

R E V I E W S

THE HOUSE OF THE OCTOPUS; a play in three acts. By Charles Williams. (Edinburgh House Press; 5s.).

It is still too early to estimate the permanent significance of Charles Williams' work. Up to his sudden death this summer he was still experimenting in technique and his brilliant vivid questing mind was reaching towards its maturity. It is characteristic that his last play, "The House of the Octopus", seems essentially a young man's work. It is a study of martyrdom, a poem cast in play form. The non-Christian power is the Po Lu of his more recent poems which was becoming a permanent symbol to his imagination; its plot lies in the interweaving of sudden apostasy and long endurance—the "coinherence" of Christian souls. The primary effect achieved is that of tightening and relaxing tension. It is marked throughout with an abnormal strength of focussed imagination. For it is impossible to divorce Charles Williams' literary achievement from his personality.

His very rare capacity for personal friendship and the spontaneity of his compassion, of his generosity and of his love were integrally one with the intuitive power that underlay his prose and focussed his poetry. Through it he had ceased to be derivative and had pierced through layers of the unreal towards acceptance. He may be remembered as the first of the Romantic Movement to be no longer in revolt. His essential function was to initiate.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

THE OPEN MIND. By Georges Bernanos. (John Lane, 8s. 6d.).

A fitting sub-title for M. Bernanos's new novel would be "Mortal Sin in a French Village". It is a terrible picture of evil: the cumulative evil of self-seeking, jealousy, lust and suspicion hidden away under the peaceful façade of French provincial life. The setting and the characters matter little enough: here is the battleground M. Bernanos has chosen, and it is as good a one as any on which to stand and watch Good and Evil struggling for the possession of the last rampart of all, a man's mind.

The seriousness of M. Bernanos's theme, his passionate conviction that here is something that overshadows all the public battles and revolutions which haunt the headlines, makes *The Open Mind* one of the important books of the last few years. It makes the usual novel, even the usual "Catholic" novel, seem a novelette in comparison. But it has grave defects if it is to be judged by the standards of the medium M. Bernanos has deliberately chosen—fiction. The monotonous craziness of his characters—the wild woman from the chateau driving her giant mare over the countryside; the fantastic "professor", M. Ouine; even the priest, battling unavailingly unless the tide of damnation—invites no compassion, no interest even. The novel has the crude, if powerful, distortion of a Doom on a medieval church wall. We are appalled; but there is no tension, no concession to even the smallest