

THE GREAT EXHIBITION: 1851. By Yvonne ffrench. (Harvill Press; 18s.)

The Great Exhibition has passed through several phases of public esteem within a generation. Not many years ago it was dismissed, along with every other manifestation of Victorian culture, with the derision and contempt of all right-minded people; then its gew-gaws were found to exercise a curious nostalgic charm upon our affections; and now we salute it as the greatest monument of nineteenth-century idealism, the shrine of Free Trade, and the cathedral of industrial prosperity; the Palace of Glass in which it was held is now acclaimed as the first functional ferro-vitreous building of the modern era.

Miss ffrench tells its story as it should be told, with careful documentation, sympathy, and a kindly wit. Happily, many of the national traits revealed in these pages are still with us. We still vibrate with righteous indignation at every new building put up and every old tree cut down; the game of public controversy is still played, with as much etiquette and passion as cricket, by questions in the House and letters to *The Times*; ambitious active men still get their way behind the smoke-screen of 'a representative committee'; the Russians are still un-cooperative.

No doubt the genuine idealism that inspired Prince Albert and his colleagues was rotted at the heart by complacency and materialism; but here was, at least, a vision of peace on earth. The men of 1951 are in no position to read moral lectures at these simple Victorian architects of an earthly Jerusalem.

GEORGE SPEAIGHT

RESTORATION ROGUES. By Maurice Petherick. (Hollis and Carter 30s.)

The Restoration of Charles II to his father's throne left quite unsettled the great dispute which had cost that throne to his father, the question as to whether, in England, King or Parliament was really sovereign. With his uncertain it is not surprising that there was confusion in all the affairs of the kingdom and that, in that confusion, rogues found many opportunities for profit, especially in the trade of informer. Mr Petherick's rogues range from a Duchess to a brazen racketeer. Much of the book is concerned with the Popish Plot, and one of the most attractive of these excellent sketches is of the Popish midwife who feared neither King nor Council nor Titus Oates.

P.F.