

into these two hundred and forty pages is remarkable. One is left with a sensation of the inadequacy, one might almost say the impertinence, of making any review of them which is not the result of many months of study and meditation.

S. M. CATHERINE, O.P.

MODERN LITERATURE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH, by Martin Turnell; Darton, Longman and Todd, 12s. 6d.

The most radical problem that besets the Christian reader, if he is of an enquiring bent, is that of the influence on literature of belief. How far, in fact, does a writer's faith inhibit or enhance his creative powers? The first chapter of this book takes us from the serene world of accepted pieties which was so immensely steadying and liberating for Chaucer's imagination, to the spiritual crisis in Donne's time, the breakdown of faith which has been the poet's matrix ever since. Religious poetry, in particular, becomes more and more difficult to write. The burden of overcoming the hostile environment, of breaking the spell of scepticism which willy-nilly dominates everybody's outlook, cripples the Christian imagination. Mr Turnell dismisses the efforts of Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson, and shows that even in as certainly great a poet as Hopkins the isolation of belief from the mainstream of culture, and the exhausting battle to keep belief up at all, prevent him from ever opening into any epic vision. The second chapter is an examination of D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf. Mr Turnell comes to the conclusion that their rejection of faith reduces their explorations of human reality, ultimately, to a baffled impotence which is indistinguishable from the moral dead-end occupied by Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett. The final chapter deals with some explicitly Catholic writers, Claudel, Mauriac and Graham Greene, whose sometimes grave defects are compensated for, Mr Turnell argues, because they are committed to belief in our immortal destiny. It is not, of course, that Graham Greene is a *better* novelist than E. M. Forster, but that he is, to use Mr Turnell's word, *serious*. It is at this point, when one begins to wonder what this 'seriousness' amounts to, if Mr Greene is to be counted as 'serious' and Mr Forster not, that the book stops. It is fair to add that the stringent criticism of Mr Greene is clear and convincing, like most of the analysis of cases which so largely make up the book. The more theoretical passages, however, are a good deal less substantial and satisfying than in Mr Turnell's earlier book on roughly the same theme, *Poetry and Crisis* (1938).

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