

LE REGARD D'ORPHÉE. An Inaugural Lecture. By J. B. Barrère. (Cambridge University Press; 3s. 6d.)

No one is required to take notes and pass examinations upon inaugural lectures, and the qualities that make a discourse amenable to condensation within the notebook of the University student, and to storing within his memory, are not expected in this form of oratory. They are certainly not present in the lecture with which Professor Barrère handselled the recently established Chair of French Literature at Cambridge, of which he is the first holder. For one hour he chased will-o'-the-wisps under the tolerant gaze of Orpheus, the singer's head now resting upon its shoulders, now borne upon a woman's lyre. 'Fantômes et poésie' is the subtitle of this diaphanous yet confusing *entretien*, which winds and leaps in and out of its themes like clematis on a whitethorn hedge.

'Une deuxième manière, une troisième incarnation' murmurs the professor discreetly from time to time; and once he allows himself a 'donc' ('cet anneau pontifical du discours', as Bremond called it); but on the whole the skeleton of his thought is fairly volatilized and the art with which he disguises the framework of his edifice is so consummate that one is left wondering whether the framework is there at all. 'Si l'on a suivi mon propos . . .' he says hopefully—or ironically—some five minutes before he sits down. 'If', indeed . . . the assumption is rash. It takes one deserving of a Good Driving certificate to follow all the turns and twists of the allusion-strewn course without ditching or banking. Yet the exercise is worth trying. Though the complete film is giddy, a 'still' taken at any point is rewarding and may prove the starting point of fruitful imaginings of one's own. The virtuosity of the lecturer enlivens in the long run the intellect and sensibility of the listener, and that, we feel, is what Professor Barrère has intended.

CUTHBERT GIRDLESTONE

THE HERO IN ECLIPSE IN VICTORIAN FICTION. By Mario Praz. Translated by Angus Davidson. (Oxford University Press; 45s.)

In a book of wide and lively erudition Professor Praz considers the relationship of *genre* painting to the novel, examines 'the process by which Romanticism in England gradually turned bourgeois', and analyses the work of the 'Victorian prose writers who proclaimed the dignity and beauty of humble, everyday things as against the conventional romantic idea of the heroic'.

He seeks, with the help of forty illustrations, to establish the link between the *genre* painters and Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope and George Eliot not only in their choice of subject ('everyday lyricism') but in their common anecdotal and moralizing qualities. His assertion,

however, that this is a causal relationship is, in spite of liberal documentation, unlikely to command widespread agreement. 'It was the development of situations and subjects employed in painting', he writes, '... which influenced subsequent literary evolution.' However true this may be of Hogarth and Fielding, it is plainly unsatisfactory as a generalization, emphasized as it is later by the statement that Dutch painting 'initiated democratic art.'

Central to his thesis is the word *Biedermeier*, which he uses as the European equivalent of 'Victorian'. It is 'both a style and a conception of the world, of a small world of good sense and good manners, domestic pleasures and the cult of a gentle, well-groomed nature, subservience to sane principles, minute love of the concrete, with, from time to time, a few flights on the wings of a mild and perhaps slightly melancholy dream.'

This he finds dominant in the writers of 'the bourgeois century' where it is seen primarily in their hero figures, characterized by bourgeois morality, who have replaced the Byronic *homme fatal*. But the eclipse of the Romantic protagonist, who has never been significant in English fiction, does not take us very far. It is true that the nineteenth-century heroes are bourgeois (has it ever been doubted?), but at their best they are, for the first time, heroes, centres of conflict. Professor Praz, in a curiously paradoxical comment on George Eliot, recognizes this emergence of the modern hero: 'Disillusioned observation of life as it really was, led to the eclipse of the hero and the disclosure of man's swarming interior world, made up of disparate and contradictory things.' It was in this very revelation that the true fictional hero appeared.

What we seek, however, is not the book which demands assent but that which stimulates to reflection and reconsideration. This is the kind of work Professor Praz has given us. His starting point is novel, his discussion relevant, and consequently he serves us with the mild shock we need to dispute; to engage, in Mr Eliot's phrase, in the common pursuit of true judgment.

JAMES REED

NOTICES

MAN OF FIRE, by Malachy Gerard Carroll (Mercier Press, 12s. 6d.), is a life of Emmanuel d'Alzon, the founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption and of the Oblates of the Assumption. The story of his early life is well told with its interesting glimpses into his aristocratic family background and association with the intellectual movement of the eighteen-twenties in France, dominated as that was by the figure