

gality of spirit, an industrious craftsmanly frame of mind, of a capacity for joy and love and contemplative thought, and for the practice of the arts. All that is still alive in us yearns towards the South—if it only knew it—but is thwarted by inhuman forces of Science and fog-ridden moralistic Christianity working in collaboration with our diabolical climate. Look at that statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus—no, you will not be able to see it for the glare of advertisements recommending bile-beans. London, the most Christ-conscious city of the world—but it is a phantom figure of Christ looming through the fog and rain with which it is haunted. And indeed it *is* perhaps very significant that a procession of the Salvation Army stationing itself in some square at Arles or Tarascon is an unbearable image. Under such skies it is so hard to think that the temptation arises either to vegetate or to resort to the mass-produced thought that comes from Germany; so hard to find suitable diet for the body that one is tempted into mere grossness or else to feed out of tins or out of the hands of scientists. Clubs, arm-chairs, potted meats, indigestion, intolerance, envy—there is no end to the list of evils.

As a guide to the world of Provence this is a superb book, a rich, joyous, learned work of art. As a moral, social essay, its Pied Piping is entirely in the right direction, but its value has been seriously impaired by a mood of irresponsibility. It is not for the Troubadour to engage directly in theological, any more than in economic spade-work operations. But he must not hinder those others whose painful duty it is to do so. Mr. Ford Madox Ford, however, loyal Papist although he means to be, has not seemed to mind if in his gambolling he has embroiled quite a fair number of fundamental Christian principles. He has carried his sympathy for the Provençal Troubadours to the naughty length of playing at being himself some sort of semi-pelagian. This is unfair to his readers; it is to court the risk of being put on the Index!

RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

THE TRIPLE THINKERS. By Edmund Wilson. (Oxford University Press; 10s. 6d.)

Mr. Edmund Wilson's new book opens with an attractive account of the author's meeting with the late Paul Elmer More, who, with Professor Irving Babbitt, was one of the intellectual leaders of the elder generation in America.

'A man of true spiritual vocation,' writes Mr. Wilson, 'unable to remain a simple rationalist but prevented by a Protestant

education and an obstinate hard-headed common sense from finding a basis in the mysticism of Rome, he devoted long and diligent years to establishing an historical tradition *which would justify his peculiar point of view* (italics mine).

This seems to me to be a good statement of the dilemma of More's generation which was perpetually oscillating between *moralisme* and *littérature* (More recognized Baudelaire's power, but found him unsatisfactory 'as a guide to life'!), without being able to find any certain basis for judgment in life or art, and which was finally driven into eclecticism like More himself, or into barren abstractions like Babbitt's 'humanism.' It is against this background—the collapse of the old puritan tradition and the failure of the new eclecticism—that Mr. Wilson's own studies must be seen. For like many of his contemporaries, Mr. Wilson has tried to find a solution of the difficulty in a Marxist philosophy. But though he considers that 'Marxism is something new in the world,' Mr. Wilson is too good a critic to allow his literary judgment to be distorted by the dogmatic application of hard and fast rules. Indeed, the title of his book (which is taken from Flaubert's dictum: 'What is the artist if he is not a triple thinker?') is an explicit challenge to the cruder assumptions of left wing critics. In an essay on 'Marxism and Literature,' he points out that Marx, Engels, and even Lenin were men of sensibility who were genuinely interested in literature and were constantly warning their followers against the dangers of tendentious writing; and he contrasts this attitude with the crude censorship exercised by Stalin and his friends. While he thinks that Marxism can 'throw a great deal of light on the origins and social significance of works of art,' he declares that 'Marxism by itself can tell us nothing about the goodness or badness of a work of art' and 'the leftist critic with no literary competence is always trying to measure works of literature by tests which have no validity in that field.'

The essay on 'Flaubert's Politics' is an interesting application of Mr. Wilson's own theory to a concrete instance. He has no use for the view that Flaubert was a mere aesthete without any understanding of contemporary problems, and argues that he 'owed his superiority to those of his contemporaries—Gautier, for example, who professed the same literary creed—to the seriousness of his concern with the large questions of human destiny.' In a comparison between Flaubert and Marx he says: 'To-day we must recognize that Flaubert had observed something of which Marx was not aware. We have had the opportunity to see how even socialism which has come to power as

the result of a proletarian revolution has bred a political police of almost unprecedented ruthlessness and all-pervasiveness—how the socialism of Marx himself, with its emphasis on dictatorship rather than on the democratic process, has contributed to produce this disaster.' *L'éducation sentimentale* is therefore seen to be a profound criticism of weaknesses of practical socialism; and it is excellently summed up as 'the tragedy of nobody in particular, but of the poor human race itself reduced to such ineptitude, such cowardice, such commonness, such weak irresolution—arriving, with so many fine notions in its head, so many noble words on its lips, at a failure which is all the more miserable because those who have failed are hardly conscious of having done so.'

The most substantial of the other essays—the studies of Henry James, Pushkin, Bernard Shaw, and the American writer, John Jay Chapman—possess the same qualities of lucid exposition combined with acute comment which distinguished Mr. Wilson's admirable study of modern tendencies, *Axel's Castle*, which was published seven years ago. In the long essay on 'Bernard Shaw at Eighty' he exposes the inconsistencies of that writer's political ideas and praises the artist at the expense of the pamphleteer. He points out that it is the 'theme of the saint and the world which has inspired those scenes of Shaw's plays which are most moving and most real on the stage'; but it is a little curious to find him describing that embarrassingly sentimental performance, *Saint Joan*, as 'the first genuine tragedy that Shaw had written.' 'In Honour of Pushkin' (which is followed by a translation of *The Bronze Horseman*) seems to me to be an admirable introduction to a writer of whom, unfortunately, most of us know too little.

One of the things which makes this book refreshing is its author's nationality. It is characteristic of the best American criticism that it approaches European authors from a new angle and is usually free from the preconceptions which sometimes hamper European critics. On the other hand, the romantic attitude of the American towards 'action' occasionally produces some curious judgments. Mr. Wilson, for example, is altogether too kind to Hemingway and Mairaux; and it is startling to find a second-rater like Dreiser bracketed with Balzac and Dickens. He is taken in by Miss Millay's bogus lyricism; and the interesting study of A. E. Housman's limitations as a man and his achievement as a scholar is followed by a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the very respectable minor talent which produced *The Shropshire Lad*.

MARTIN TURNELL.