

ality in a century where the obtrusion, even evidence, of a definable personality in verse was a rare thing. Now we are presented with his 'Works'. What critical place are we to give their author in the history of poetry between the death of Chaucer and the rise of Wyatt? Set him against Hoccleve or Barclay, and it is a very high place. To this it might be argued that he belongs to what Mr Speirs calls the non-Chaucerian tradition. However that might be, we shall have to turn to contemporary Scotland for a genuine comparison in terms of a sheer originality combined with force.

The stamp of the Wakefield Master, in five of six of these pageants, and fragmentarily—sometimes extensively—elsewhere in the cycle, is his nine-line stanza containing thirteen rhymes. That a poet of genius, set to write *over* or to revise a tired script, should coax embers into a really swaggering blaze (for what a lean and rakish humour this poet has! how piety blends with brawling invective! and how a homely Yorkshire eye and ear for folk-ways—with his 'hob over the wall' or his game of Hot Cockles in *Coliphizacio*—merge naturally into his participation in a cycle dramatizing the whole history of the one Big Experiment!) by turning eighty or so lines, or forty or so couplets, into three of his stanzas remains a marvel. Certainly, by over-layering stuff, roughened but still dull, with his intricate and wheeling stanza, he imposes an order. But, in imposing an order, he also strikes his material into life. Dr Cawley, in a note on the stanza, writes well, but even he does not say all that could be said towards advancing an answer to this mystery of how elaborate pattern made for freedom and the discovery of new relations between the characters of a drama.

This admirable volume, besides the texts of the pageants, is equipped with an introduction, a bibliography, appendices, notes and a full glossary.

FRANCIS BERRY

PIERS PLOWMAN AND THE SCHEME OF SALVATION. By Robert Worth Frank. (Yale University Press; 32s.)

This is a scholarly study of the form and meaning of *Piers Plowman*. Mr Frank reads the poem as a literal rather than an allegorical poem, and does not seek to place it in any particular doctrinal, religious or political movement of the fourteenth century. He does not, however, study in a vacuum; he interprets the poem in the light of fundamental Catholic theology. Without detracting at all from his own interpretation one may feel that he strains too hard to discredit the allegorical interpretations of scholars like Nevil Coghill. These surely can exist side by side with his own. He maintains that *Piers Plowman* dramatizes

the scheme of mankind's salvation, and that the old theology which associated each of the Three Persons of The Trinity with a part of that scheme helps to explain the puzzling last section of the poem, Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. These matters are investigated very thoroughly, and as far as the argument goes it is convincing enough, but I feel that certain themes have not been allowed sufficient prominence. We need to know more of how the scheme of salvation applies to the individual and to realize that Dowel, Dobet and Dobest are not a simple progression either in time or perfection. We need also to know the place of faith in the poem. Why did Piers remain true to the Church? Is a 'cry for and a faith in the salvation of man' sufficient? Was Langland a modern Humanist? Certainly Mr Frank does not seek to make him one, but we need a clearer explanation of the doctrine of Grace to rule out this interpretation altogether.

On the other hand his interpretation of the meaning of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest is most illuminating. It is difficult to see how anyone can have been fully satisfied with the old definitions of Active, Contemplative and 'Mixed' life, as a sole interpretation. Certainly they do represent themes in the poem, but it is surely wrong to identify them too literally, as some commentators do, with particular ways of Christian life. Mr Frank attempts to qualify such views; so he cannot agree that Piers's determination not to worry about food any longer is 'the Contemplative Life as Walter Hilton defines it'. 'The doctrine which Piers states is the doctrine of *ne solliciti sitis*, not of the *Contemplative Life*.' This is sound enough and needed to be said. Nevertheless an important distinction remains to be made. When we write the words Contemplative Life with capital letters we speak of a formal way of life recognized as a social 'level' in the Church—the life lived by Carthusians, Cistercians and such. But a Christian does not have to enter an enclosed religious order, or even any order at all, to follow the contemplative way of life, without capital letters, so to speak. That is a way of prayer in a life of union with God that may be lived by nuns and married women, priests and husbands alike. Moreover it is a way of life that may wax and wane in the individual Christian. The phrase contemplative life therefore may mean an officially organized way of life or a way of prayer, and these may or may not overlap. These two meanings of the phrase must be held in balance if we are fully to appreciate Langland's mind. One wonders whether he knew the teaching of St Bernard who made it so clear that the different ways of prayer could exist in the same monastery among men even doing the same work. Whether he had or not, Langland perceived this subtlety and reflected the manifold ways of the Holy Spirit in the manifold meanings of his poem. So, much as we welcome this 'social'

interpretation of the Vision, we shall set it side by side with the allegorical commentaries which re-create much of St Paul's vision of the Church.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

QUESTIONS OF PRECEDENCE. By François Mauriac. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 12s. 6d.)

Though only now put into English, this is an early Mauriac originally written in 1921; it may please those who find Mauriac's concern with sin oppressive. Nevertheless this is authentic Mauriac; the sense of sin is there, though less mature (some would say obtrusive) than in his later works. It is an attack on the snobberies and cruelties of Bordeaux society at the beginning of this century, told in the first person by a young man (unnamed) who, half in and half out of the ruling caste, takes his share in their failings. Although Mauriac outlines the characters with ruthless clarity there is no bitterness. As he indicates himself, the characters are more like caricatures. But the delicacy with which he indicates the hero's share of responsibility for much of what others do is unsurpassed; the same is true of the manner in which Mauriac works out his belief in the spiritual irrevocability of our smallest acts. This is not the greatest Mauriac but there is the unmistakable touch of the master. For Gerard Hopkins's translation one can only repeat all the earlier words of praise.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

VICTORS AND VANQUISHED. By Francis Stuart. (Gollancz; 16s.)

This is described as a quiet novel, and indeed it is, for Mr Stuart believes that the world is shaped as much by the secret workings of a man's heart and mind as by the public doings of politicians and soldiers. His hero is a young Irishman who, without any attempt to withdraw himself, finds himself uncommitted to the international events which threw Europe into a turmoil in 1939. His decision to return to his teaching job in Germany was brought about by neither pacifism nor neutrality. He had no theories to air, no axe to grind; his problem is entirely personal, to choose between his wife and the German Jewess with whom he has fallen in love. On the moral level we may query the unselfishness of his behaviour, but there is no question of Mr Stuart's success in telling a private story with no distracting excursions into self-analysis. It is the story of a young man who sets himself to do what he believes, rightly or wrongly, should be done. There is no isolationism; the horrors of war and Jew-baiting are there neither muted nor strident, and as the author carries us along with his beautiful