

## REVIEWS

### THE ROCK

ONE feels it *is* necessary to tread delicately in dealing with this pageant play written by I'.S. Eliot in furtherance of the Anglican Church Building scheme for Greater London, for which each scene was sponsored by a London Anglican parish. To a Catholic there cannot but be something exasperating in the assumption that the long line of Church builders, St. Melitus of London, Rahere, Sir Richard Whittington, leads up to those of the Church of England as by law established—even though the main issues of the Reformation are deftly avoided, and the gap filled by a scene in which monks and nuns (presumably mixed Catholic and Anglican) sing the Good Friday Reproaches, while the churches are despoiled by the minions of Edward VI. It is notable, too, that in the book of the play, the Rock reveals itself as St. Peter, in a scene in which he tells a fisherman of the mysterious consecration of Westminster Abbey by his own hands. This scene, for all its beauty, was cut; did it point too clearly Romewards?

But it would be ungenerous to deny praise to *so* earnest an endeavour to bring spiritual realities practically before the multitude, to answer the question, so prevalent in the new paganism, 'why build churches, anyway?' The production has much that is beautiful, much that is of interest.

'A pageant's rather like a pantomime,  
M'here anything may conic, at any time !'

announced Dick Whittington's cat, introducing a ballet. And 'anything' included not only ballet, mime, history, tragedy, comic relief, but a **live** Anglican Bishop, who, in full canonicals, **as** part of the final tableau, blessed the audience. And it says much for the spirit created by the performance that this conclusion seemed in no way out of keeping.

Among the various scenes two stand out in memory—the lively little set-to between Communists and Fascists, who end **by** both falling upon the Golden Calf of Power, while the Chorus laments :

'There is no help in parties, none in interests . . .  
Or the new winding sheets of mass-made thought . . .  
We speak to you as individual men ;  
**As** individuals alone with God.  
Alone with God, you first learn brotherhood with men.'

And another scene, a mime of singular beauty, showing the dedicated craftsmen at work upon the new church. Their hair and faces are whitened, so that they seem statues; they stand **as statues, and as** the music progresses, turn by turn they come to life **and** then are again still, so that movement passes visibly

## BLACKFRIARS

in a circling wave : the sculptors hammer at the chiselled crucifix, the fresco painter awakes to paint, the weavers of vestments sway rhythmically about their loom, the metal workers complete a chalice, and lastly the illuminator, sitting at a desk, lifts her brush . . . .

The choruses which divide the scenes are spoken by seven men and ten women, masked, in dull gold draperies. Here the poet had **plainly** a free hand, and it would be hard to over-estimate their craftsmanship and wise loveliness. Space forbids adequate quotation. One can only mention the opening chorus, with its penetrating question :

'Where is the Life we have lost in **living**?  
Where is the wisdom we **have** lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we **have** lost in information?'

Or the **final** chorus of praise to the Light, Invisible and Visible?

'The light that slants upon our western doors at evening,  
The twilight over stagnant pools at batflight,  
Moon light and **star** light, owl and moth light,  
Glow-worm glowlight on a grassblade.  
O Light Invisible, **we** worship Thee.'

**How** the light diminishes, in the very length of the lines, the sound of the vowels, till the last line **bursts** out in white radiance !

That one who is perhaps the greatest of our **living** poets should lend a docile pen to write, and, he admits, rewrite under the direction of the organizers **of** the scheme, is an example of literary humility so rare as to deserve **all** reverence.

H.B.C.

## GRAMOPHON

**LAST** month the world celebrated Richard Strauss' seventieth birthday. Incidentally he is a June musician not only by birth. H.M.V. have added to their list of Strauss recordings a new version of the tone poem *Till Eulenspiegel* (DB 2187-88, 6/- each), B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra under Fritz Busch; two brilliant records of music: that abounds in tantalizing snatches of the loveliest melodies, then **off** ! the mood changes, trick?; and solemnity, pattern **and** inconsequence; music that tells the story of a rascal who dresses himself in finery, rides full tilt through the market upsetting the booths, who masquerades as a priest and preaches a mock sermon, who falls in love and out again, who baits wise men and roams whistling through the **town**, until finally he **is** arrested nntl sentenced to be hanged as an incorrigible. With the same melodic and harmonic beaut!, vitality and colour, **and in** a similar strain of tragic-comedy comes