

by St John-Perse; both language and verse seem at first to be too loose, but the total effect is coherent and not without power. The verse of the 'Orphic Elegies' is tauter, the symbolism, drawn from wider sources, including Chinese, more tightly bound together. Both sequences are impressive, but there still seems to be lacking some punch, some density, which would make them as powerful as they ought to be.

George Seferis<sup>7</sup> and John Peale Bishop<sup>8</sup> are both major poets. It is rash to say this without having the space to enlarge and quote. Seferis first: you can hardly, as some English poets have found out, go wrong with images taken from the scenery of Greece, but in Seferis' poems the land lives, the figures of Greek myth and history speak, and through them (or is it they through him?) he makes his subtle questing explorations of reality, of personal relationships, his symbols and encounters with their clear outlines and ambiguous depths. George Seferis must be, in his own tongue, of the stature of Eliot or Claudel.

John Peale Bishop died in 1947 or 1944, the blurb says the first, a prefatory note in the book the second. Whichever it was, it should not have taken more than a decade from his death for the first volume of poems by him to be published in England. He has affinities with Allen Tate, who has written a short introduction, and with John Crowe Ransom, but nevertheless a strongly individual feeling, born of the conflict in him of New England and Southern blood and of the effort not only to hold these together but in focus against the European sources of American life. It is impossible to quote from a longer poem and to quote a short one would not do him justice, but this is quite certainly a book which anyone who takes poetry seriously ought to buy.

ANDREW MARWOOD

## REVIEWS

LE MILIEU DIVIN. By Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. (Collins; 18s.)

This book may be called an approach to the study of what St Paul called the *Plerôma*, that mysterious ultimate Plenitude to which the Christian Revelation bids us look forward. In the previous book the author, writing as a palaeontologist, confined himself, first, to what was strictly 'observable' and did in fact observe within a limited area the evidence for upward changes in phenomena, from the less to the more highly organized, culminating in the 'phenomenon of Man', a self-conscious being. But while he clearly could not invoke knowledge granted by a 'supernatural revelation' (such as redemption from sin, or Grace), neither he nor anyone could be forbidden to speculate and form hypotheses; and Fr Teilhard suggested

<sup>7</sup> *Poems*. By George Seferis. Translated from the Greek by Rex Warner. (The Bodley Head, 15s.)

<sup>8</sup> *Selected Poems of John Peale Bishop*. With an Introduction by Allen Tate. (Chatto and Windus, 12s. 6d.)

that the evolutionary process might have started immeasurably long ago, and even, may be still proceeding into an unfathomable future having an Omega as its mysterious consummation.

Mr Bernard Wall (General Editor of Fr Teilhard's works in English) and his collaborators agree that the word *milieu* cannot be translated, meaning as it does a 'centre-point' radiating outwards, and an environment pressing inwards. The author here starts from God, apart from whom nothing can exist: God exists, and is active, in all created things. How, then, get as near to him as possible? How 'divinize' our actions, our inevitable contacts with material things? Should we not do without them, so far as possible? At least, discount them, by seeking God's intention when perforce I deal with them? Regard them as mere husks containing my God-ward will? Let the mere music, the mere colour, the form fall back into the nothingness from which God drew them? And has that not the language of Christian asceticism and the practice of the great penitential saints? Fr Teilhard is resolute in upholding our constant duty of 'detachment', if only because we are each so 'possessive', so inclined to keep hold of what seems good, to ourselves, and thus retarding the effect of God's action in the world, which draws it ever towards such a unity that he becomes 'All in all' (I Cor. xii. 6; xv. 28). Indeed, since every single item, or force, in our world affects every other, it is unthinkable that the Creator should suffer his manifold creation to drift idly into chaos or stagnation. So with his incessant work in and around us, we must *co-operate*.

But how? In no way other than through Christ, who came first, before all creation—'Yes, in him were created all things—things in heaven, or on earth—things visible and invisible . . . by means of him, and unto him, they all of them are created . . . and in himself do all things hold together . . .' (Col. i. 15-18). Paul strains and struggles to 'present every man brought to his consummation in Christ' (28). It is in Christ that God has made the whole Plerôma of the Godhead to dwell bodily, and it is 'in him that you reach your own fulfilment' (ii. 9). And in Ephesians iv. 13 he prays that we may be formed into a perfect man, having for measure the Plenitude of Christ—of Christ who (Eph. i. 23) is 'fully fulfilling himself in all things'. It is entirely with reference to the vast paradox unflinchingly set before us by St Paul that Fr Teilhard builds the main part of his book—that Jesus Christ, who was to be seen from birth to death in human history, none the less does not consider himself complete until he has incorporated into himself the whole of creation, forming thus the *Christus Totus*, the Great Christ. It is now Christ who is to be 'all and in all' (Col. iii. 11). In the Apocalypse we see the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Church as she is meant to be, descending from above and not only investing the created world, but permeating it, for the Holy Spirit, issuing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, cascades down the jewelled terraces from apex down to the very foundations—as a matter of fact, these being the Prophets and Apostles, that Spirit has always been softly and secretly stealing upwards through the dust-choked crannies in the obstinate rocks in the Mountain till the whole be animated and the Trees of Life spring up everywhere around it—but John cannot

paint every detail in his picture, all of them at once. It is all-important that in explaining the 'mystical' language of St John and St Paul we should not explain it away as vague rhetoric. On the whole of created history *Christus cogitabatur*: as we have already said, he is the Alpha no less than the Omega.

May I add a line in view of the allegedly increased interest in oriental religions noticeable, we hear, especially in America? If we understand aright, this will mean either 'Hindu-Buddhism' or 'Zen' (a Japanese word for a system really imported from China). The latter teaches that man has everything in himself which enables him to attain to 'happiness' without assistance (a sort of 'Pelagian-Taoism', if not what the original Gautama really taught); and the former always implies the gradual de-personalization of one's self and the absorption into Nirvana—a 'puffing out', a de- or ex-spuration. Each is clearly quite opposed to Christianity: for, as Fr Teilhard insists, each is tending to become his full true self, though only through and in Christ.

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THE LOTUS AND THE ROBOT. By Arthur Koestler. (Hutchinson; 25s.)

It would not be difficult—it has often enough been done, in varying degrees of frivolity, sadness, indignation, malice or spleen—to paint a picture of Catholic life in this or that place, drawing on the writings of dubious mystics and sentimental pietists as well as on the superstitions and other disedifying *mores* of the inhabitants, and ignoring what lies behind these things, so as to conclude plausibly but invalidly that 'the world has nothing to learn from Christianity'. Mr Koestler, in this study of India and Japan, gives the impression of having done something of the sort with regard to the East, not through any frivolity or malice but because despite his observant eye he is perhaps rather out of his depth and certainly out of his element.

Out of his depth: he admits that his 'knowledge of the Hindu scriptures is sketchy', and certainly his quotations give no hint of the depth and grandeur of the greatest writings; moreover one cannot but suspect a writer who describes the aristotelean schoolmen *en bloc* as 'sterile and pedantic' of being equally superficial and unreliable in his judgments of Eastern thought.

Out of his element: he scolds the Japanese for being unwilling to 'adopt the matter-of-fact type of thinking and the logical categories' of western thought, and (most revealingly) speaks of the *comforts* of ambiguity; in India he surely misses the point of the contrast between 'heart' and head, and it does not seem to occur to him that his failure to make sense of what he is told by the 'wise men from the East' may be due to his failure to find a clue to *their* way of thinking. Ambiguity (ambivalence, paradox) may be, not a comfortable evasion, but the stuff of all symbol-thinking (the simplest study of western mysticism for example would have shown him how unconscious and hyperconsciousness co-exist); the language of symbol and paradox is in fact characteristic not merely of the Hindu scriptures but in great measure of the Bible as well; again, Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal and a