

JOHN BUNYAN: THE MAN AND HIS WORKS. By Henri Talon. (Rockliff; 25s.)

It was only in the nineteenth century that *The Pilgrim's Progress* began to be considered, not as a work of piety and edification, but as a masterpiece of English prose. At one time it looked as if scholars were in danger of neglecting edification altogether in their anxiety to hail Bunyan as a pioneer of the novel of the open road. But these anticipations of profane fiction are the deductions of the literary historian; Bunyan is a conservative-minded, backward-looking writer who owes most to Puritan theology, and, beyond that, to the ancient homiletic tradition of the rural pulpit. In recent years seventeenth-century Puritan thought has received more careful examination, particularly in America (the work of Professors Perry Miller and William Haller may be mentioned).

M. Talon has attempted to digest this body of research; at the same time he does not lose sight of the creative genius in Bunyan which had impressed the nineteenth century, and which produced out of traditional material something no other 'mechanic preacher' could have produced. His approach is through the working of Bunyan's imagination; he sees the spiritual autobiography of *Grace Abounding* as providing in its obsessive imagery the germ of the allegories: in them the phenomena of Bunyan's own consciousness are projected and given objective form. M. Talon's discussion of the value of *Grace Abounding* as autobiographical evidence, and the extent to which one must presume a freer treatment of spiritual history in the light of the conventions of Puritan religious biography, is one of the most illuminating parts of his book.

In its impressive review of Bunyan's whole literary output, this study can worthily take a place along with other distinguished French contributions to English studies, like those of Legouis and Huchon. The criticism of the narrative *ordonnance* of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is excellent; so often in other hands the appreciation of Bunyan's style is limited to purple passages or character sketches. Sometimes the author relies a little too much on secondary authorities; for the English translation he has, however, corrected a number of minor historical inaccuracies which were present in the original French edition published in 1948.

ROGER SHARROCK

THE KNOT OF VIPERS. By François Mauriac, translated by Gerard Hopkins. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 11s. 6d.)

LOOK DOWN IN MERCY. By Walter Baxter (Heinemann; 10s. 6d.)

The collected edition of Mauriac's novels in English (a notable achievement in the history of translation) now includes the novel which, perhaps more than any other, deserves to be called Mauriac's

profoundest work. This study, written as a diary, of a man obsessed by avarice and hate, reveals in all its terrifying power the extent of M. Mauriac's analysis of the mystery of human iniquity. It is an astonishing achievement to have drawn so consistent a picture of meanness and malice, and yet to have retained a fundamental sympathy for a man's misery and his need of God. If the theme of pity be the ultimate one of a novelist who is a Christian, then with *The Knot of Vipers* M. Mauriac has spoken definitively. With economy and grace he evokes a closed world with the confines of his own Landes. And the circle of his family, conventionally Christian, conventionally cruel, that surrounds the old and weary lawyer, brings out the dilemma of faith for the faithless. Reconciliation comes at last, not violently, improbably, but out of a perennial human need, and the knot of hatred is indeed unravelled.

Mr Baxter's first novel, a grim and violent picture of war in the Burma jungle, has nothing explicitly to say of God or religion. But, paradoxically, such is its theme. The central figure is a man whose unhappiness, whose cowardice even, finds expression in squalid infidelities, in a nervous tic of personal futility, but Mr Baxter, with extraordinary confidence in the telling, exposes the true root of his failure and never gives it a name. But unlike Mauriac's lawyer, Captain Kent is a man who has never known the truth he longs for. He is representative of the world we know, whose unknown God is far away, and the neurosis of failure is all there is to recall. This is not a happy novel; it is certainly an important one. 'Look down in mercy to thy people who cry to thee': Mr Baxter does not give the whole quotation, for the men of the world he draws cry indeed, but as yet it is to an unknown God they cry.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR. By Edouard Perroy. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 30s.)

One's first reaction on reading this book is to wonder why it has not been translated before. The answer is probably to be found in the fact that the text has been revised and bibliographical additions have been made for the benefit of the English version. Mr W. B. Wells has given us a competent and solid translation. The book, it must be emphasised, is not merely a military history, for the social, economic and constitutional elements of the great struggle are interwoven to make up the whole story, and it should be scarcely necessary to stress the rare skill and learning of an author who can thus move with confidence in the history both of France and England. Moreover, the book itself is so planned and written that detail never obscures but rather illumines the main outline, and the personalities of the chief actors stand out remarkably clearly against the crowded events and