

profoundest work. This study, written as a diary, of a man obsessed by avarice and hate, reveals in all its terrifying power the extent of M. Mauriac's analysis of the mystery of human iniquity. It is an astonishing achievement to have drawn so consistent a picture of meanness and malice, and yet to have retained a fundamental sympathy for a man's misery and his need of God. If the theme of pity be the ultimate one of a novelist who is a Christian, then with *The Knot of Vipers* M. Mauriac has spoken definitively. With economy and grace he evokes a closed world with the confines of his own Landes. And the circle of his family, conventionally Christian, conventionally cruel, that surrounds the old and weary lawyer, brings out the dilemma of faith for the faithless. Reconciliation comes at last, not violently, improbably, but out of a perennial human need, and the knot of hatred is indeed unravelled.

Mr Baxter's first novel, a grim and violent picture of war in the Burma jungle, has nothing explicitly to say of God or religion. But, paradoxically, such is its theme. The central figure is a man whose unhappiness, whose cowardice even, finds expression in squalid infidelities, in a nervous tic of personal futility, but Mr Baxter, with extraordinary confidence in the telling, exposes the true root of his failure and never gives it a name. But unlike Mauriac's lawyer, Captain Kent is a man who has never known the truth he longs for. He is representative of the world we know, whose unknown God is far away, and the neurosis of failure is all there is to recall. This is not a happy novel; it is certainly an important one. 'Look down in mercy to thy people who cry to thee': Mr Baxter does not give the whole quotation, for the men of the world he draws cry indeed, but as yet it is to an unknown God they cry.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR. By Edouard Perroy. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 30s.)

One's first reaction on reading this book is to wonder why it has not been translated before. The answer is probably to be found in the fact that the text has been revised and bibliographical additions have been made for the benefit of the English version. Mr W. B. Wells has given us a competent and solid translation. The book, it must be emphasised, is not merely a military history, for the social, economic and constitutional elements of the great struggle are interwoven to make up the whole story, and it should be scarcely necessary to stress the rare skill and learning of an author who can thus move with confidence in the history both of France and England. Moreover, the book itself is so planned and written that detail never obscures but rather illumines the main outline, and the personalities of the chief actors stand out remarkably clearly against the crowded events and

incidents. Professor Douglas contributes an introduction which is entirely admirable to a book without which no library, however modest its pretensions, can face the future.

T. CHARLES EDWARDS

THE LIFE AND SOUL OF PARACELSUS. By John Hargrave. (Gollancz; 16s.)

Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombast Paracelsus—superb name for an alchemist. This will surely be a fascinating account of dabblings in black magic. One starts to read eagerly. The writer's style is unusual, brisk, breezy, possibly deliberately bombastic and very outspoken, especially on the subject of the critics, throughout four centuries, of the astonishing Paracelsus. Even in these days, it seems, a defender of Paracelsus is liable to be 'smirked at, if not insulted'.

Somewhat daunted, the reader, prepared to repress even the slightest smirk, forges ahead, misgivings increasing as the style that at first seems breezy becomes distressingly vulgar. A sick Canon's room, for instance, is described as having about it 'the whispering ghost-words of the solemn ordinances of the Church: the gibble-gabble of Latin prayers, chants, masses, liturgies rattled off *holus-bolus Corpus Christi—isn't it time for supper yet?*' [Author's italics.]

An angry but dignified letter from Paracelsus to the Town Council of Basle is described 'as though he "blew a raspberry" through the keyhole of the Council Chamber, and shouted: Now then, you boobs—I'm telling' you!—I'll stand no more of it—so you'd better get crackin', see?'

Language like the above is possibly meant to be cleverly satiric. Its progressive accumulation clouds and obscures the life and soul of Paracelsus; one wearies of Mr Hargrave. How refreshing to turn to Browning's dramatic poem on the great alchemist, though Mr Hargrave disapproves of it as 'unreal and utterly misleading'. He may be right, of course, for Mr Hargrave has spent many years of research on the subject. There may be many who will prefer Mr Hargrave's bibulous, cantankerous Paracelsus to Browning's noble and dignified philosopher. And how different they are. The dying Paracelsus in Browning's poem says:

... I press God's lamp  
Close to my breast—its splendour, soon or late  
Will pierce the gloom. I shall emerge one day.

Mr Hargrave's concluding words are:

'Immortal Paracelsus—"always drunk, always lucid!"  
Drunk on the Dewdrink of the Stars.'

The book is dedicated, no doubt significantly, 'To Those Who Know'.

K.M.