

may be questioned; it is a just qualification of the story as he has told it.

Ivo THOMAS, O.P.

APE AND ESSENCE. A Novel by Aldous Huxley. (Chatto & Windus; 7s.6d.)

This book is described by the publishers as a cautionary tale: a picture of the post-atomic-war age. But the caution is robbed of its power, partly because the picture itself is unconvincing, repellent without being plausible, indignant but not coherent; partly because the survivor and representative of the old order is hardly more dignified or attractive than the grave-looting, devil-worshipping, sex-obsessed new-agers. And this is a deeper reason than the technical failure of the book for wishing that it had never been published. The positive side of what Mr Huxley has had to say in his recent works is so vitally important that it is a tragedy when he ruins his case by revealing in ever deeper colours his *horror humani*, his disgust for humanity. If he could see and love the greatness that so often lurks beneath the squalors of humanity, and so could pity the squalors, he could help humanity out of the morass; as it is, those who look to him for guidance in the search for sanity may well be excused if at this point they say to themselves, If this is the attitude to mankind which this search for God instils in us we are better advised to stop—or at least to wait until Mr Huxley for his part has begun to search for man.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

MEN AND WIVES. By I. Compton-Burnett.

MORE WOMEN THAN MEN. By I. Compton-Burnett. (Eyre & Spottiswoode; 7s.6d. each.)

The novels of Miss Compton-Burnett are appearing in a uniform edition, which should make it possible for readers unfamiliar with her work to estimate its importance as a whole. No contemporary writer of fiction has received praise so generous. 'The purest and most original of contemporary English artists', says Miss Rosamund Lehmann; 'one of the most original living writers', says Mr Edwin Muir. And yet she is scarcely known beyond the narrowly circumscribed world of the critics.

The first clue to her novels lies in their titles: *Brothers and Sisters*, *A House and its Head*, *A Family and a Fortune*. and those under review. She writes of family life, of the elaborate life of natural loyalties against a social background that is, one supposes (no dates intrude) Edwardian. The stuff of her fiction is at first sight trivial: in *Men and Wives* the complications in a village centring round its two principal families, in *More Women than Men* the conflicts springing from the life of a staff in a girls' school—but conflicts that relate to husbands, wives, brothers, sisters. Indeed what happens in her novels matters very little, though sheer melodrama—a murder or a suicide—can enter as coolly as you will. The