

Christian society. What the priest initiates in his mysterious rite, the secular prince must continue by his legislation and the faithful people must consummate in its life' (page 208).

DONALD ATTWATER

BOCCACCIO. By Francis MacManus. (Sheed and Ward; 16s.)

There are two common methods of presenting the biography of a writer. One is to devote the first part to an account of the man's life, and the second part to an appraisal of his works. The other is to portray the events of his life and his writings in one chronological sequence against the background of his times. In 'Boccaccio', the latest volume in the Writers of the World Series, Francis MacManus has chosen the latter; and it is a wise choice. For this is as much a book about the twilight of the Middle Ages as about Messer Giovanni Boccaccio.

'I must hasten to add', writes Mr MacManus in his *Avvertimento*, 'that it is not a scholar's book because, as any scholar will discern even in the depths of his cups—that is, assuming that cups and scholars still associate—I am no scholar, though I have met some scholars on their way from school. . . . Following their authority and sometimes their example, I have picked brains'. In spite of such diffidence there is evidence of considerable scholarship to be found both in the biography itself and in the appended list of books consulted. But if he means that he has written a book that can be enjoyed with profit by the general reader as well as by the scholar, he is quite right. His prose is vivid, colourful, robust, liberally spiced with humour, and at times even lyrical. The only footnotes are prose translations of the excerpts from Boccaccio's writings with which the book is generously provided. One only wishes that he had placed these immediately after the originals in the text as he did in the case of the verse translations.

The prologue on the circumstances of the exile and death of Dante Alighieri sets the scene for the colourful life of one who was to be his most ardent worshipper and his first biographer. There follow five parts corresponding to the seasons of the year. 'Early Spring' recounts the birth, childhood, and early love affairs of Giovanni. 'High Spring' begins with the Holy Saturday of 1336 in the Franciscan Church of San Lorenzo when he looked up from his prayers and saw 'a most marvellous vision of beauty'. This second part is full of quotations and summaries from the long romantic novels and poems which the languishing lover wrote in an attempt to woo and win the illegitimate daughter of King Robert. Those who are to fling this book aside in wearied boredom will do so somewhere in the middle of 'High Spring'. The climax of 'Summer' is the picture of the Black Death and its effect on medieval Europe and on Boccaccio. Mr MacManus is at his best in 'Autumn' where he skilfully and elegantly describes and appraises the work for which Giovanni Boccaccio is chiefly

famous among English readers. What may be called 'the black frost', traces of which can be felt in the 'Decameron', effects its work of withering and devitalising as the 'Winter' of his life sets in and he turns himself to the writing of the biography of the man who was his master, guide, and hero, though he died eight years before Boccaccio was born. By it he virtually restored to his rightful place the man that died in exile, unmourned by the men of his own city; and then he himself died in poverty mourning over the death of his dearest friend, Petrarch, and realising that 'it had all been a long, confused, and ill-directed journey in which a man mistook the lights of human habitations for guiding stars and lost the sunlight in wild forests and climbed desperately from valleys odorous with rankly ripe fruit to the barren crags, all the time missing, and feeling in torment that he was losing, the track of the fortunate pilgrims'.

N. A. W. DEANE

THE IRISH TRADITION. By Robin Flower. (Clarendon Press; 8s. 6d.)

Dr Flower did not live to complete the history of Irish literature which he, more than most men, was qualified to write. But *The Irish Tradition* will serve as a final memorial to his scholarship and to his gift of making a difficult and unfamiliar field attractive. Here are gathered together a course of lectures given at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1938 on medieval Irish literature, as well as his Sir John Rhys lecture on *Ireland and Medieval Europe* and a translation of his Irish introduction to an anthology of Irish love poetry. For the English reader the chief delight of *The Irish Tradition* will perhaps be Dr Flower's own versions of early Irish prose and verse.

*'The singing birds of Heaven greet
The Virgin's son with music sweet,
One whisper of their song would heal
The agonies damned spirits feel'.*

He reveals a fresh world, and, how rarely in a scholar, matches the loveliness of that world with his own account of its and his translation of its achievements.