

Lord David Cecil's conclusions, as I have said, do not, as a whole, call for much discussion, except for his exaggerated opinion of Thackeray, and the essay on George Eliot which shows that his standards of criticism have been to some extent the usual misleading ones of 'character' and 'pleasure.' George Eliot receives full recognition for her intellectual superiority, but Lord David Cecil, though realizing it to be her chief asset, seems to be repelled by it and finds her inferior to Dickens in 'creative imagination.' 'Lydgate is far more like a real man than Mr. Micawber, we know much more about him . . . But he is not so alive . . . [Her characters] never seem, as the greatest figures in fiction do, to have got free from their creators, and to be acting and speaking of their own volition.' The suspicion that this means only that Dickens is easier to read is confirmed on the last page where the comparison is with Mrs. Gaskell—'*Middlemarch* may never give us the same feeling of unalloyed pleasure as *Wives and Daughters* does, but it rouses far deeper emotions, sets the mind far more seriously astir.' The criterion of pleasure implied here is bound to be misleading in serious criticism.

FRANK CHAPMAN.

THE CRITICISM OF BALLET

BALLETOMANIA, by Arnold L. Haskell (Gollancz, 18/-).

There is much to be said for regarding ballet, at the present time, as an art form of considerable importance. With the failure of the symbolist and expressionist movements, ballet remains the only popular alternative to the current drama of social realism. And interest in the modern ballet is, as most recent writings on the subject show, stimulated or at least supported by the frustrations imposed by the ordinary theatre. But apart from this accidental significance it seems to-day more obvious than ever before that the ballet possesses an intrinsic importance; through the medium of classical dancing it can offer satisfactions which, however they are to be explained, are unique.

As far as the theatre is concerned, the situation has not changed much between the return of the Diaghilev ballet after the war and the arrival of the new Russian ballet in 1932. T. S. Eliot's comment in *The Dial* in 1921 is as relevant now as when it was written: 'Two years ago M. Diaghilev's ballet arrived . . . we greeted the Good-humoured Ladies, and the Boutique Fantasque, and the Three-cornered Hat, as the dawn of an art of the theatre . . . The ballet will probably be one of the influences forming a new drama, if a new drama ever comes. I mean, of course, the later ballet which has just been mentioned; for the earlier ballet, if it had greater dancers—Nijinsky or Pavlova—had far less significance or substantiality. The later ballet is more sophisticated, but also more simplified, and simplifies more; and what is needed of art is simplification of current life into something rich and strange.'

When, three years later, Eliot again contrasted the ballet with the realistic theatrical tradition, there was a slight shift of stress: what seemed important now was not the modern ballets but the impersonality of the ballet dancer. Whereas the actor's 'stage personality has to be supplied from and confounded with his real personality,' we observe in the ballet 'that the man or the woman whom we admire is a being who exists only during the performances, that it is a personality, a vital flame which appears from nowhere, disappears into nothing and is complete and sufficient in its appearance' (*Four Elizabethan Dramatists*). This may not appear very explicit but it is a formulation that one comes back to again and again as a statement of the meaning and importance of the classical tradition of dancing. A similar progress from an interest in the ballet's handling of current life to an appreciation of the essential qualities of classical dancing is recorded by Adrian Stokes¹ and is probably fairly general.

Mr. Haskell's book is very largely concerned with the personalities of dancers off the stage. At first glance it consists almost entirely of reported gossip, but apart from the trivia of the dancers' daily lives there are records of interesting conversations with the most distinguished of living choreographers—Fokine, Massine, and Balanchine—on their methods. First-hand information of this kind

¹*To-Night the Ballet* (Faber, 3/6).

and the many facts assembled, however scrappily, on the development of the modern ballet, make the book useful as a historical source, a usefulness which is greatly increased by the sixty-three excellent photographs.

Mr. Haskell's larger claim to have constructed at least a personal framework for the criticism of ballet is hardly supported. He does, however, write as a technically trained spectator able to assess the skill, and observe the peculiarities of skill, of every dancer. Moreover, he appreciates the personality of the dancers, not only as people, but as dancers, though without ever responding as sensitively as Adrian Stokes—in his book and even more in his periodical criticism—to individual qualities or style. It is significant that neither writer has attempted to say anything whatever on the temperament or style expressed in the dancing of such artists as Massine and Woizikowski. 'The mature Massine is the biggest personality I have seen in ballet' says Mr. Haskell, and leaves it at that, although he has so much specific comment to offer on the lesser dancers. One is forced to suppose that this inarticulateness in our two most expert critics of ballet is further evidence of the impersonality of the greatest dancers. (Similarly, no one who saw or knew Nijinsky has been able to say anything about his personality, either as a man or a mimetic dancer, and the 'personality' is completely absent in the biography by his wife). Of this impersonality Mr. Haskell has no conception, and nothing has been added by anyone to T. S. Eliot's suggestion in 1924.

The undeveloped state of the criticism of ballet is particularly unfortunate at a time when the ballet is not only exceptionally vigorous and has a wider appeal than ever but is also going through a momentous development (out of, but not outside, the classical tradition), a time then when the art of ballet needs the support and collaboration of intelligent critical response even more than the public enthusiasm which both Haskell and Stokes are so anxious to raise to a still higher pitch. The new 'symphonic' ballets, as far removed from the sophisticated post-war ballets as they are from the early national romantic ballet of Russia, clearly stand in need of more relevant and precise criticism than they have yet received. How far these are important as works of art in themselves remains to be judged, however one may agree on their importance as choreography: the old distinction between mime and

dance having been abandoned, the alternation of principal dances and ensembles is giving way to co-ordination, and a more complex and homogeneous composition achieved, starting from and preserving the essentials of the classical tradition, as well as extending its range of movements. The new choreography is more integrated, and integrates more. But the business of criticism is not only to register a perfection of medium, it should also concern itself with what the choreographer is trying to say. And the emotions and attitudes which the new ballet communicates with such very effective success remain to be analyzed and evaluated.

In the absence of a criticism seriously interested in the problems of the ballet as theatrical art, it is a good thing that classical dancing should be generally recognized as the great form it is. Incidentally, classical dancing at its best, and only at its best, seems capable of conveying feelings apparently independent of the specific feeling, if any, which a dancer is employed to express or indicate in a given situation. Even when the obvious sentiments are insignificant or cheap, the dancer's performance may have a detached and uncontaminated intensity which obliterates all the rest—a fact which isolates the classical dancer from any other performer. Ultimately, it is in the achievements of the great dancer that the classical tradition receives a meaning. And, as T. S. Eliot, again, has said, 'the difference between a great dancer and a merely competent dancer is in the vital flame, that impersonal, and, if you like, inhuman force which transpires between each of the great dancer's movements.' The quality of anonymous revelation—*la terrible célérité de la perfection des formes et de l'action*—visible in the great dancer 'thus devoted, concentrated in purpose' is only attainable through the ascetic training and narrow limits he submits to.

ERIK MESTERTON.

A PUBLIC FOR ART IN INDUSTRY

THE STUDY OF ART, by R. H. Wilenski (*Faber and Faber*, 7/6 net).

THE CONQUEST OF UGLINESS, edited by John de La Valette, with a foreword by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales (*Methuen*, 8/6 net).

ART AND INDUSTRY, by Herbert Read (*Faber and Faber*, 12/6 net).

PICTURE MAKING BY CHILDREN, by R. R. Tomlinson (*Studio*, 7/6 net).

THE TEACHING OF ART IN SCHOOLS, by Evelyn Gibbs (*Williams and Norgate*, 12/6 net).

In what seems an obsessively neat piece of pigeon-holing, Mr. Wilenski has sorted into their 'functional categories' all whom he calls 'students' of art, *i.e.*, not only style experts, aestheticians, historians, critics, etc., but also restorers, forgers, dealers, and owners. A large part of the book is concerned to define the legitimate activities of each specialist. For general purposes the vital distinction is between the historian and the critic; it is a distinction of particular importance in art, where the critic too often supports his criticism with a supposed historical conception which in fact turns out to be based on the historian's own bastard criticism.

Criticism, according to Mr. Wilenski, has very wide responsibilities: first, it must formulate clearly its conception of the nature and general value of art; second, it must study the artist psychologically; third, it must show in what sense the picture represents the artist; and fourth, it must assess the value of the work of art to a particular spectator. The proviso 'to a particular spectator' is necessary since Mr. Wilenski insists on the relativity of critical judgments, denying the existence of 'universally applicable objective standards of "goodness" and "badness" in art.'

And although he goes into minute detail about each of the functions which comprise the study of art, including art criticism,