

The horror of the tale lies in the interposition of a group of sensation-hungry people in the Florentine villa, from the luxury of which the spirit of Eustace Barnack has been separated by sudden death, who insist on holding séances, before the wretched man has been buried, in order to enjoy the excitement of communicating with him, not because they love him, but because they cannot endure the boredom of the material comfort for which he and they have long since bartered all other good.

The centre of this group, through whom the whole story is told, is Sebastian Barnack, a boy of seventeen, already a poet of unusual gifts and accomplishments, a nephew of the dead man.

Alternately unhappy and ecstatic, Sebastian becomes the victim of his own temperament and of the half-insane hedonism of the society into which his uncle has brought him. All this is presented with the glittering satire familiar to readers of Mr. Huxley's earlier books. The scene is set back twenty years and changes from an upper middle class, almost ascetically Humanist family-life on Primrose Hill to the aesthetic atheism of moneyed English society in Italy. In the background, and drawn with less precision and realism, moves the figure of Bruno Rontini, the antithetical embodiment of everything Eustace Barnack was not. Rontini's death is the entrance into life for Sebastian. It happens ten years after Bruno had been thrown into prison on suspicion of complicity in an anti-Fascist plot. The book closes with a succession of extracts from Sebastian's diary, made during an air-raid in London. Here the detailed satire and the elegant perspective down which Mr. Huxley has remembered post-war folly, give place to an impressionism—perhaps pointillisme is a more exact analogy—which is not altogether satisfactory. Absorbing as the final chapter is, it makes too sudden a transition from the alternating depth and shrillness of those preceding it, so that this book, in the greatest sense the greatest of his novels, is at the same time not so good technically or artistically as some of its predecessors.

NAOMI ROYD SMITH.

FOSSETT'S MEMORY. By Christopher Hollis. (Hollis and Carter; 9s.)

A welcome but not very substantial memory. It serves as the occasion for his brother-in-law to record his conversations with friends and relatives of Robert Fossett; these are interesting enough, sometimes very serious: Mrs. Fossett quotes Virgil gracefully and Michael Paravane indicates something of the meaning of Catholic doctrine. The blurb correctly describes them as 'gradually feeling their way out of confusion,' but progress is still slow and somewhat uncertain, so that it is difficult to see in what the 'coherent and courageous philosophy of life' will consist. It was salutary for Virgil to hope, and to know that 'somehow or other the gentle things win in the end,' but we should feel happier about

the salvation of twentieth-century Englishmen if Michael and his fellow-Catholics could remind them a little more violently of supernatural hope and of the manner in which Divine Gentleness Incarnate has already secured the victory.

EDWARD QUINN.

ALL HALLOWS' EVE. By Charles Williams. (Faber; 8s. 6d.).

Mr. Charles Williams was versed in theology as well as literature, and this novel is as interesting under the first heading as under the second. Simon the Clerk, an adept in black magic, finds himself, as he approaches the final step to world power, opposed by four people, one of whom is already dead. This giant conflict between good and evil is the stuff of the story, a story which is theologically informative and formative as well as dramatically exciting; and it involves a description of the growth to perfection and to the utter disintegration of evil, respectively, of the two girls Hester and Evelyn, both of them killed in a plane crash just before the story begins. It is here that one finds one of the particularly interesting suggestions so skilfully and persuasively conveyed by Mr. Williams: the idea that, like the 'pain of loss,' the 'pain of sense' is no arbitrary punishment but the logical consequence of the sinner's sins, those idols to which he has given allegiance in this life, and which thereafter more and more completely dominate and determine him, while at the same time the material on which the appetites were formerly fed is no longer available. So Evelyn, whose passion was mean and cruel gossip, endlessly streaming from her lips, can now find no-one to listen to her, while the torrent itself becomes more and more rapid, degraded, and compulsive, so that the pain in her 'lungs' becomes for her indeed a fire of hell. Hester, on the other hand, finds through purgatorial experience the fullness of love and therefore its power—the power that can even harrow hell.

Mr. Williams wrote not only with deep insight and rightness of imaginative detail, but also with a power of suggesting and sustaining atmosphere which must make his story plausible even to readers who do not share his theological premisses. Occasionally the involution of the style makes the meaning of a sentence obscure at a first reading.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

POETRY LONDON, Number 10. Edited by Tambimuttu. (Nicholson and Watson; 15s.).

There appear to be at least 150 poems in this solid volume, which is intended to give 'a cross-section of new poets'—that is, poets whose work has not appeared in print at all, or has not yet appeared in *Poetry London*. The editor says that he has had the idea of such a collection in mind since 1939, and one can agree with him that it was bound to be valuable—as a document. No other value could