

chapel at Ravenstonedale, Westmorland under his father's ministry (1898-1909): 'In his Monday night Bible-class ... I received my first and best teaching about Luther and Calvin'. I doubt if Eastwood was all that intellectually impoverished. But I admit that some of them may have voted Labour.

And so it goes on. The old dry dissenters are goodies, the evangelicals and (particularly) the Unitarians are baddies. Unitarians, of course, tended to be on the left until Chamberlain left the Liberals: Professor Davie tells us that John Aikin 'though he pamphleteered in 1790 against Parliament's refusal to revoke the Test Act, was a more admirable and engaging person' than his fellow-Unitarians (p. 123) —all that was lacking to make him a joy to meet was acquiescence in the persecution of his own religion. Mrs. Humphrey Ward, whose *Robert Ellesmere* was taken very seriously by very serious people, is nowhere mentioned (nor, speaking of omissions, is the greatest account of late nineteenth-century dissent, Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns*). George Eliot's Anglican Evangelical phase is mentioned, but not her Unitarian contacts, without which she would probably never have translated Straus and begun her literary career. And although we are given a couple of approving references to Matthew Henry, there is

nothing of the much greater achievement in biblical scholarship of A. S. Peake, who at the end of Professor Davie's period 'rescued a generation of Non-Conformists from fundamentalism'—a cultural achievement surely not entirely without significance.

I would not want to end on an entirely sour note. When he writes about people he likes, Professor Davie is, as one might expect, usually worth reading; he is good on Watts, and even better on 'Mark Rutherford'. Purged of its grosseries and its Gosseries, this would make a useful introduction to an area of literary history which has been relatively neglected (although Professor Davie's claim that it is totally so is exaggerated: Nichol Smith's *Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, 1926, gave Watts fourteen pages, and the Wesleys six; this seems about fair, compared with eight for Shenstone and six for Parnell). It is certainly a better book than the 'more acrimonious' appeal to the dissenters of today with which he threatens us on the final page of his text promises to be. But then, if he thinks that the political climate of Nonconformity is so left-wing today that it needs such a call to arms, he may be in for a shock: I fear that in all too many cases he will be preaching to the converted (by which I mean, in my confusing Wesleyan way, the reprobate).

PETER GRANT

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS by Bernard Bergonzi (*Masters of World Literature Series*, edited by Louis Kronenberger) *Macmillan Press Ltd* 1977 pp. 202 £7.95

1877 was certainly something of an *annus mirabilis* for Hopkins, a year in which he was ordained as Catholic priest and in which he wrote some of his richest poetry. If he is to have a centenary, then last year was surely it, and Professor Bergonzi's critical biography was a welcome contribution to its celebration. The book is comprehensive yet very readable, though I found the print fussy and the style prone to inelegance and pedantry—particularly in a mass of literary comparisons, many of which are at best superfluous. Bergonzi is especially illuminating on Hopkins's extraordinary intellectual and artistic powers and wide-ranging interests in conflict with the dissipating forces of a complex and often self-destructive temp-

erament. The painful and costly paradoxes of Hopkin's life and character are well presented and documented: the star of Jowett's Balliol who chose the obscurity and discipline of the Society of Jesus; the sensuous, sacramental visionary who adopted a life of ascetic rigour; the religious poet who scrupulously sacrificed the temptations of art for a puritanical faith.

Yet there are tensions which were creative as well as destructive. If 1877 is a significant year for Hopkins it is because it exhibits him supremely as the poet-priest he was. His own discrimination between them was essentially a false and self-deluding one, and it is a major fault of Bergonzi's book that it accepts the distinction as real and objective. In Bergonzi's view of Hop-

kins, the priest is the man and the poet is something separate and discordant. To be fair, he admits that 'opposites unexpectedly come together: as man and poet Hopkins manifests an "either/or" which can become a "both/and".' (p. 179). But the truth, I would suggest, is rather the reverse: a "both/and" occasionally becomes an "either/or" of apparent opposites, but only in Hopkins' mind.

Professor Bergonzi's attitude here is reflected in the dichotomous structure of the book: the first five chapters are biographical and the final chapter presents a critical reappraisal of the poetry and poet; and where poetry enters into the biographical section it is discussed largely with a view to content, while the last chapter is concerned with formal criticism. The key to this sharp form-content distinction, and with it the book's persistent division of Hopkins into man and poet, is to be found perhaps in the final critical chapter, and particularly in Bergonzi's challenge to Leavis' assessment of Hopkins.

Bergonzi refers to the Leavis of *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) for whom there is a vital and successful relation between Hopkins' idiosyncratic poetic idiom and his intense and unique spiritual experience of a world "charged with the grandeur of God", the subject of

much of the poetry. In Leavis' opinion, "the technical triumph is a triumph of spirit." But the difficulty he justifies is, for Bergonzi, an offence. Hopkins' technical originality is, in his opinion (as, interestingly, it was in Bridges'), often too opposed to the inevitably restrictive nature of the English language to allow proper communication, and so form and content disintegrate. Besides, for Bergonzi, Hopkins is also "a poetic formalist" (p. 176) concerned with "autonomous pattern-making" (p. 173) as well as with expressing a vision of the natural world. His is "a Mallarmean Hopkins." (p. 177).

With characteristic dogmatism Leavis declared Hopkins to be the only influential and the greatest poet of the Victorian age. Bergonzi's judgement is more cautious; he adapts Ben Jonson's remark about Donne:

"The greatest poet . . .
for some things" (p. 192)

But if he is correct in this qualification, it is not because of Hopkins' failure to integrate vision and articulation, nor indeed to integrate priest and poet, both of whom together compose the man who created such beautiful and profoundly original poetry, revealing and dedicated "To Christ our Lord."

JOHN WITHERIDGE

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