

REVIEWS
BOOK FOR THE MONTH

COME HOME TRAVELLER. By Claude Kinnoul. (John Miles, 10s. 6d.)

Most first novels, when they are strong enough to endure criticism, appear to be smoothly derivative or else jagged with originality. Claude Kinnoul's *Come Home Traveller* cannot be put into either class. It is an uneven work of marked and discrepant excellences. Written in English, it is thought in French. Only a Catholic could have planned it and yet, in its main theme, it avoids the final resolution of Catholic doctrine.

The woman, Suzanne, who 'did not want to have a faith which was not the Truth simply because it might be a comfort'; and Louise, who thought of the child she was to bear as 'an intruder come to spoil everything', stray into mortal sin and are brought back, voluntarily, to Purgatory on earth, not through any ghostly ministrations, but through an automatic rising from the depths, as a drowning man will come to the surface of the water and float there without any effort of his own.

This repulsive attribute of sin, by the operation of which the sinner is made to recoil from his misdeed *after* its accomplishment, doing so mechanically, neither through fear of punishment nor under the dictation of remorse, is a phenomenon known to life, but not often employed in fiction: Claude Kinnoul uses it as an artist, stating the facts of her double story without ratiocination, showing us Louise who tries to murder and then to abandon her child and Suzanne, entangled in her own wilful lying and planned adultery, so vividly and with such a clear avoidance of sentimental pity that we accept the incredible, in-cordination of their conduct as we accept the difficult ways of people we know and love in real life. For this writer has the grace of loving her creations and is thus able to give them that life of their own which persists for the reader after the book is closed so that they haunt the memory and we can follow them through other scenes than those the writer has set down in words.

The tale, it will be gathered, is horrible in its facts, though some of its episodes, including a poignant courtship, are gracious and lovely. Its darker stretches are enlivened by flashes of mordant comedy: its wit is sparse and Gallic in flavour: its scene is laid alternately in Provence among civilised, rich, slightly Bohemian characters, and in the poorer quarters of Paris on the edge of the underworld. The book is rich in texture but uneven in writing with occasional lapses in the use of distributives and a confused attitude towards the noun *chaperon* and the verb, *to chaperone*, but the style rises with the occasion, and there are pages, among them those telling of Suzanne's encounter with the Blessed Sacrament,

which have the dignity, the restraint, and the profound emotion of true art.

Any novel with Paris and Provence for background must offer some glimpses of olive groves and vineyards, some urban morning and evening scenes: there are in *Come Home Traveller* many, but not too many or too elaborate, such sketches. Here, for example, is nightfall on a hillside above Aix-en-Provence.

The silhouette of cypress and olive trees stood out darkly; mist bathed the feet of the hills: beyond, in their setting of red rocks, were the little shining, solitary beaches which the Mediterranean tasted with drowsy lips.

There is also Dolores, the aged nurse—a Spanish peasant, half witch, half Sybil, and wholly a child of God. She is not entirely incorporated in the tale of the people she serves and stands out from this picture of their lives as though demanding a book to herself. This criticism is, indeed, applicable to the whole tale: like many first novels, it contains material for two, if not three, full length books. That is the defect of its quality, a quality strong enough to carry its author far and high in the succession of Catholic fiction.

NAOMI ROYDE SMITH.

BIBLICAL STUDIES

THE BIBLE AND THE COMMON READER. By Mary Ellen Chase. (Collins 10s. 6d.).

This book has some good chapters, especially those on the background history of Israel, on certain individual characters in the Old Testament and on the literary value of different parts of the Bible. But it also has many inherent weaknesses which disqualify it as a practical guide to the Christian student. The author is a lecturer in English literature and a novelist, and sets out to introduce the literature of the Authorised Version ('The noblest monument of English prose', p. 15), by placing it in its background of Hebrew history and commenting on its varied literary forms (narrative, biography, letters, legend, saga, ballad, lyric, etc.), showing how in each genus it rivals the greatest. This study of literary forms is good, though superficial through not penetrating beyond the Authorised Version. The main weaknesses are (1) an entire absence of interest in Theology or Revelation in the Bible, with little emphasis on the action of God in the world; (2) an equal absence of interest in Christ, except as a good subject for a clever biography by St Luke, or in the development of Christianity 'to some branch or sect of which most of us either nominally or actually owe some measure of allegiance, if not by conviction at least by family tradition' (p. 239), which is of course why 220 pages are devoted to the Old Testament, and only 47 to the New Testament; (3) taking the Bible as the Authorised Version; (4) an acceptance without question of all the old 'critical' views, e.g., Peter is post-exilic, so are most Psalms, I-II-III Isaiah, Daniel is maccabean, Matthew and Luke are A. D. 90,