

GOD'S PAUPER, by Nikos Kazantzakis; Bruno Cassirer; 21s.

Biographies, generally speaking, tend to be unreliable in that they often more accurately reveal the author's personality than the subject's reality. *God's Pauper* is a life that disclaims being a biography at all, which is perhaps a safer line for an author to adopt. Nevertheless, it is an historical novel and, much as one can say in favour of historical novels, they do present dangers of their own making. In the hands of a less profound philosopher than Kazantzakis, an historical novel about St Francis would follow the usual lines of the accepted interpretation of the character, merely filling in with suitable, but unimportant dialogue. But here the author, several times a candidate for the Nobel Prize, sets a different and much more difficult problem; for he himself was a philosopher. He studied in Paris under Henri Bergson, after completing his course in law at the university of Athens. He finished his studies in Germany and Italy and then his travels took him to Spain, England, Russia, Egypt, Palestine, China and Japan. For a short time during the war, he was Minister of State in Greece and then became Director of the Bureau of Translation from the classics for UNESCO. Apart from Homer, Aeschylus and Nietzsche, he maintained that Bergson was the greatest influence in his life.

It has been said of his novels – the best known in England are *Zorba the Greek* and *The Last Temptation* – that the characters were contrived to illustrate various maxims of his own philosophical thought. Hence his analysis of St Francis, deep though it would seem to go, may or may not be a true interpretation of the inner life of the saint – that is the fictional part of the book.

It is superbly written and well translated (by P. A. Bien), the work of a high artistic order, formed by a tender and firm hand. Albert Schweitzer, to whom this book is dedicated as 'the Francis of our era', once wrote, 'Since I was a young boy, no author has made such a deep impression upon me as Nikos Kazantzakis.' Certainly Kazantzakis' work has depth and durable value because he has experienced much and in the human community he has suffered and yielded much. With his upbringing and experience, he is well able to breathe into his prose all the warm airs of the Mediterranean, its light, its colour, its sadness; and, so equipped, he is able to create an admirable setting for the Saint of Assisi.

J. B. DOCKERY, O.F.M.

THE HACK, by Wilfrid Sheed; Cassell; 18s.

To say that Mr Sheed is both an artful and crafty writer is less facetious than it sounds. His high standard of craftsmanship is an immense pleasure and the book is compact, shapely and tightly woven, the theme taut and sustained from the first to the last page. As to his art it is nowhere more impressive than in the brilliant selection and subtlety apparent in his dialogue. Brief conversations between the principal character and his mother-in-law are masterly and achieve

in a few lines what Salinger in *Franny and Zooey* evokes less well in as many pages. Here there is a dryness and acuteness of observation as stimulating as a fine Hock. The setting is depressingly dreary and the characters, even the children, thoroughly unsympathetic and the central character's problem somehow fails to involve the reader. Yet, such is the author's skill that he achieves that essential 'one remove' to another plane that transmutes the whole thing into a work of art. It would be both fascinating, and, one feels, rewarding to see what Mr Sheed would make of a book in which his characters demanded his passionate involvement and some form of vigorous affirmation, always a harder task than the negative, satirical approach and perhaps less acceptable today.

LEIGH LESTER

THE GENESIS OF RELIGION, by Margaret Murray; Routledge; 12s. 6d.

Dr Margaret Murray's own religious belief seems to be pantheistic, 'that unseen overruling Power which Science calls Nature and Religion calls God.' Her thesis is that this belief, which provides all religions with their myth-surrounded core, originates at the point in biological and cultural evolution where man replaced pre-man. The origin of religion was a specifically feminine discovery resulting from woman's consciousness of pregnancy, which she ascribed to the activity of an unseen Power. Woman was then the dominant partner in human progress. The first fixed settlements were composed of women and children (the men being away hunting) and in this matriarchal society the cult of a female deity would emerge long before any idea of a male deity. This latter concept arose probably when the men abandoned hunting for farming and joined the women in the fixed settlements.

This book does not explain old myths; it manufactures new ones instead. The knowledge we have of the social structure and religious beliefs of modern food-gathering and hunting peoples (such as the Australian aborigines) entirely contradicts Dr Murray's reconstruction. The author of *Genesis* had a truer understanding of the essential complementarity of the sexes in the determination of human destiny than can be found in this projection backwards of feminism.

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