

unmentionable horrors. The Attwaters in this new version have performed a great service to those who cannot read Middle English easily, for if their work is read independently it will give a reasonably faithful account of both the sense and the feeling of the original, whilst, better still for those who will take the trouble, it will serve as a reliable guide if it is read together with the original. Their work is a welcome antidote to the deplorable catch-penny vulgarity with which others have presented this priceless treasure of our literature to modern readers. It must be conceded that this new rendering is not itself easy: the punctuation is, deliberately, no doubt, as capricious and vague as that of the manuscripts themselves, we are supplied with neither English nor sources for the many Latin tags, which, rightly, are preserved in the text, and, occasionally, we may think that the translators have needlessly retained, unglossed, features of the original vocabulary—'toft', 'kenned', 'bride', 'though me search', 'mould'—which will puzzle and often may mislead. Yet such difficulties are endowed with a moral value, for they should teach those who read this version that if we wish to derive true profit and pleasure from *Piers Plowman* we must make the same effort as for Dante or Camoens or any other great medieval writer; we must master the poet's own tongue.

To those who may question that this is worth while, one would recommend, as an introduction to this poem's grandeur, a reading of Passus XI in Rachel Attwater's rendering. Here we are away from the heavy-handed and to us often tedious allegory, on heights where we can descry the poet's moral greatness and his awful visions of earthly and heavenly beauty, his tenderness for the outcasts and the misfits of the world, his solemn elucidation of the mysteries of our creation and redemption, his delight in the wonders of the natural order. We may justly compare with Tauler's delicately perfect simile of the growth of the child in the womb the loving account which we have here of the wooing and mating and building of the birds: and then we are led on to one of humanity's great, despairing cries over its own witnessless and lawlessness, as the dreamer, seeing the fairness and accord of all else under the heavens, demands of Reason:

'Why followest thou not man and his mate that no mishap them attend?'

ERIC COLLEDGE

THE GREAT TUDORS. Edited by Katherine Garvin. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 25s.)

ELIZABETHAN QUINTET. By Denis Meadows. (Longmans; 15s.)

FOUR WORTHIES. By Wallace Notestein. (Jonathan Cape; 18s.)

There is no slackening in interest in Tudor studies on either side of the Atlantic, and these books are typical of the present trend, away from

political and formal history, toward biography. Here are studies from many different pens of the prominent statesmen, churchmen, scholars and poets who together gave the Tudor period the fascination it undoubtedly retains for so many, and particularly for Americans. *Great Tudors* is a reprint of rather less than half of a very substantial volume that appeared in 1935. It has a new and thoughtful introduction by Miss Garvin, the original editor, but the essays have not been revised. There are nineteen in all, and they are unequal in length and in quality. Amongst them are the sympathetic study of Thomas More by the late R. W. Chambers, the fine, concise study of John Fisher by Douglas Woodruff, and Belloc on William Lord Burghley, which is not perhaps Belloc at his very best. Some essays, notably that on Shakespeare, suffer from lack of space. The essay on Richard Hooker was hardly worth reprinting. Within the compass of a single page (273) we are informed that the clergy at Elizabeth's accession 'were politically disloyal and had to be discarded'; that the Elizabethan settlement was a 'religion suitable for Englishmen'; and that 'the Jesuits were everywhere and still threatened the Queen's life' and this at a time (1588) when there were only four of them in England, two of them in prison. All this sounds even funnier than in 1935.

Denis Meadows in *Elizabethan Quintet* has chosen to write on Walsingham, Parsons, John Dee the Queen's astrologer, and two minor characters. He has a fresh—sometimes too fresh—style, and is well informed. The most important of his essays is the one on Robert Parsons, to which we await a reply from Farm Street. Mr Meadows, who was himself a Jesuit novice, tells us that the Society 'fight shy of this controversial figure. The English Province of the Society has in its archives a great deal of material about this fascinating Jesuit, but so far the literature of Catholicism in England lacks a biography of him.' Are we to infer that the Jesuits at Stonyhurst are hiding a mass of material that they fight shy of publishing? And how does Mr Meadows know?

*Four Worthies* covers a wider epoch, but half the book is devoted to John Chamberlain, the writer of news-letters that have always been a favourite quarry for historians in search of small-talk. From the mass of letters, now available in a fine American edition, Mr Notestein seeks to build up the character of this attractive and cultured Elizabethan Pepys.

These books are all designed for the general reader. The general reader, we gather, is repelled by footnotes, has no use for an index, and is prepared to take everything on the authority of the writer. Mr Meadows, an American, will tell him that Walsingham was a typical Englishman (pp. 2-3); Mr Conyers Read, an Englishman, will

tell him that 'Walsingham might have belonged to any Christian country' (*Great Tudors*, p. 211). But neither writer will help the general reader to further study. All three books, but particularly the first, would have been more valuable, and certainly not less attractive, if enriched by a short reading-list.

GODFREY ANSTRUTHER, O.P.

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY'S HISTORIA NOVELLA.

GESTA STEPHANI. Latin text with translation and notes by K. R. Potter. (Nelson; 20s. each.)

It is a pleasure to welcome excellent new editions of these two histories fundamental for the study of the trouble years of Stephen, more especially as the second is something of an historical event. When a text of the *Gesta Stephani* was already in typescript, a manuscript which supplied the lost ending of the work was discovered at Valenciennes. Professor Mynors, who collated the MSS and contributes a note on them in either volume, concludes that the new manuscript was a copy of the now lost Laon MS used by Duchesne, in which several *lacunae* already occurred before the fourteenth century. Unfortunately this means that there is still no account of the Battle of the Standard which must once have been there. Dr Poole has given us an admirable estimate of the evidence which the newly-discovered manuscript supplies. Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*, which was left incomplete and unrevised, is a more shrewd and concise narrative than that of the author of the *Gesta Stephani*, but it is impossible not to feel the attraction and at times the vividness of the writing of this unknown supporter of Stephen. The two works, seldom differing over the facts, are from their differing points of view delightfully complementary, and even Malmesbury cannot withhold a word of praise for Stephen, that *mansuetissimus homo*.

A.S.

FELIX'S LIFE OF ST GUTHLAC. Edited and translated by Bertram C. Colgrave. (Cambridge University Press; 30s.)

Guthlac was a Mercian who lived the life of a solitary in the Fenland during the last years of the seventh century and the first decade of the eighth. He attained a reputation for sanctity during his lifetime. Felix wrote his life of the saint before the middle of the eighth century while many of the saint's contemporaries were still alive. Later a certain amount of imaginative writing and not a little forgery was called in to build up the legend of the saint and incidentally to magnify the importance of the monastery of Crowland with which he was associated.