

are being disregarded or openly attacked. An unbridled individualism and subjectivism are at work everywhere, so at least to the old-fashioned, it seems that we live in an atmosphere of anarchy and unprincipled licence. Art is notoriously in revolt against tradition. Philosophy a welter of conflicting subjective systems. Literature expresses the wildest and most subversive individual ideas. Religion, again, outside the Catholic Church, divided as it is against itself, would seem to be fighting a losing battle against a revived pagan morality and a modernism that corrodes the essential Christian truths. Youth, bewildered and confused, is often swept off its feet by the universal flux, so that despair of finding stable principles leads it to yield to the pagan morality it sees on every side. But the very extent of the evil has its compensation. People are driven to look for stability wherever it may be found. The Catholic Church has an added impressiveness and grandeur amidst the welter of discarded principles and conventions that surround it. Mr. Wheeler, presumably an Anglican clergyman, reviews the position and points out the dangers and perils to which civilisation is exposed to-day. His is a slight book, but well-written and informed. He pleads for a Catholic morality and a return to sane philosophic principles. He finds the best hope for the latter in the neo-Scholasticism that is so active on the Continent. Many will wish that Mr. Wheeler had written at greater length, but no single work could have dealt with all the problems raised. He wished simply to draw attention to the anarchic state of contemporary thought, literature, art and religion and has succeeded excellently in his purpose. F.B.

THE VOYAGE OUT. JACOB'S ROOM. MRS. DALLOWAY. THE COMMON READER. By Virginia Woolf. (Hogarth Press; 5/- net each.)

The increase of novel reading and production in these days is not a sign of increased aesthetic sensibility in the populace. Literature, the humblest of the fine arts, easily lends itself to mere reporting of the facts of life, and not transforming them, or to preaching current propaganda. Our grandfathers, observing that the novel—like all other forms of art—does not promote directly the cause of ethics, religion or making money, condemned it as a waste of time. Herbert Spencer allowed George Eliot's novels alone in the London Library because they taught philosophy. Such an attitude at least acknowledged that art, however futile, had a nature of its own. But now the novel is the jam for every sort of pill. The grimmest parents

never frown while the child thus delicately imbibes its useful knowledge. Their criticism asks not whether the characters hold together with inherent logical consistency, but, rather, of what philosophy is this a handbook, what problem does it solve? If the philosophy is theirs, if the solution pleases, the soundness of the novel is established.

To such readers Mrs. Woolf makes no appeal. She has no message. She waves no flags. She is a novelist: a person of acute sensibility perceiving life as it rushes by, seizing its essentials and creating it anew in an enduring form, 'whole and comprehended.' Her views on the universe come out in her characters, not in her comments. What she writes of Conrad is applicable also to her own work: 'The criticism (of those who insist that art should preach) is familiar, and as difficult to refute as the remarks of deaf people when *Figaro* is played. They see the orchestra; far off they hear a dismal scrape of sound; their own remarks are interrupted, and very naturally they conclude that the ends of life would be better served if, instead of scraping Mozart, those fifty fiddlers broke stones upon the road. That beauty teaches, that beauty is a disciplinarian, how are we to convince them, since her teaching is inseparable from the sound of her voice, and to that they are deaf? But read Conrad, not in birthday books, but in the bulk, and he must be lost indeed to the meaning of words who does not hear in that rather stiff and sombre music with its reserve, its pride, its vast and implacable integrity, how it is better to be good than bad, how loyalty is good and honesty and courage, though ostensibly Conrad is concerned merely to show us the beauty of a night at sea. But it is ill work dragging such intimations from their element. Dried in our little saucers, without the magic and mystery of language, they lose their power to excite and goad; they lose the drastic power which is a constant quality of Conrad's prose.'

Pater defined Botticelli's morality as 'all sympathy.' And Mrs. Woolf says of Chaucer: 'His morality lies in the way men and women behave to each other.' The amazing rightness of her psychology results from a similar sympathy and unprejudiced observation. She does not impose a code to which her characters must be made to fit. She observes, actually, impartially, objectively. She does not decide that reality must be this or that, but accepts it as it is. It is this passionate acceptance of life which fills her novels not only with spontaneity and freshness, but also with modernity. She reminds us of the modern French painters. No cult of nature, no 'back

to barbarism,' stains her work: she is urban, civilised. She lives enthusiastically in this our strange transitional age. Lights, streets, human beings beautiful or grotesque, motor cars, aeroplanes fascinate her. 'The telephone, which interrupts the most serious conversations and cuts short the most weighty observations, has a romance of its own There is something about the present which we would not exchange, though we were offered a choice of all past ages to live in.' It is this zest she admires in Chaucer and the Greeks. 'Chaucer was a poet: but he never flinched from the life that was being lived at the moment before his eyes.'

The Voyage Out is a novel in the old form; a story told. Its essence is a conflict between human love and destiny which extinguishes it on the brink of fruition. It is a fine and austere tragedy, full of pity and understanding, but resigned to what must be. Its outlook on the world is not Christian, but Greek. Faithful to her observation, Mrs. Woolf cannot find in the contrast between the glorious possibilities of life and the certainty of death, any hope. Only the Christian revelation can give that and ease the contradiction. Mrs. Woolf is not a Christian; perhaps because she has not realised the fullness of Christianity, how it allows the intelligence full play, how it can face the joy and the evil of the world and indicate an answer without sentimentalism. As it is, how much is expressed, elsewhere, in these words, on the Greeks: '. . . they are even more aware than we are of a ruthless fate. There is a sadness at the back of life which they do not attempt to mitigate. Entirely aware of their own standing in the shadow, and yet alive to every tremor and gleam of existence, there they endure, and it is to the Greeks that we turn when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations, of our own age.'

The Voyage Out moves steadily to its end. But on the way the characters develop. They are not passive puppets in a Jansenist universe. Rachel blossoms into an intelligent woman. Hirst and Hewit display their attractive minds. Helen's fostering wisdom is like the chorus of the Pities throughout the tale. It is the mind, the spirit, with which Mrs. Woolf is concerned. And it is concentration upon this which would seem to have determined her new style beginning with *Jacob's Room*. The title is significant. 'Nothing happens to us as it did to our ancestors; events are seldom important; if we recount them we do not really believe in them; we have perhaps things of greater interest to say' she remarks in her essay on

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the Pastons. 'Events are seldom important'; it is the person who experiences them and is above them that matters. And though Jacob makes many contacts, visits many places, he is as mysterious in his room as anywhere; the thoughts flung out in its firelight reveal him—Jacob in his room. At Cambridge (a marvellous description), in London, in Greece, we follow him. Places and persons stimulate thoughts, and thoughts pass briefly through the mind; are disjointed, change swiftly. So Mrs. Woolf breaks up her sentences, gathers impressions, showers thoughts, in terse phrases and vivid imagery. The only risk her method runs is lack of continuity. The old way in which the character was clearly outlined by a *third person* made a mould that could be seized. We could say 'This is Jacob's'; and the fullness of the mould depended on the novelist's power. Mrs. Woolf provides no mould. And certainly at the end, though Jacob is undoubtedly alive, we do not feel we know him. He is like a man we should have cared to know, but whom we saw only a few times off and on before he died.

But *Mrs. Dalloway* we know. In this novel the new style justifies itself and gains perfection. It is short; one day, in London, this day in June. It should be read quickly, then re-read and read again. Gradually in the brightness of its brilliant impressions a pattern emerges: a few people—representative of rich and poor, of the vain and fanatical and good-humoured, of the joy and sorrow of life. And through them London—modern London with its sights and sounds. In this one day, through their thoughts, reflective and profound as wells, Mrs. Woolf marks out each character's essential traits. For although her morality is all sympathy, although she accepts what is, for herself she holds a standard of values. She accepts experience, but orders it, some higher, some lower. And so she can judge her world with conviction, select its essentials, save it from incoherence, fashion it into a whole.

It is this conviction of the supremacy of intelligence, together with an exquisite scholarship, which makes *The Common Reader* the most satisfying and permanent work in contemporary English literary criticism. It provides for literature what Mr. Clive Bell has provided for painting—a guide, but a guide with judgment. She does not broadcast her feelings under the name of impressions. She throws a bright light on the *object*, and its immanent principles flash out. Not only the moderns are clarified—but the Brontës, Jane Austen, Evelyn, Montaigne. Her essay on the Pastons is the best introduc-

tion to the Letters. She uses their writings to recreate their life. And those unlearned in Greek should refrain from 'On not knowing Greek.' They would have to begin at once.

THE BENEDICTINES. By Dom David Knowles. (Sheed & Ward, 2/6 net.)

A volume in the 'Many Mansions' series of concise and popular monographs on the principal Religious Orders. In the book before us Dom David Knowles sets forth in an able manner the essential spirit of Benedictinism and discusses its varied manifestations. It is an attractive account of the Benedictine ideal by one who has that ideal very much at heart, and we recommend very cordially Dom David's interesting pages of lucid exposition and candid self-criticism. J.M.

THE IDEA OF VALUE. By John Laird, M.A., Regius Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Aberdeen. (Cambridge: at the University Press; 18/-.)

It has been said that philosophy is but a toilsome and pedantic way of discovering what common sense always takes for granted. In so far as it is the function of philosophy to give rational and scientific justification to our intuitions the taunt is a truism. It is for this reason that a philosophy which fails to fulfil this function and which concludes in fantastic paradox will ever have more attraction as mental entertainment than the traditional philosophy of common-sense. But when the commonplace has disappeared in the litter heaped up by sophistication, the thinker who attempts to extricate and expose the obvious deserves our gratitude. And there is a certain pleasure in the re-discovery of even the most trite when it has been lost and forgotten.

'If the present volume,' Professor Laird concludes, 'clears a little rubbish away and does not add much more, it will have amply fulfilled its purpose.' Any effort to give some definite significance to the confused concept of value deserves all attention. A cursory reading of this difficult book might suggest that if Professor Laird has cleared away much rubbish, he himself has somewhat smothered the main issue with irrelevances. It is probable that a closer study would do much to modify this criticism; but despite the clarity of much of the detail and the crisp definiteness of the style, the trend of the argument is often hard to follow. But it is clear that Professor Laird has some very important things to say; and although, at the end of it all, we are only put on the road 'towards a conclusion,' it is