

Plotinus

The Philosophy of Plotinus. By William Ralph Inge, Dean of St. Paul's. 2 Vols. 3rd Edition. (Longmans. 21s.)

THE appearance of the third, and, as Dean Inge tells us, the final edition of his great work on Plotinus is a welcome event in literature. The original Gifford Lectures were the outcome of some sixteen years of study, and they dealt with Neoplatonism in the spirit, explicitly, of a disciple, and of one who regarded his subject as a living, not a dead, philosophy. The aphorism as to Christianity carrying off to its hives the honey of Plotinus is well known, and it represents a historical fact.

Neoplatonism is inextricably intertwined with the Christian Faith, to which, indeed, it rendered inestimable services in its exaltation of "the good life," and its adumbration of a Trinity in Unity. Moreover, the Catholic Church recognizes the validity of Plotinus's mystical Ecstasy, and, like Virgil, he became for centuries a sort of seer haunting the frontiers of the Faith. Neoplatonism, at its earliest and best, was vastly more than Harnack's "incomparable cloudland." It was the culmination, as the Dean has said, of seven hundred years of untrammelled Greek thought, and he who would experience anything like Plotinus's final revelation must climb first the most difficult of metaphysical ascents. Nor is that ascent made easier by the Greek of the Enneads, terse and compressed to the last degree. Fortunately, Mr. Stephen McKenna has, as a labour of love, translated all but the sixth Ennead for us. In the ten years' interval between the first appearance of his *Plotinus* and this edition, Dean Inge notes with pleasure the increase of recognition of his author as "one of the greatest names in the history of philosophy." The works of Heinemann, Arnou, and Lossky have appeared. Mr. Whittaker has enlarged his *The Neoplatonists*. Dr. Inge has revised his own book throughout, and has made some hundreds of small emendations. We cannot see how the historical Incarnation fits in with the system of Plotinus, who studiously ignored the idea, but there is no doubt that his system was one of the greatest of all contributions to human thought.

The Game of Anthropometry

Eurydice, or The Nature of Opera. By Dyneley Hussey. (Kegan Paul. 2s. 6d.)

The Theories of Claude Debussy. By Léon Vallas. Translated from the French by Maire O'Brien. (Oxford University Press. 6s. 6d.)

"ONE asks oneself how he could ever have strayed so far as to find pleasure in *opera*, and pass from Louis Gallet to Victorien Sardou, thus propagating the odious heresy that it is necessary to compose for the stage, a thing which can never be reconciled with writing music." This sentence, which is quoted from Debussy's *Monsieur Croche*, is also quoted in the new English translation of Léon Vallas' *The Theories of Claude Debussy*. Through the mouth of M. Croche, Debussy is here expressing his contempt for Saint-Saëns. Perhaps we should not take his critical pronouncements too seriously, for it is obvious that his journalism does not reveal the fastidious sense of style that we find in his music, but it is curious to discover the composer of *Pelléas and Mélisande* making so sweeping a statement. The question of operatic form was one which occupied his mind for many years, and several times he almost abandoned the idea of solving the problem. He was, as we know, violently opposed to the Wagnerian method. M. Vallas sets forth the composer's ideas in this connexion with admirable clarity, and we reach the crux of the matter in this passage: "Music has a rhythm whose secret force directs the development. The emotions of the soul have another, which is more instinctively general, and is influenced by numerous events. The juxtaposition of these two rhythms creates perpetual conflict. They are not simultaneous. Either the music gets out of breath in running after a character, or else the character sits down on a note to allow the music to catch up with him."

Mr. Hussey recognizes this problem in his book *Eurydice*, but he will not admit that opera is a hybrid form of art. By a twist of the meaning of the word *artificial*, he shows that the limitations of the operatic art are its salvation. This, of

course, is not a new idea; indeed, the value of Mr. Hussey's little book lies not so much in any originality of thought as in the lucid statement and arrangement of known truths. He argues that opera, being a distinct form of art, is subject to no other art for its laws, and he is resolutely opposed to the type of musician who affects to be able fully to enjoy an opera by listening to the music and ignoring the action and the spectacle. Without weakening his argument, he might have admitted the fact that a wireless performance of an opera enables untutored people to make acquaintance with the music and thus prepares them for a wider understanding and a richer experience when they enter the opera house. But Mr. Hussey is intent upon following a narrow line and refuses to be distracted by topical questions. This attitude leads him into the error of judging the case of contemporary opera with only English achievements as evidence; and it is this same passion for narrowing the issue that causes him to exaggerate the importance of the orchestral writing in Handel's operas.

Debussy's attitude was otherwise. There was not the smallest detail which he did not take into account in his search for a way which French opera could take without losing its self-esteem. In his case we are left with a tantalizing account of the great difficulties in the way and are given no solution. Mr. Hussey's book is the more comforting to those whose instinct (even, it may be, against their better judgment) is for opera. The difference of outlook between these two authors is such that to follow the middle course is to take the way of comparative safety. That difference is well illustrated by the fact that, whereas Mr. Hussey speaks of "characterization" without telling us precisely what is meant by the word, Debussy describes the same element as "an ill-chosen game of anthropometry."

BASIL MAINE.

Fiction

The "Strange Excitement"

Catherine Foster. By H. E. Bates. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)

The Boroughmonger. By R. H. Mottram. (Chatto and Windus. 7s. 6d.)

Anna Marplot. By Mrs. Fred Reynolds. (Bodley Head. 7s. 6d.)

Dark Hester. By Anne Douglas Sedgwick. (Constable. 7s. 6d.)

The Eternal Forest. By George Godwin. (Phillip Allen. 7s. 6d.)

IN the preface to his *Last Poems*, Mr. A. E. Housman writes of the "strange excitement" that visited him during the making of his poems, and, in the suggestion that he cannot again hope for its coming, hints at the rarity of its appearance. This inspiration, urge, or "strange excitement" is surely the vitalizing factor which turns what would otherwise be merely ephemeral fiction into works of art. A novel that lacks it may yet be a good novel, obedient to the laws of construction and characterization, but, then, its limits are clearly defined. With one exception, the novels of this week lack the "strange excitement"; the exception is *Catherine Foster*, a novel which is described by its author as "the story of a woman who loves her husband's brother." One cannot help feeling that Mr. Bates has given us his own decorative fancy of a woman in love rather than an authentic portrait. There is more of shadow than substance in the book, but it is the shadow of a great beauty. Mr. Bates writes as one who is observing the loveliness of the world for the first time: he speaks of "sprays of fresh lavender, like tiny sheaves of blue barley," and, in a few lines, he captures summer: "Cuckoos in ash trees, meadow pipits and willow wrens from one never knew where, a cornerake at night, all came in with a surprise of notes . . . and on the fringes of the wood one heard the sweetest, sleepest of voices, and with the sound of the doves all earth moved half consciously into summer."

So, half consciously too, does Catherine Foster move into love, revolts from the crudities and meannesses of her husband and finds an outlet from her own urgencies and sensuous need of beauty in the love and sympathy of Andrew Foster. There is very little action in this drowsy and beautiful book: long chapters are devoted to days spent on the river, to days in the woods and evenings of music. The writing throughout is exquisite. Mr. Bates has much of the "capturing quality"

of Katharine Mansfield : what he sees he makes his own, and holds out to us. But the conversations fall short of the general high level ; they are stilted and choppy. Catherine Foster is too much the princess in a fairy tale to speak our language easily.

If Mr. Mottram had not given us *The Spanish Farm* and *The English Miss* we should be very well satisfied with *The Boroughmonger*, which, though it bears no evidence of the strange excitement that impelled its predecessors, is still a pleasant and interesting story. It tells of the adventures of a young Parliamentary candidate in the days of cock fighting and nankeen trousers. As it is, we are a little disappointed. It goes without saying that Mr. Mottram writes well. He has, in his rather Dickensian style, given an admirable picture of life in a Midland town, but his book has an historical rather than a human interest, and, though the account of the election riots and the capturing of Theodore by his opponents are quite exciting, we do not really mind whether or not the young man wins the lady of his heart. In the past, Mr. Mottram's charm has lain in his almost staggeringly truthful depiction of types we have loved to recognize, but we have not met the counterparts of Theodore or Lord Carston or Mr. Statchard, and cannot greet them. We hope that his next book will be a modern one.

Mrs. Fred Reynolds has been more successful in bridging the gulf between to-day and yesterday. She has taken for heroine a young girl, brought up (oh, so properly brought up !) in the stuffy security of a Victorian home. Anna is a delightful character, and the story of her nursery days spent in the company of her complacent sister Lottie, of her runaway marriage and dreary life in London with her ne'er-do-well husband is absorbing reading. Mrs. Reynolds has not written a great book, but it is all very brisk and entertaining and Anna is very easy to know.

In her new book, Miss Anne Douglas Sedgwick gives further evidence of her powers of penetration into the feminine mind. She has chosen for her theme the relations between a mother and her daughter-in-law. Monica's son, Clive, rejected Celia, who was his mother's choice, and married instead the dark, decorative, and very modern Hester, who denied her son fairy stories and regarded her mother-in-law as a Victorian Aunt Sally. The tale of their jealousies, and the descriptions of Hester's "arty" friends are very amusingly recorded, but the final reconciliations and renunciations are too good to be true, just as the moral speeches that one woman makes to another are too long to be believed in. Until the very end of the book, however, the women all act according to their types. Celia, who dresses in soft greys (presumably to match the wishy-washy colour of her mind), who takes what is given to her and not what she wants, is an admirable foil to dark Hester, who takes what she wants. Miss Sedgwick is very nearly at her best in this engaging book.

If, as we suspect, *The Eternal Forest* is a first novel, Mr. George Godwin should provide us with some excellent work in the future. He is essentially a story-teller—a rare thing in these days of nebulous novels—but he has tried to tell too many stories at once. His tale of the settlers in a Canadian Valley is crowded with interest, but the scene shifts continually. We should like to know more about a few of the people and not so much regarding many of them. When this has been said we have nothing but praise for Mr. Godwin's work, whose pictures of the old Norwegian, the unhappy minister, and the English settler and his wife are all excellent. There are passages of great beauty in the book, and we feel that just a little of that "strange excitement" has fallen to Mr. Godwin's share.