

persecuting Mexican state. Ought he to relieve the faithful of the scandal of his life; or is it more important that he should stay, to give them God? Finally he does escape; the old sleek life beckons him; and he turns back at the call of a dying man, knowing that he is walking into a trap, still weak, still shivering, still tortured by his own worthlessness and sin.

The skill with which the story is built up is outstanding: the Mexican scene, the heat and the squalor; the vivid, terrible, contrast provided by the passages from the pretty plaster-saint life of the other martyr; the figure of Padre José, married and settled down to a life of humiliation on a Government pension; the cold idealism of the Red lieutenant; the recurring portrait of the priest himself in earlier days; the scandal of ecclesiastical commercialism ('The boy, father, has not been baptised. The last priest who was here wanted two pesos. I had only one peso. Now I have only fifty centavos'); all these things are organic elements in a single vision, gradually achieved, of extraordinary intensity and depth. It needed great skill to write such a book; but it needed more than skill. That is why it is one of the most moving novels, and one of the most illuminating, that one has read for a long time.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

'WHAT IS LITERATURE?' By Charles du Bos. (Sheed and Ward; 5s.)

To attempt to provide an answer to the question 'What is Literature?' is to join oneself to a distinguished line of critics: Arnold, Sainte-Beuve, Coleridge, de Gourmont. 'I would have no right to approach the question at all,' M. du Bos rightly says, 'if I pretended that I am not in possession of at least the lineaments of an answer.' There are two fundaments of his answer which are presupposed by any real aesthetic: the objectivity of beauty and the exemplarity of God: 'beauty is *objective* before being *subjective*,' and the response of the soul 'depends upon the immutable objectivity of the appeal addressed'; and 'the mystery of Beauty is tributary of God's presence . . . and herein lies the deepest ground not only for the objectivity of Beauty, not only for its immutability, but for all the mysterious truths residing in the essences of the things of Beauty themselves.' It is a pity that, starting from such premises as these, the criticism of M. du Bos should show all those failures into which all criticism so easily falls, and perhaps especially French criticism: his language lacks critical precision, and, at those moments where he approaches the

centre of his subject, he takes refuge in quotation, hiding from immediate reality in rhapsodic intuitions. The very objectivity of beauty has the effect, apparently, of removing us from reality: it 'stirs in us the whole of dreamland.' It is, perhaps, this conception of literature as the means of entering into dreamland which accounts for his preoccupation with the poetry of Keats and Shelley, and for his being able to call Mr. Charles Morgan's *The Fountain* a masterpiece, an *absolute* novel. There is a certain lack of balance in M. du Bos' criticism: he is rightly insistent upon the timeless qualities of literature, but has no mention of the equally important 'sense of his own age,' which T. S. Eliot has shown to be present in all the greatest poets; and his insistence upon beauty and joy as criteria of greatness in literature must surely exclude work whose value has been recognised.

This, however, does not prevent his having many valuable things to say. The book gives contact with a man of great learning and wide sympathies, for which it will be read with pleasure even by those who believe that literature is a passage to something nearer than dreamland.

LUKE TURNER, O.P.

MEN, WOMEN, AND PLACES. By Sigrid Undset. (Cassell; 7s. 6d.)

The majority of these essays by the great Norwegian novelist are to do with England—with English writers, characters or scenes. One of the most delightful is an account of Margery Kempe of Lynn, whose strange career of religious exploration led her in her old age to Norway and the Baltic towns of the fifteenth century. Another is based upon the records of the Blundell family, whose vicissitudes are an ample illustration of what was happening to English Catholics in the seventeenth century. Lucius Cary is another of the English figures of that period to whom the writer's sympathies have gone out: her essay on his sufferings in the Civil War forms a clear-cut post-script to Matthew Arnold's famous study. But one could wish that, like Arnold, she had quoted the long and lovely prose elegy which, in the *History of the Rebellion*, Clarendon dedicated to this the dearest of his friends.

But the full vigour of Sigrid Undset's thought appears even more strikingly in such a study as that of D. H. Lawrence, or of modern Scandinavian spiritualist writers. Her analysis of the nineteenth century upper-middle-class dilution of Christianity from which these aberrations derive is especially clear.