

the salvation of twentieth-century Englishmen if Michael and his fellow-Catholics could remind them a little more violently of supernatural hope and of the manner in which Divine Gentleness Incarnate has already secured the victory.

EDWARD QUINN.

ALL HALLOWS' EVE. By Charles Williams. (Faber; 8s. 6d.).

Mr. Charles Williams was versed in theology as well as literature, and this novel is as interesting under the first heading as under the second. Simon the Clerk, an adept in black magic, finds himself, as he approaches the final step to world power, opposed by four people, one of whom is already dead. This giant conflict between good and evil is the stuff of the story, a story which is theologically informative and formative as well as dramatically exciting; and it involves a description of the growth to perfection and to the utter disintegration of evil, respectively, of the two girls Hester and Evelyn, both of them killed in a plane crash just before the story begins. It is here that one finds one of the particularly interesting suggestions so skilfully and persuasively conveyed by Mr. Williams: the idea that, like the 'pain of loss,' the 'pain of sense' is no arbitrary punishment but the logical consequence of the sinner's sins, those idols to which he has given allegiance in this life, and which thereafter more and more completely dominate and determine him, while at the same time the material on which the appetites were formerly fed is no longer available. So Evelyn, whose passion was mean and cruel gossip, endlessly streaming from her lips, can now find no-one to listen to her, while the torrent itself becomes more and more rapid, degraded, and compulsive, so that the pain in her 'lungs' becomes for her indeed a fire of hell. Hester, on the other hand, finds through purgatorial experience the fullness of love and therefore its power—the power that can even harrow hell.

Mr. Williams wrote not only with deep insight and rightness of imaginative detail, but also with a power of suggesting and sustaining atmosphere which must make his story plausible even to readers who do not share his theological premisses. Occasionally the involution of the style makes the meaning of a sentence obscure at a first reading.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

POETRY LONDON, Number 10. Edited by Tambimuttu. (Nicholson and Watson; 15s.).

There appear to be at least 150 poems in this solid volume, which is intended to give 'a cross-section of new poets'—that is, poets whose work has not appeared in print at all, or has not yet appeared in *Poetry London*. The editor says that he has had the idea of such a collection in mind since 1939, and one can agree with him that it was bound to be valuable—as a document. No other value could

be represented by a collection of young writers whose only common qualification for appearing in print is that they have not appeared before. A few of the documents gathered here may give evidence of a struggling literary talent, but the majority testify only to the struggles of a developing personality. Of the best of them one can only say that they are 'promising'; if this irritates the young writer, it is because he has not yet a sufficiently developed standard of value. He will be lucky if his work really deserves to be called promising, generally it will deserve much less. Certainly there have been, and will be, exceptions—young writers whose work may be recognised as perfectly achieved—but these are not always enviable, for they may find development more difficult than those whose gifts will come to fruition later.

Let us then forget 'literature' or 'poetry,' taking up this volume, and remember that the England of the war has been in a high degree what Keats called 'a vale of soul-making'—which of course implies its immense qualifications too in what is called 'soul-destroying.' These writers are desperately implicated in the business, and one cannot but see that, on their own terms and precisely within the limits they set themselves, they have their reward. Read such poems as Michael Hews's *War Autobiography*, Iain Fletcher's *Given with His Picture*, or Thomas Good's *Chronometer*: like many others, they have an immediacy, a crudity made up of artificiality, literary reminiscence and sincerity, which is worth many more accomplished effects. The effect of personal existence has certainly been conveyed; but, I emphasize, these writers are not yet poets, they are adolescents with a taste for writing poetry. Tambimuttu's introductory letter 'in memory of Keith Douglas' gives a further useful basis for measuring the achievements of youth. Keith Douglas went from Oxford to the Army, fought in North Africa and was killed last year in France at the age of 24. Tambimuttu compares his poetry to Auden's, and says that it 'expresses mature and considered attitudes towards experience which are satisfying.' I would be the last to deny the achievement represented by writing as carefully and compactly as Douglas did in the circumstances in which he found himself; and who could fail to admire or be moved by the serious, balanced and in every way handsome character with which he faces us? But here is just the point at which one must distinguish. In a somewhat similar position, Henry James, writing an introduction to Rupert Brooke's letters, provided a more than usually magnificent example of the art of hedging. I do not find it so difficult to say that Keith Douglas's poetry seems to me a very small part of the whole, and a poor thing—with all its 'promise'—beside his personal reality. The mistake which most young writers make is to regard their personality as poetry. It is a mistake which Keith Douglas was learning to avoid, and one into which the critic should never be led.

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