

sterility of abstract art, in the particularisation of coloured geometrical shapes. Unless, as Mrs Gray suggests, he turns as Rossetti did, to the illustration of the myths and legends of literature an alternative now discredited but one which produced the lasting wonders of Greek, medieval and renaissance art.

JANET CLEEVES

LEON BLOY: *A Study in Impatience*. By Albert Béguin. Translated by Edith M. Riley. (Sheed and Ward; 12s. 6d.)

This happily translated book will be an excellent introduction to the mind of Léon Bloy—that violent, provocative, disconcerting, and yet challenging and most appealing, man and writer, whose influence on spirits attuned to his own burning spirit was so intense and far-reaching. Indeed, if he had done no more than bring about the conversions of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain his interest for us would have been enormous. But they are only outstanding members of the group of friends and disciples who gathered round Bloy in his later years: Pierre Termier, Pierre van der Meer, the abbés Roblot and Léonce Petit, Frédéric Brou, Jean de la Laurencie, the painter Rouault, for example. As one of them wrote, 'those who had seen him came back again for his words and still more for the eloquence of his silent presence'. For they had perceived 'the essential splendour of his work' in spite of the strange medley of matters swept along in its torrential flood.

Madame Maritain's vivid memories are fresh in our minds: the 'greatness, simplicity, imperturbable conviction, contempt for contingencies, singleminded purpose' which made him resemble an Old Testament prophet; but also the violence and intolerance which made Barbey d'Aurevilly compare him to a cathedral gargoyle 'pouring out the waters of heaven on the just and the unjust'—the waters of heaven, and the anger of God interpreted by the personal indignation of the prophet.

The Historical Introduction specially written for the English translation is exceedingly useful. The biographical sketch gives a clue to much in a writer all whose work is a revelation of his personality—his 'identity' to use his own word. Bloy entitled one set of his journals *The Pilgrim of the Absolute*, and he wrote once to Jean de la Laurencie: 'God had given me the sense, the need, the instinct, of the Absolute . . . a very rare gift that I felt even in my childhood, a faculty more dangerous and torturing than genius itself, since it implies the constant wild appetite for what does not exist on earth and since it isolates one endlessly'. This instinct for the Absolute took strange and disquieting forms in his boyhood—he might have been another Rimbaud; but from the time of his conversion he could be satisfied, for himself and others, with nothing less than absolute fidelity to supernatural truths. The torturing longing made the spectacle of unheroic living, especially among professing Christians, an abomination to him. Hence his utter intolerance ruthlessly expressed of those who fell short of so exacting a standard; and his intense effort, through all

the resources of a powerful pen, to rouse them from their lethargy.

M. Béguin appropriately calls his book *A Study in Impatience*. He analyses Bloy's thought under four headings, which turn out to be variations on the one central theme. 'Initiation into Suffering': in God's mysterious and loving dispensation Christ had to suffer; all suffering is a participation of the Mystical Body in his agony and must go on to the end of time—did not our Lady herself weep at La Salette? (We cannot overrate the importance of La Salette in Bloy's life). Only through suffering shall each individual achieve his 'identity'. 'Poverty, Money and the People of Israel': wealth for Bloy was an evil 'not so much because it spelt unfairness as because it dimmed the transparency of one's being and impeded that vision of the Truth which could be obtained only by renunciation of earthly possessions and by love of suffering' (p. 79). The mystery of the Jews will not be resolved until their conversion—destined to come about on the eve of the Catastrophe (for which Bloy longed with all his impatience) which will end temporal history: we cannot even indicate here the trend of his personal and visionary exegesis of the Scriptures as the key to history. 'The Symbolism of History and the Soul of Napoleon': Bloy's historical work is permeated with the idea that the greatest individuals like the least are only special cases of the realisation of an 'identity' symbolical of the hidden super-natural destiny of mankind. And that is also the case with nations—to wit France in her war martyrdom (Bloy was referring to 1914, but his writing is entirely apposite to this last war). One would like to quote here *Sanglot dans la nuit* (pp. 220-1); or in a different tone the pages (207-8) describing a Society from which God is absent; or again examples of Bloy's intensity of prayer. Instead we repeat once again his own words, famous words which sum the whole matter up: 'Il n'y a qu'une tristesse, c'est de n'être pas des saints'—there is only reason for being sad, not to be a saint.

MARY RYAN

THE DOUBLE IMAGE. By Rayner Heppenstall. (Secker and Warburg, 8s. 6d.)

DEATH, WHERE IS THY VICTORY? By Daniel-Rops. (Cassell; 10s. 6d.)

Ten years ago, writing of Mr Heppenstall's book of poems, *Sebastian*, the present reviewer complained that echoes of Gerard Hopkins, and an acquaintance with the lesser names of the Roman martyr-ology, have no meaning apart from the faith in which a Jesuit called Hopkins lived, and for which a pope called Anicetus shed his blood'. It is not always easy to defend a judgment, yet Mr Heppenstall's latest book—'a study of the Christian myth in the work of Léon Bloy, Georges Bernanos, François Mauriac, Jacques Maritain and Paul Claudel'—retains that knowledgeable interest in Catholic preoccupations, allied to a total rejection of their validity, which made *Sebastian* so baffling.

The author thinks his 'a good-tempered, a light-hearted, a strictly