

## OBITER

THE STRONG ARE LONELY. A silly title, suggesting one of those epic novels of American life through several generations, is the principal defect in the English version of Fritz Hochwalder's play about the suppression of the Jesuit paradise in Paraguay. It is a sad reflection on the state of the English theatre that every difficulty was experienced in finding a West End home for a play which, for seriousness of dramatic purpose and intelligence of acting, can have had no equal since the war.

The issue raised by the conflict between the State and a successful theocracy and by the deeper conflicts which the religious vow of obedience can create is, to begin with, *dramatically* effective. The play held the attention, engaged the imagination, at that necessary level, and was of course brilliantly served by such actors as Donald Wolfitt as the Jesuit Provincial, Robert Harris as the King's representative and Ernest Milton as the emissary of the Jesuit General. Indeed, Mr Milton, in a performance of beautifully controlled understanding, summarized the spiritual tension that makes this play memorable and at the same time made us aware of the ultimate loyalties that were in question.

It may be that the play exaggerated the historical facts: perhaps the Indians were less concerned with their material prosperity and were more truly aware of their Christian faith than was here suggested. But 'this world was not meant for the kingdom of God', and the ideal of heaven on earth—all things in common under the paternal rule of the Jesuits who protected 'their' Indians from the slave-trading rapacity of the Spanish colonists—could not perhaps have survived in any case. The forces of popular education and influence from without would in the end have been too strong.

But the essential crisis of the play lies in the unchanging territory of the human will. For the Father Provincial to surrender all his work to his enemies (for him they are the enemies of God as well), and that at the command of his religious superiors (the suppression of the Paraguayan Reductions is presented by the Jesuit General's emissary as the necessary condition for the Society's survival in Europe), means a heroic act of the will which presents the vow of obedience in its starkest terms. One did not feel that Donald Wolfitt had as it were got inside this terrible decision: his anguish and his final submission were somehow contrived, they did not seem different in kind from the lesser agonies of ordinary life.

To see a London audience obviously deeply moved by a religious

theme at this level of seriousness was an experience to be remembered. The real argument for religious plays is that they should be dramatically effective and professionally impeccable: in these respects the recent production at the Piccadilly was notable, and the play achieved its deeper purpose through its scrupulous care for what the theatre rightly demands.

I.E.

THE WOODS ARE FULL OF THEM. A tear, said Blake, is an intellectual thing; a statement sufficiently improbable to those not in tune as to invite immediate disagreement. In the same way those who do not care to listen often, or at all, to the Goon Show may find it hard to concede that it too, after its fashion, is an extremely intellectual thing. It is broadcast twice weekly these days—both recordings, first on the Home Service and later in the Light Programme; but I am persuaded that if it went out regularly and exclusively on the Third Programme it would be quite at home.

Any programme that appears week by week for long seasons and over several years, is bound to have its ups and downs, and since the Goons rely upon a kind of existentialist absurdity for their biting comment on our day and age, when things do flag they are apt to fall pretty flat, for absurdity that lags quickly becomes merely tiresome. But at its best the Goon Show is astringent, topical, cruel sometimes, decisive more often, witty nearly always, frequently so triumphantly lunatic that one laughs aloud even when alone, which is a searching test. The permanent cast, as it were, of characters bears no relation to the actors, for now that Michael Bentine pursues his old Etonian way elsewhere there are virtually only three of them—Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan who is also responsible—and what a responsibility—for the script, and Harry Secombe who plays only himself: the announcer, Wallace Greenslade, and Ray Ellington the coloured crooner play small but recurrent parts in the pattern of the programme but hardly in that of the script. But the characters! they shove and push each other out of the way to make their points, fighting for life and mike-time like vegetation in the Matto Grosso. Minnie and her buddy Henry; Moriarty; the warm-voiced moon-calf Eccles; Ned Seagoon himself, Admiral, General, Peer or fearless explorer as the case may be; the odious, knowing Bluebottle; Major Bloodnok and, my favourite by far, the smooth and casual Hercules Grytpype-Thynne, drawing in his U-voice 'You silly twisted boy', or insinuating temptation into the ears of Seagoon with devilish skill.

Imagination boggled as to how it could be *done*, let alone invented, but for once imagination did not have to boggle indefinitely. I have now

had the privilege of *seeing* a Goon Show. This fantastic performance took place in surroundings of the utmost theatrical propriety, in the old Camden Theatre which the B.B.C. have redecorated with the height of conventionality, so that it is all awash with gilt and red plush and gleaming white paint, and Ellen Terry's incomparable profile dreams away on a plaque in the foyer. An immensely long, immensely happy queue waited for the doors to open, and the moment we found our seats a feeling of high euphoria spread over us all. Already from the wings came maniacal cries that could only be Seagoon's; we laughed each time in spite of the admirable jazz purveyed to keep us quiet. From the very beginning of the show the deceptive casualness and the obvious relaxation of the performers was a delight, and when they strolled forward to throw away or bellow their lines, so complete was their mastery that half an eye was still left free to savour our enjoyment we could hardly believe that these were the characters involved in that lethal free-for-all which we could—and indeed did—hear the following Tuesday evening. There they were, Spike Milligan as long as a lamp-post in a shapeless jersey and a deerstalker hat, Peter Sellers with a hundred voices coming from the same dead-pan countenance in its owlish spectacles, Secombe a figure out of a nightmare whose every movement was comic, whose very fingers were significant, and yet whose impact remained obstinately radiogenic: to see all this, to receive those cracks nearly as fast as they were poured out before us was indeed a feast considerably better than enough.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

## REVIEWS

THE BOOK OF THE POOR IN SPIRIT, BY A FRIEND OF GOD. Translated and with an Introduction by C. F. Kelley. (Longmans: library edition, 21s.; pocket edition, 8s. 6d.)

This work bears the marks of having been written in a hurry, the most obvious of which are the many uncorrected mistakes wherever foreign names or titles are cited. On page 278, for one example, *Geistleben, Abhandlung, Dufourq, Geschichte des deutschen Sprache, Revue belge de philosophie* and *Bussuet* should read *Geistesleben, Abhandlungen, Dufourcq, Geschichte der deutschen Sprache, Revue belge de philologie* and *Bossuet*. Having observed these errors, one proceeds to read the critical introduction and the text with something less than perfect confidence, and to check the author's references wherever possible; and the results of such a scrutiny are far from gratifying.

*The Book of the Poor in Spirit* was until the nineteenth century gener-