

proportion as profits had previously been reduced by such dead-weight burdens; *the smaller the rate of profit, the lower would be the standard of interest* (italics ours). But surely a lender would be entitled to base his rate of interest on the profits to be made by industry using its *own* rather than *borrowed* capital.

A. L'ESTRANGE, O.P.

A WOMAN OF THE PHARISEES. By François Mauriac, translated by Gerard Hopkins. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 9s.)

ANNA COLLETT. By Barbara Lucas. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 9s.)

*La Pharisiennne*, the most recently published of M. Mauriac's novels, is the first title in a new collected edition of his novels in English. It is the story of Brigitte Pian; a hard woman, pious, scrupulous, but 'her neighbours always had to pay for her scruples, it was always at somebody else's expense that she displayed her spiritual delicacy and the rigours of her conscience'. As with all of M. Mauriac's work, *A Woman of the Pharisees* is an extended *casus conscientiae*: its theme is the evil of 'interference', that itching righteousness which is wiser than God himself and has none of his divine patience.

So it is that lives are ruined with the highest of motives, for Madame Pian, with a suggestion here, a delicate touch there, destroys the love of her step-daughter for the 'incorrigible' Mirbel and by her attitude hardens his waywardness into evil; the Abbé Calou is brought to disgrace; the schoolmaster and his wife, her protégés, come to disaster. The portrait is a ruthless one, and is wholly authentic, for M. Mauriac has a genius for unravelling those hidden threads of motive which, far more than spectacular deeds, can corrupt the mind and are the stuff of tragedy.

The setting of the novel is the countryside in France before the 1914 war, and gives a curious timelessness to the story. The powerful moral issue stands out as universal, and this despite a serious defect in the construction of the book. *A Woman of the Pharisees* might well do without the clumsy convention of undisclosed letters and documents which are constantly invoked to give authority to an analysis of human motives which is never in need of such devices. This *deus ex machina* creates an exasperating duality in a story already encumbered in its narration in the person of Madame Pian's step-son, himself scarcely affected by the tragedy.

But the book remains a masterly commentary on the mystery of evil, and one can think of no other novelist with Mauriac's range, penetrating as it does into the very depths of a man's conscious stirrings towards—or more often away from—God. The translation is generally excellent, but would be improved by a greater familiarity with the detailed vocabulary of Catholic devotion. Thus the Abbé Calou 'went off to the church to make his devotions', where the meaning is: 'said his prayers'. Again, while recognising the difficulty

of rendering the paper-lace aspirations of nineteenth century French prayers into English, one might hope for a subtler version than, for instance, 'Notice, I beg, O Lord, that I do not kick against the pricks, and enter my acquiescence, please, on the credit side of the account'. The matter is not so trivial as it may seem, for Mauriac's terrifyingly accurate perception of the overtones of religious devotion is an essential part of his novelist's gift to make every detail have its power, its providential meaning.

*Anna Collett* can bear comparison with Mauriac's work, because it recognises the same problems, subordinates the pattern of human iniquity to the same ultimate design. Here indeed the issue is simpler: Anna's love for the Italian prisoner has all the anguish, the hopelessness of all conflicts between duty and desire. But Miss Lucas has deliberately sacrificed some of the implications of her theme to the single necessity of the passion that over-rides all else—husband, child, happiness, and at last life itself. For there can be no easy way out. The Faith remains, a rock to be built on, or a rock to be broken against, as it seems. Miss Lucas, with a resolute skill that marks a great advance on her earlier novels, keeps her central characters poised above that rock, until the final choice; 'To have the faith is one thing and a good thing. To live up to it is quite a different thing', says Anna. 'Mario smiled. "Yes, that has occurred to me, too"', he assured her'.

The detail of *Anna Collett*—the raffish friendliness of war-time pubs, the stray encounters hitch-hiking on the Oxford road, the Italian prisoners in the fields, the people with jobs in the Ministries—all this is brilliantly done, and sets off in all its intolerable isolation the fatal love that cannot be. With *Anna Collett* Miss Lucas has achieved a great novel.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

PLEA FOR LIBERTY. By Georges Bernanos. (Dennis Dobson; 8s. 6d.)

Of these six open letters, written from Brazil in December, 1940, and the following year, one is addressed to Americans, one to Europeans, and the remainder to the English.

They contain a vindication of the French people, as opposed to the 'élite bourgeois' who betrayed them; an indictment of the democracies for greed and cynicism, and of the Catholic bishops who have clung to an unjust social order; and a warning that history can only repeat the collapse of the League and the shame exposed at Munich, unless the rights of man replace the rights of Mammon.

'The real scandal is not the war; it is the anarchy of Christian consciences which the war suddenly laid bare.'

Mr Bernanos has no doubt of the coming triumph of the Church, or of the sacrifices that it will require from Catholics. He sees her present seeming impotence, not as a spiritual ebb but rather as a turn of the tide, a marshalling of resources for zero hour.