REVIEWS

THE HEART OF THE MATTER. By Graham Greene (Heinemann; 9s. 6d.)

A characteristic text of Péguy's—*Le pécheur est au coeur même de chrétienté*—introduces this study of conscience and the fact of sin. For beneath the technical accomplishment of Mr Graham Greene's novel—which makes the energetic efforts of most of his contemporaries seem like five-finger exercises—there flows a deep and overwhelmingly powerful current of moral debate. West Africa during the war is the setting, English colonial officials are the actors. The world is a familiar one for Mr Greene's readers: the seedy port, the club intrigues, the idiocies of men with a grievance, the intolerable heat, the flies, the smells, the corruption of place and person.

There seems a duality here, a stress which at a first glance seems unresolved between the strutting figures and the hidden springs of fear and love that inform their action. One can marvel at the skill of the thing, can be impelled by the tragedy of Major Scobie—the good man, for whom goodness (in his case it is compassion) leads him on to evil—and can yet miss a deeper skill, a further tragedy. Here perhaps is the ultimate judgment by which a writer must stand, and by which he so generally falls and fails. The overt processes of moral judgment can dispense with the infinite overtones of good and evil—the shadowed greyness of human action—which challenge the black and white of the good as simply rejected or embraced. For the artist the process must be very different. He has no privileges; but he has the task of seeing the moral judgment incarnate, of separating the strands of motive and habit and blindness and passion, of seeing—with Graham Greene's Father Rank—at last that 'the Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart. . . . Don't imagine you—or I—know a thing about God's mercy'.

It is a perilous business, but the greater the artist the more confident—because the more humble—is his search into the dark continent of human love and misery.

Major Scobie is good, loyal, just. His compassion makes him bleed within for his ageing, fretful wife. His compassion melts when a widowed girl is carried ashore after months in an open boat. He has sold himself for the terrible price of pity, and it leads him in the end to sacrilege and suicide. The bald summary gives no idea of the theme, nor does it hint at the fascination of its development. Not a word that does not matter, not a stray gesture that does not advance the discovery of what indeed is the 'heart of the matter', not a single character who does not serve to comment as a chorus on the unfolding of the tragedy.

It is possible to criticise the shift of emphasis at the end of the novel which seems—but only seems—to exalt a sinner's rebellion.

What is crucial to the book has happened long since, at the moment of Major Scobie's sacrilegious communion. Here is the heart of the matter: the supernatural reality which is proclaimed even in the sacrilege, one might say because of the sacrilege. The subsequent tragedy is in effect a commentary on that moment, and a theologian's scruples about Scobie's salvation (and Mr Greene's apparent hope of it) must give place to the larger question—the unassailable truth of the supernatural—which dominates the book.

It seems unnecessary to add that *The Heart of the Matter* is a very great novel. It is not the answer to a moralist's *casus conscientiae*; it is one man's tragedy realised against the enormous background of God's providence. There are categories to which such a book might be assigned. It has been chosen by all the Book Clubs. Its meaning will be debated, and not least by those who share its author's faith. But it is unlikely that in our time we shall see another novel of such power and pity and integrity.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

MAURICE TO TEMPLE (Scott Holland Lectures 1946). By Maurice B. Reckitt. (Faber; 16s.)

Mr Maurice Reckitt gives us in these lectures a very full and complete outline of the efforts made within the Anglican Church during the 19th century and after to apply the principles of Christianity to the sociological problems raised by the advance of the industrial revolution. Those efforts were begun by Frederick Denison Maurice, whose prophetic insight, akin in certain ways to that of Newman, early detected the fallacy of progress which deceived nearly all his religious contemporaries. His eminence as a biblical theologian, scarcely recognised during his lifetime, is only now beginning to be accepted in contemporary Anglican thought.

After Maurice there is a long line of social reformers reaching down the century to the present time, amongst whom the names of Kingsley, Hancock, Stewart Headlam, Westcott, Scott Holland, Gore and William Temple are prominent. Mr Reckitt paints in the background of 19th century 'progress' against which most of these men worked and gives us a description of the aims, often varying considerably in their extremeness, of the organisations and movements through which their work was done.

In the earlier part of the century the Oxford Movement, which was in essence a theological movement, reviving within the Church of England its dormant Catholic traditions, had no direct impact on social conditions. Newman, Keble and Pusey were greatly concerned for the poor but they thought in terms of charity, of the corporal works of mercy, of immediate relief of distress, rather than of organised effort to ameliorate social conditions; indeed it seems likely that they would have regarded the latter as altogether outside the province of the Church as such. As a result, the dogmatic teaching concerning the Incarnation and Redemption and their extension in the Church and the Sacramental system was not by