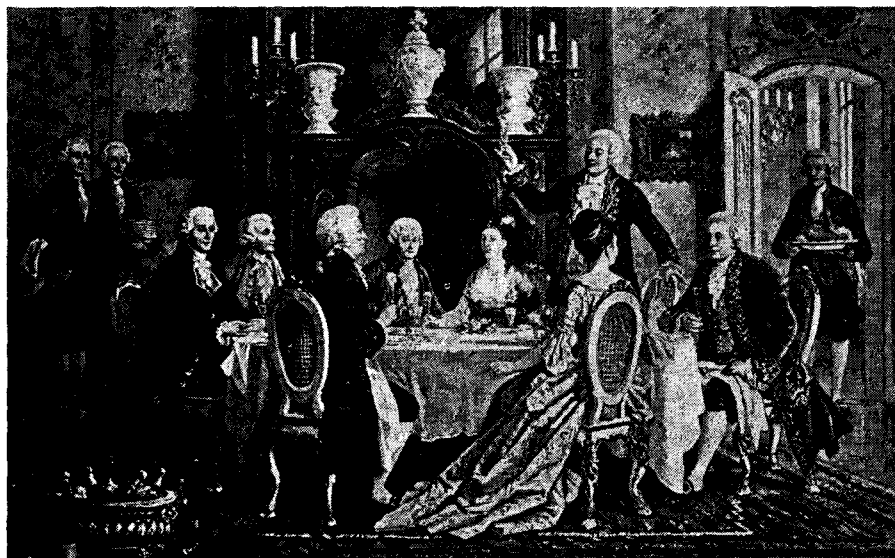
with an appendix composed of the letters that Mozart’s widow, Constanze, wrote to J. A. André of Offenbach, who bought up all the manuscripts that Mozart possessed at his death. These letters appear here for the first time anywhere, in translation by Mr. C. B. Oldman, the distinguished British musicologist and Mozartian, and are interesting not only as proof of the change in Constanze after Mozart’s death, but because of the light they throw on certain compositions of disputed authenticity, such as the “Wiegenlied” and the E flat Violin Concerto.

But it is Miss Anderson’s phenomenally painstaking, detailed, and documented work before which the whole world of musicology must pause and give thanks. No matter of punctuation, emphasis, or innuendo—in which Mozart abounded—has been too unimportant to receive her careful attention. She succeeds in making a translation that is not only literal in word, but in sense, and imbues it with a contemporary feeling for colloquialism that intensifies the impact of Mozart’s own slangy and jocular language. She points out the comparatively crude education of Mozart’s mother, and the sketchiness of his own education other than in music, which is reflected in casual disregard of grammar and other niceties of written speech.

As for the editing—that is so valuable as to become, together with the letters and the use of Dr. Alfred Einstein’s edition of the Köchel catalogue—as good a guide to knowledge of Mozart as any of the biographies. In the future, Miss Anderson’s work will take its place at the very top of the Mozart bibliography, indispensable to all concerned with the subject. Each place and person mentioned in the text of the letter is identified in a brief footnote, and tied into the chronology through the index.

Because of the editor’s careful chronological arrangement of the family letters, where each communication is followed—allowing for the passage of the ten days that the post required between, say, Salzburg and Paris—by its answer; and because of the astonishingly full detail in which the Mozarts customarily wrote; and because of the vividness of their speech and the frankness of their opinions; and because of the importance to them of traveling, with the great matters of their lives consequently recorded in the most intimate form, a thorough reading of these letters leaves one wondering why anyone undertakes further “interpretive” biographies of Mozart. Certainly the new material contained in the Anderson publication necessitates the revision, in many places, of all the existing biographies. Miss Anderson has consulted so many authorities, so extensively, that there can be small occasion for any further dispute over such questions as the famous letter of 1791 which Mozart was thought to have written to Lorenzo DaPonte, in which he predicted his death. This now seems to be apocryphal, and as such is omitted by Miss Anderson. On the other hand she has discovered in a fine-combing of the public libraries and private collections of Mozartiana wherever they exist, many hitherto unpublished and sometimes unknown letters which throw new light on matters previously considered conclusive.

It is only natural to inquire into the ardent student and able writer who is responsible for this magnificent work. Miss Emily Anderson has been a name unknown in British musical and literary circles. Persistent questioning brings out only that she began this work ten years ago, having studied at Berlin and Marburg Universities, and taken her Ph.D. at the latter. Her only previous published work was a translation, in 1923, of Benedetto Croce’s work on Goethe. She is extremely retiring and categorically refuses any information the circulation of which might lead to her being lionized as she



Dinner in honor of Mozart: from a painting by Borckmann

deserves to be. Currently she is engaged in a work of research for the British Foreign Office, and she holds a lectureship at the University of Galway, Ireland. And she is an amateur pianist.

It must be a satisfaction to her, not only to have brought this invaluable, timeless work on Mozart to successful completion, but to realize what a contribution she has made to all study of the subject. This is one of those rare definitive works which makes obsolete all that preceded it in its field—such as the rather quaint English translation of the letters by Lady Wallace, and the excellent one by M. M. Bozman which, however, is very incomplete. Miss Anderson's prefatory list of the librarians, curators, musicologists, and other authorities whom she has consulted in her work shows that, a passionate scholar and indefatigable student, she left no cranny of possibility uninvestigated. And such is the pace, the polish, and the charm of her writing that it is worthy even of Mozart.

Marcia Davenport is the author of one of the best lives of Mozart in English.

The Other Americas

LATIN AMERICA: A brief history. By F. A. Kirkpatrick. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1939. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ERNEST GRUENING

THE political and social history or the contemporary depiction of the twenty Latin-American nations tends to treatment as a unit. Despite the divergences between them based on physiographic, climatic, aboriginal—and later immigrant—ethnic differences, their common denominator remains so large that Latin America (the only justifiable, all-inclusive appellation for the independent political states between the Rio Grande and Cape Horn, and from the Caribbean republics to the Galapagos Islands) inevitably continues to be regarded as a cultural, political, and economic conglomerate. In the effort to produce a one-volume condensation, the

vastness of the terrain to be included, the length of the era under consideration—four centuries—and the variants above noted, are compensated for by a common pattern. This uniformly displays: discovery in the last years of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; penetration and conquest in the sixteenth; colonial rule for three centuries comparatively unvaried in its basically exploitative character; revolt and liberation in the early nineteenth century (except in the case of Cuba); a century of political independence from the old world under dictatorships and republican forms of government, an era which contributed something to literature, and in Mexico, to painting, but nothing to science, natural or political, excepting a few doctrines in the field of international law—an era, in short, of ephemeral political figurines whose tale is quickly told.

These one-volume epitomes in English have been well done by Williams, by Robertson, by Rippy, and their use as text-books keeps them up to date by revisions. Another text of the same nature should therefore offer unusual qualities to justify its appearance. Mr. Kirkpatrick's "Latin America" passes this test handsomely. The author skips the pre-conquest period, an omission justifiable in such a compendium and less important in a historiography which is political rather than cultural in its emphasis. The arrangement of his material is excellent, its presentation incisive and readable, his judgments objective and fair. It is evident that the writer has a thorough mastery of a vast amount of material, is conversant with the controversial nature of the issues that have arisen in the last half-century—as in Mexico, and especially in connection with the Monroe Doctrine and related inter-American problems. One may disagree with his view that the United States's occupation of Haiti and Santo Domingo was "work done for the world," and regret the omission of material revealing the economic bases for the interlude of rampant U. S. imperialism from the eighteen nineties to its abandonment with the enunciation of the "Good Neighbor policy." A few sentences would have sufficed—and indeed, throughout, Mr. Kirkpatrick reveals the art, so necessary under the limitations imposed by space, of revealing a great deal with a few words. However, in the retrospect from the year 1939, these temporary trends naturally seem far less important than they did a decade ago. In sum, we have, from a British source, a craftsmanlike, scholarly, and judicial contribution to the existing literature on the other Americas.

Ernest Gruening was adviser to the United States Delegation at the Seventh Inter-American Conference in Montevideo, 1933.

Fantastic Dramas

THESE ARE REAL PEOPLE. By Rosita Forbes. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

YOU scarcely need the assurance that these are real people, so clearly and credibly are they shown, despite their trappings of fiction. Nor need you doubt that the scenes are actual, for Miss Forbes is one of the most accurate, and incidentally most entertaining, of explorers. In this volume she has collected ten adventures, ostensibly true, from her seventeen years of travel. All are of remarkable people, the women mysterious and forceful, with "closed faces," the men "with a genius for destruction," usually, who lived for an intense moment or a lifetime in Sumatra, New Guinea, Morocco, and other strange parts, where Miss Forbes attended the fantastic dramas she describes.

There was the Man Who Made Fear at the edge of the Red Sea, and was finally worsted by his polyp of a wife. There were the Zebra Men of Devil's Island. There was the haunted planter of New Guinea, and the baby who drank wine and ate with a murderous knife. The book is built of violence, of corrosive fears, of evil, indomitable ambitions, of witchcraft in which Miss Forbes quite evidently, and with fair reason, believes, as do many who have lived free of their own cultural bias in savage communities. Though explicitly she claims no credence of magic, she is unwilling to deny the grisly head which confronted her in Samoa, nor the frequent and tangible substance of terror which she could not rationally explain.



Rosita Forbes inspects a tree house: from "These Are Real People."

These things happened (and this skeptical reviewer is frank to admit that he has been witness to them), so Miss Forbes has recorded them simply and with that fine sense of humor which pervades all her books and seems adequate to extricate her from any situation. To render them palatable, however, she has presented them in short story form, with the result that her book has both the virtues of fiction and of pure travel writing, with the disadvantages one might expect from a combination of the two. Were her stories better constructed and not inclined to anticlimax, and if the joint of discernible fiction and fact were not quite so obvious, they would gain both in credibility and force. They are in any case good reading, and several of her least likely assassins may be counted upon for a long while to enliven your most lonely nights.