

century, with its constant amazement at the vastness of this new land. And, as an experienced observer of Argentinian affairs, he comments on recent events with intelligence. He makes full allowance for the inevitability of a Perón and is fair to many of his intentions. He is not swamped by the violent reaction that has necessarily followed Perón's fall, but he shows how hollow was the gimcrack structure (so like the new buildings in Buenos Aires) of a government which promised much but in fact only achieved every sort of bankruptcy. The future of Argentina can scarcely be free from storms, but Mr Pendle's impartial and informed book provides English readers with the means of understanding the past and so of being prepared for what is yet to come.

I.E.

THE MIND AND ART OF COVENTRY PATMORE. By J. C. Reid. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 35s.)

During the last few years the chief Victorian poets have been undergoing a certain revaluation, but one who has consistently escaped serious critical attention has been Coventry Patmore. With *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, Mr Reid has made generous amends. It has a comprehensiveness, firmness and readability about it which makes it one of the best studies of a Victorian poet since the war.

Mr Reid begins by surveying Patmore's depressing reputation, a reputation caught rather exactly in F. L. Lucas's description of him as 'a combination of a Catholic mystic and Colonel Blimp'. He then goes on to consider the influences on Patmore and his thought, the essentials of his philosophy, aspects of his prose, and finally the development and achievement of his poetry. Only in this final section is Mr Reid a little unsatisfactory. There is a certain externality about his treatment of the poetry which is disappointing after such valuable preparatory chapters. Mr Reid's book is certainly a landmark in Patmore studies, but the way is still very much open for a first-hand appraisal of the poetry in the manner of, say, Mr R. P. Blackmur.

Patmore presents the critic of his poetry with special problems. It was significant, I think, that Mr Reid approached the poetry by way of 'the ideas'. Stimulated by the vitality and depth of the ideas, we might tend to attribute the same qualities to the poetry when we find them embodied there. But, of course, there are two things involved here—the poetry and the 'philosophy'—and in Mr Reid's final section they are insufficiently distinguished. In this respect, Patmore raises problems for the critic similar to those raised by Wordsworth. Patmore's 'ideas' are more profound than Wordsworth's, but their presence in his poetry doesn't make it comparable with that of the author of *The*

*Prelude*. When Patmore is not at his best we feel that he is making the depth of 'the thought' do duty for the depth of 'the poem'. Parts of *The Unknown Eros* seem to me open to this charge. 'Thought' cannot be converted into poetry by prosodic skill. Mr Reid puts his finger on Patmore's essential weakness as a poet when he says that 'he was never faced with the kind of intellectual and emotional problems which shake men to the very centre and which in the solving, purge the spirit and refine the personality'.

The great merit of Mr Reid's book is that it drives us into taking fresh stock of Patmore's prose. We have Patmore as literary critic, for instance. He attacks impressionistic criticism in an age which virtually knew no other; he stresses impersonality as a condition of great literature; he points out that 'bad morality is bad art' and this understanding of morality goes far beyond the didactic. Faced with particular judgments he is equally impressive; with regard to Shakespeare, he insists—at a time of Swinburnian ecstasy—on seeing the plays as plays and seeing them whole. As for his contemporaries—there is 'the high pressure' of Rossetti's verse, but 'I find an impression of cold instead of warmth, as if the fire had a salamander instead of a heart at its centre'; and considering his friend Francis Thompson, he praises the technical skill, but points out the 'cheap sublimities'.

But the literary criticism is of minor importance compared with his religious writing. Patmore's constant stress on a full recognition of the implications of the doctrine of the Incarnation, particularly with reference to marriage, is doubly remarkable—for being written when it was, and for enforcing so eloquently the most fruitful of religious speculation today. St Paul's advice, 'Glorify and bear God in your body', might be taken as an epigraph for all of Patmore's work, and if Mr Reid doesn't send us immediately back to reconsider the *Collected Poems*, then he certainly does send us to *The Rod, The Root and The Flower* and makes us see that is a spiritual document with classical status.

IAN GREGOR

RACINE: CONFESSIONS; Unpublished Sonnets. Translated from the French into verse by Walter Roberts. (Mowbrays; 13s. 6d.)

*Confessions* by Racine! One rubs one's eyes on reading such a title! Surely no writer between St Augustine and Rousseau had used this name for a work? But yes! It is Racine's name, not Jean-Jacques's, that stands on the cover. Have we here then a discovery—a collection of religious lyrics by the author of the *Cantiques spirituels*, *Athalie* and other works? Alas! no. There is not a shred of evidence that these anonymous sonnets are by the great playwright. The confused introduc-