

GOD'S PAUPER, by Nikos Kazantzakis; Bruno Cassirer; 21s.

Biographies, generally speaking, tend to be unreliable in that they often more accurately reveal the author's personality than the subject's reality. *God's Pauper* is a life that disclaims being a biography at all, which is perhaps a safer line for an author to adopt. Nevertheless, it is an historical novel and, much as one can say in favour of historical novels, they do present dangers of their own making. In the hands of a less profound philosopher than Kazantzakis, an historical novel about St Francis would follow the usual lines of the accepted interpretation of the character, merely filling in with suitable, but unimportant dialogue. But here the author, several times a candidate for the Nobel Prize, sets a different and much more difficult problem; for he himself was a philosopher. He studied in Paris under Henri Bergson, after completing his course in law at the university of Athens. He finished his studies in Germany and Italy and then his travels took him to Spain, England, Russia, Egypt, Palestine, China and Japan. For a short time during the war, he was Minister of State in Greece and then became Director of the Bureau of Translation from the classics for UNESCO. Apart from Homer, Aeschylus and Nietzsche, he maintained that Bergson was the greatest influence in his life.

It has been said of his novels – the best known in England are *Zorba the Greek* and *The Last Temptation* – that the characters were contrived to illustrate various maxims of his own philosophical thought. Hence his analysis of St Francis, deep though it would seem to go, may or may not be a true interpretation of the inner life of the saint – that is the fictional part of the book.

It is superbly written and well translated (by P. A. Bien), the work of a high artistic order, formed by a tender and firm hand. Albert Schweitzer, to whom this book is dedicated as 'the Francis of our era', once wrote, 'Since I was a young boy, no author has made such a deep impression upon me as Nikos Kazantzakis.' Certainly Kazantzakis' work has depth and durable value because he has experienced much and in the human community he has suffered and yielded much. With his upbringing and experience, he is well able to breathe into his prose all the warm airs of the Mediterranean, its light, its colour, its sadness; and, so equipped, he is able to create an admirable setting for the Saint of Assisi.

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THE HACK, by Wilfrid Sheed; Cassell; 18s.

To say that Mr Sheed is both an artful and crafty writer is less facetious than it sounds. His high standard of craftsmanship is an immense pleasure and the book is compact, shapely and tightly woven, the theme taut and sustained from the first to the last page. As to his art it is nowhere more impressive than in the brilliant selection and subtlety apparent in his dialogue. Brief conversations between the principal character and his mother-in-law are masterly and achieve