

do not know him, the controversies that his name arouses, range into every sort of irrelevancy. How *could* people know him? To the public at large he is a free-thinker with a happy knack of clever aphorisms. Not such a bad sort, really, for after all he believed in God: did he not say that, "If God did not exist he would have to be invented"? To the student of French literature he is a copious, elegant, versatile, sometimes boring, but again highly amusing writer, a master in secondary styles or a secondary writer if compared with the greatest. But a great part of his work, and the man himself so abundantly revealed in the Correspondence remain unknown. Indeed, who but a specialist could read, or even delve deeply into, the fifty volumes of the *édition définitive* of which a considerable part is only indirectly literary? Even the student is at the mercy of broadcasts, selections, generalisations.

The value of Dr. O'Flaherty's book is that it has a well-defined scope and an accurate purpose. It does not aim at doing what all general accounts of Voltaire must do, but at providing irrefragable evidence about the man and his ideas. It gives a copious selection of first-hand quotations from writings not usually read: writings in which Voltaire reveals his essential preoccupations. They enable us to begin to answer the questions *how, why, by whom*, just formulated.

The "myth"—indeed it has all the vagueness of a myth—of Voltaire as an enlightened leader of modern thought, a disinterested social reformer, a victim of ecclesiastical tyranny, is dispelled, both in the text and in the learned Additional Notes supplied by Dr. Alfred O'Rahilly. It is a painful but necessary exposure of the uglier aspects of Voltaire's mind and character, which subsisted, because he was quite extraordinarily diverse, along with intelligence, outward polish, much kindness when he was not crossed: his systematic disregard of truth, his superficiality, his cruel vanity, his abominable and irreverent coarseness.

We have no space for details: they must be read in their context. The vast unmanageable material has been handled with remarkable skill. The writer has had the self-sacrificing courage to quote the *ipsissima verba* that critics habitually refer to as unquotable. The tone of such utterances is a thousand times more shocking in a writer of his prestige than in minor writers where they may be found; and their repetition is unendurable.

In view of a second edition—which we understand is already looked for—we might suggest a clearer statement of Voltaire's gradual evolution: it is in the stream of writings poured out anonymously and pseudonymously from Ferney and in the Correspondence of that time that we get the definitive Voltaire. And it might be well to explain more fully the attitude of the clergy as is here done for the Bishop of Annecy; in order to show that it was abundantly justified and indeed in the circumstances moderately ex-

exercised.

It is hardly too much to say that taking all in all Voltaire divided and divides people into two classes, those who are with Christ and His Church and those who are not. Taking all in all, for a Renan had little use for him, and he has had Catholic partisans. He bears witness to the absence of Christ in a life. As P. Brou, quoted in the Preface, says, he did nothing but injury to what we hold most sacred. When we have given every consideration to literary excellence, to human inconsistency, to the special difficulties of a time, we must take our stand, to quote some fine words of Karl Pflieger, on the "conviction and the acknowledgment that Christ is not only our best, our most delightful, our highest and our deepest, but, rightly understood, our sole possession here on earth".

MARY RYAN.

AVRIL. By Hilaire Belloc. (Sheed and Ward; 7s. 6d.).

This is not a new book, but its reappearance is both welcome and timely. It is welcome because Mr. Belloc presents some of the finest French poetry, and in words that have a share of the freshness and vigour of the period of which he writes, conveys to the English public the charm of the period that preceded the great classical age of French literature. It is timely, because now, more than ever, we are conscious of the need of that "re-establishment of comprehension", which Mr. Belloc had in mind when he first wrote this book. Its particular content, however, makes it even more timely, for black as the war years have been for France, they have seen an outburst of lyric poetry—the poetry of Aragon—which has something of the spirit of this book.

On other points, however, there is room for criticism. Mr. Belloc's picture of the "primal and catastrophic" nature of the French Renaissance, of Charles d'Orleans and Villon, as the writers in whom "the first note of the French Renaissance is heard" makes us wonder how closely he is acquainted with earlier French literature. He is more at ease when he deals with individual poets, and skilfully and clearly he shows the gentle melancholy of Charles d'Orleans, the profound self-revelation of Villon, the 'esprit' of Marat, the pomp and circumstance of Ronsard, the poignancy of du Bellay. Yet it is with a shock—despite Mr. Belloc's plea—that we arrive at the formal Malherbe, but perhaps he serves his purpose, for undoubtedly, he is the end. It may have been Malherbe's orthodoxy that tempted Mr. Belloc, for he suffers from an over-anxiety to Christianise his 16th century poets. To stress Ronsard and du Bellay as 'Churchmen' is surely a mistake. Villon, with all his rascality, was more fundamentally Christian.

There is one final serious criticism to make. Surely, after so many years, blatant inaccuracies could have been corrected. Villon's "whole surviving work" is not in the "form of two rhymed wills".