

The second is unknown, and so requires faith—  
 The kind of faith that issues from despair.  
 The destination cannot be described;  
 You will know very little until you get there;  
 You will journey blind. But the way leads toward possession  
 Of what you have sought for in the wrong place.

*The Cocktail Party* marks no new or spectacular advance in Mr Eliot's thought, or in his communication of it. It is perhaps more equable in its emphasis, but uniting all its elements of wit and brilliant invention, of sustained poetry and unsparing penetration of character, is the steady rhythm of faith and the knowledge of man's destiny and the price that destiny must command.

THE UNKNOWN DISCIPLE. By Francesco Perri. (Bles; 12s. 6d.)

A novelist who takes the events of biblical history for his theme is courageous if not always well-advised. *The Unknown Disciple* tells the imaginary history of the young man of St Mark's Gospel who 'fled from them naked' in Gethsemani, and who, according to the tradition, is identified with St Mark himself. In Signor Perri's novel Marcus Adonias is the son of Valerius, the Roman Vice-Governor of Jerusalem, and Micol, daughter of Phabi, a member of the Sanhedrin. He is brought up in Rome, falls in love with Varilia, wife of Valerius Messala, a senator, is initiated into the Dionysian rites and is exiled to Palestine where he serves under Pontius Pilatus. His mother by this is a member of the zealot followers of Eleazar, and the crux of the novel is the killing of Micol by the Romans and the death of Valeria (arrived in Palestine in disguise to rejoin Marcus) at the hands of the zealots.

So far the novel is a melodramatic and often powerful picture of the Roman world, and of its impact on the turbulent East. If one is reminded of Cecil B. de Mille, that is perhaps inevitable, for a novel on such a scale faces the same difficulties as those of a Hollywood mammoth production, and cardboard mingles with stone. But with the appearance of Christ and Marcus's inclusion among his disciples, the contrast between the economy of the Gospels and the novelist's adaptation of their record is perilous to the integrity of the story. Signor Perri is indeed basically faithful to his text, and his devices, ingenious to the point of daring, are generally valuable in underlining the stress between the Roman and Jewish worlds and the revolutionary emergence of Christianity with its threat to both alike. But the reconstruction of Christ's words is weak and verbose: his teaching seems softened in *oratio obliqua*, and the telescoping of the years of his public ministry upsets the balance of the book.

I.E.