

THE FRENCH NATION. From Napoleon to Pétain. 1814-1940. By D. W. Brogan. (Hamish Hamilton; 25s.)

It is always a pleasure to welcome the return of the honorary citizen of La Roche Blanche from his transatlantic pursuits to an earlier love. The brisk narrative pace, the wider view, and the easily-worn omniscience are refreshing in these days of doctorate theses published and unashamed, with their impenetrable jungles of footnotes, and those who know the author's *Development of Modern France* will approach this book with high hopes. They will find, regrettably, that it is not exactly vintage Brogan. The bouquet is there, but the wine has little body. *The French Nation* gives the impression of being a history put together in haste, an oft-told tale with little material that is new to justify its being told yet again.

Its good qualities lie in its large outline and its mixture of the political, religious, economic and social factors which is vigorously and clearly done. There are some trenchantly Bellocian phrases in the military episodes (the author cannot refrain from twice calling bayonet charges the 'furia francese'); there are several neat summaries in a line or two of the problems of a decade; and the classical tag is dropped at just the right time and with the wonted aplomb. Yet Homer nods not infrequently, even in his style. There are occasional gallicisms ('in the limit of the possible', 'To M. Edouard Herriot succeeded M. Edouard Daladier . . .', 'The future was to men like Rouher'), downright clumsiness ('So was not France . . .') and lesser irritations like the pedantic and constant use of 'pacifacists' and 'pacificism'. These might be glossed over, but there are also mistakes of detail of a kind which suggest either too rapid writing with slipshod revision or the handing over of proof-reading to a secretary—like the mistitling of René Clair's *Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*, Cocteau's rechristening as 'Jacques', the mis-spelling of 'Tzara', *portefeuille* with a hitherto unrecorded gender, and a gross misquotation of one of the best-known lines in the whole of Racine (p. 90). Musset's swoon on hearing Rachel is made infinitely more probable if she began, as Professor Brogan makes her: 'Ariane, ma soeur, par quel malheur blessée . . .'

Again, for a work aimed presumably at the general reader (most of its quotations are translated, and there are no references, and no bibliography), the whole thing is too allusive, too literary. The reader well acquainted with French literature will enjoy catching Professor Brogan's asides, and feeling pleased with himself as he does so. But the general reader who wants to find out something about the history of France in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries *before* acquiring a knowledge of the French novel since Balzac, will make little sense of the following:

'This was the theme of Barrès's novel that scandalized the simple. To enter German service was one way to serve Alsace. René Bazin might write a more naïve novel on the opposite side, but *Les Oberlé* was to *Au Service de l'Allemagne* as Bazin was to Barrès.' (p. 262.)

He will also, quite likely, be misled by the intentional and indiscriminate use of characters from Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and Proust as real individuals in an historical context. This may be magnificent, but it is hardly history.

In his treatment of Church questions, Professor Brogan is on the whole reasonable and just, though he displays an unfortunate tendency to regard the French Church as a continually piaculative institution, having to expiate the faults of her past and never quite catching up with herself; three of his paragraphs dealing with the Church at different periods begin: 'The Church had now to pay . . .'. Many of the hierarchy in the early part of the nineteenth century, like Mgr de Quélen, were no doubt too closely wedded to an authoritarian past even to envisage the possibility that the state of affairs before 1789 had disappeared for ever. They had their counterparts in this century in figures like that of Cardinal Billot during the *Action Française* episode. But Professor Brogan could have shown much more fully that there existed quite early in the nineteenth century a Catholicism with a social as well as a political conscience, even though its leaders, with the exception of Ozanam, are not among the more familiar names of the period. And he ignores the Church in the twentieth century (apart from the flirtation and conflict with Maurras) even though the book goes up to 1940; yet it is this century which has seen the revivals—scriptural, patristic, liturgical, social and literary—which have made France, although she may be a 'pays de mission', the eldest daughter of the Church in a more genuine way than she has been for centuries.

Sometimes, too, Professor Brogan leaves us in the dark about his verdict on an institution or an episode. He mentions Solesmes on page 28 as 'the seed of a great tree', on page 123 as not having 'lived up to its promise', and on page 174 he refers to its 'reactionary politics and scholarship'. Even if we presume the adjective does not qualify the second noun, the author never makes clear what the 'great tree'-ness of Solesmes was.

Where the book scores, on the other hand, is in its fulfilment of the promise of the dust-wrapper: 'The achievements of the French genius are not eclipsed by the weakness of the French State'. Readers of *The Development of Modern France* will remember that the author took as his motto these words from the Song of Roland: 'Ne placet Damnedeu ne se angles Que ja pur mei perdet sa valor France' (May it please God and his angels that France be never diminished through me)—showing

that he felt the danger to France's reputation of even the most cordially disposed version of the story he had to tell. By and large the modern history of the governing of France is bound to be a miserable tale, under king or republic; but by telling it against the background of social and artistic development Professor Brogan emphasizes that to know the French *nation* we must look at something other than changes of ministries. My first thought on finishing this book was, Surely we do not need to be told this any more? Surely we do not need to be reminded that Cézanne and Pasteur are phenomena as interesting and significant as Thiers and the scandal of Panama? But in view of what is happening to the arts of government in France at the moment, the reminder is perhaps not so otiose after all.

LOUIS ALLEN

BAUDELAIRE. By Enid Starkie. (Faber and Faber; 50s.)

Dr Starkie's *Baudelaire* could serve as a model of what biography should be: it is both scholarly and readable, a combination not always achieved. So thoroughly acquainted is Dr Starkie with Baudelaire's writings—the less-known prose as well as the poetry—that we regret the brevity of the purely literary analysis; however, a detailed critical study would have demanded another volume, which we hope she may, one day, give us.

She has succeeded admirably in her aim: to study Baudelaire's writings in conjunction with his life and his psychological evolution. With an astonishing vividness, quite free from all sentimentality, she depicts that tragic existence: the endless financial difficulties; the ever-increasing solitude; the acute spiritual conflict between good and evil and that pitiless lucidity which excluded any hope of self-deception. The insight with which Dr Starkie tells the pitiful story of Jeanne Duval is unforgettable; unforgettable, too, the pathetic description of the catastrophic Belgian episode.

Moreover, Dr Starkie is scrupulously just towards Baudelaire's family connections: the much-maligned Aupick, Baudelaire's stepfather, a stern, rather intolerant but essentially upright man; his mother, who loved without always understanding him (and what mother would have rejoiced at the life and worldly prospects of such a son?); Ancelle, the lawyer, fussy, punctilious, tactless, but tirelessly fond of his extremely difficult ward. All these people live, not as monsters of incomprehension and selfishness, but as individuals who acted, like most individuals, often clumsily, stupidly, but with the best intentions.

It is impossible to speak too highly of the delicacy and commonsense which mark Dr Starkie's treatment of Baudelaire's death-bed conversion. The difficulty of dealing with such a subject is obvious: the essential facts are psychological and, clearly, are not available to the literary