

‘LORD, WHAT WOULD THEY SAY . . . ?’

*VISIONS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ALBION*, by William Blake. Full-colour facsimile (Dent, 15/-).

The police, it is said, when Lawrence's paintings were being seized, asked also for a warrant against one William Blake, a fellow-exhibitor and -offender. And, though Blake died a hundred years ago, it does strike one with fresh surprise, every time one opens his works, that he should be prescribed by dons for undergraduate study. For he is as lethal as Lawrence to the smoke-room story—a terrifying cleanser; and to be so is, where Restoration Comedy is applauded on the modern stage by conservative moralists of both sexes, the unforgivable immorality. Nothing could bring home more strongly that the accepted classics, though perused, are rarely read. Decorous scholars, maiden ladies and Garden Suburb uplifters pore over the Prophetic Books to piece together the meaning—

Lord, what would they say  
Should their Catullus walk that way?

Their approach, of course, preserves Blake's meaning from ever being surprised by them. And we may be sure that, if academic studies survive fifty years hence, Lawrence will suffer the same mummifying consecration. The meaning of the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, the most lucid of the prophecies, is plain enough—too explicit, in places, for quotation; this negative formulation, from *A Song of Liberty*, comes as close as will serve: ‘Let the Priests of the Raven of Dawn no longer, in deadly black, with hoarse note curse the sons of joy. . . Nor pale religious lechery call that virginity that wishes but acts not!’ Yet even in the *Visions*, where there is so much poetry, one sees what Lawrence meant by saying: ‘Blake, too, was one of those ghastly, obscene *knowers*.’ Blake's inadequate art (‘bad art’) betrays him to Urizen, who has a predominant hand in the prophecies. That is, the analysis gets lost among abstractions, and Blake, ultimately, among words. The grip and coherence of Lawrence's most ‘prophetic’ work comes out in the contrast: even *Women in Love* no longer looks like mere disaster. The

novel, one realizes, offered Lawrence far more appropriate methods for this kind of exploration than any Blake could hit on. But if Lawrence in this respect was favoured by the age one must not inadvertently appear to slight his superior genius: Lawrence was much the greater of the two.

Messrs. Dent, in these facsimile reproductions, are doing a great service. The colours, so far as one can judge without seeing the originals for comparison, are good. The enterprise deserves support.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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*MUSIC IN LONDON 1890-94, by Bernard Shaw (Constable, 3 Vols. 6/- each).*

The future musical historian will be grateful to Mr. Shaw for leaving him such a complete and entertaining picture of a very important period in the history of English taste, and for once the reader of the present can agree with the historian in finding these volumes useful and interesting. For the first impression of a musician in reading these reviews of forty years ago can scarcely fail to be one of satisfaction. Dissatisfaction with present conditions will give place for a time to gratitude for what has been accomplished since that day. Music has won a position in the cultural life of the critical few that it did not enjoy in the nineteenth century.

The England of Shaw's reviews was still very much under the domination of heavy and pretentious German masters. The Latin genius had not yet managed to throw off the stiff rhythm of the classical harmonists, and the English cared too little for music to try to think for themselves. They went on pretending to be edified by lifeless imitations of Mendelssohn and Gounod, and Wagner was still something of a revolutionist to most of them, though he had been dead twenty years.

A change, however, was beginning, and Shaw was admirably fitted to help in forming a more intelligent public. To natural good taste in music he added a critical understanding and appreciation