

refreshing to have a new book about the Holy Places, albeit by a French Protestant, for the very simple reason that any information at all is an advance. There seems to be nothing very original in the book, as it is mostly made up of references to well-known authors, particularly the Dominican Fathers of St Etienne's—but this is to praise the book. In a very small compass the author gives us the best views on the archaeological problems concerned with the Holy Sepulchre, and the ancient tombs around the city of Jerusalem. He might have brought matters up-to-date by saying something about the agreements which have been reached in the last two years between the Franciscan Fathers and the other bodies with rights in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and a note about the international committee of architects which has been discussing the plans for the restoration of the church might have tempered his castigations on page 83. Altogether a useful and safe summary of the best opinions on some of the archaeological questions dealing with the Holy Places.

CYRIL PLUMMER

THE BOOK CONCERNING PIERS PLOWMAN. Translated into modern English by Donald and Rachel Attwater. (J. M. Dent: Everyman's Library No. 571; 10s. 6d.)

In 1930 Donald Attwater first published his modern English version of the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, that is of the Prologue and the first seven books of the poem, in which we have what seems to have been the poet's original design for his great allegory, the debate about the marriage of the Lady Meed and the pilgrimage of the people, led by Piers, to gain indulgence at the shrine of St Truth. Rachel Attwater has now revised her father's work and has completed it by translating the rest of the poem as it is found in the B-text, where the author, who seems rather to have lost interest in the pilgrimage allegory and to have been seized by an even grander conception, summarily winds up the first part by saying that Truth told Piers that he should gain the indulgence by staying at home and getting on with his work, and then goes on to expound his threefold way of life for Christians, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best.

It was R. W. Chambers, still to be reckoned among the greatest of commentators upon this text, even though, as the poet himself did, he found himself led from his first narrow fields of study into a wider terrain, who said that no one could understand the Middle Ages who did not know Dante and *Piers Plowman*. The contrary is just as true: we cannot begin to understand the poem's greatness until we begin to know something of that teeming life of medieval Europe of which its author wrote, its splendours and miseries, its celestial beauties and its

unmentionable horrors. The Attwaters in this new version have performed a great service to those who cannot read Middle English easily, for if their work is read independently it will give a reasonably faithful account of both the sense and the feeling of the original, whilst, better still for those who will take the trouble, it will serve as a reliable guide if it is read together with the original. Their work is a welcome antidote to the deplorable catch-penny vulgarity with which others have presented this priceless treasure of our literature to modern readers. It must be conceded that this new rendering is not itself easy: the punctuation is, deliberately, no doubt, as capricious and vague as that of the manuscripts themselves, we are supplied with neither English nor sources for the many Latin tags, which, rightly, are preserved in the text, and, occasionally, we may think that the translators have needlessly retained, unglossed, features of the original vocabulary—'toft', 'kenned', 'bride', 'though me search', 'mould'—which will puzzle and often may mislead. Yet such difficulties are endowed with a moral value, for they should teach those who read this version that if we wish to derive true profit and pleasure from *Piers Plowman* we must make the same effort as for Dante or Camoens or any other great medieval writer; we must master the poet's own tongue.

To those who may question that this is worth while, one would recommend, as an introduction to this poem's grandeur, a reading of Passus XI in Rachel Attwater's rendering. Here we are away from the heavy-handed and to us often tedious allegory, on heights where we can descry the poet's moral greatness and his awful visions of earthly and heavenly beauty, his tenderness for the outcasts and the misfits of the world, his solemn elucidation of the mysteries of our creation and redemption, his delight in the wonders of the natural order. We may justly compare with Tauler's delicately perfect simile of the growth of the child in the womb the loving account which we have here of the wooing and mating and building of the birds: and then we are led on to one of humanity's great, despairing cries over its own witnessless and lawlessness, as the dreamer, seeing the fairness and accord of all else under the heavens, demands of Reason:

'Why followest thou not man and his mate that no mishap them attend?'

ERIC COLLEDGE

THE GREAT TUDORS. Edited by Katherine Garvin. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 25s.)

ELIZABETHAN QUINTET. By Denis Meadows. (Longmans; 15s.)

FOUR WORTHIES. By Wallace Notestein. (Jonathan Cape; 18s.)

There is no slackening in interest in Tudor studies on either side of the Atlantic, and these books are typical of the present trend, away from