

BLACKFRIARS

THE MIND OF POE AND OTHER STUDIES. By Killis Campbell.
(Oxford University Press, 1933; 13/-.)

The seven essays of which this book is made up deal with questions that inevitably arise in considering the work of Edgar Allan Poe. They are of this sort. How much or how little was he educated. What did he read? What were the influences that formed his poetic technique? What the model on which his stores were founded? To what degree, if any, was he a plagiarist? What did his contemporaries think of him? How did Rufus Griswold carry out his literary executorship?

Professor Killis Campbell, of Texas University, should be well qualified to give us the answers to these questions, for, not only has he edited an invaluable edition of Poe's poems, but he has contributed some forty studies on Poe to learned periodicals. The essays under review represent an immense amount of investigation, reading, and card-indexing, but the detail is so minute, the footnotes are so numerous, and the conclusions for the most part so non-committal that we are left to form our own opinions on the evidence so completely presented.

Professor Campbell says (p. 33) that Poe

'was not, of course, a scholar . . . nor needed to be. But judged by present day standards he possessed an unusually wide acquaintance with things in general, and in particular with the literature of his own day . . . He was not profound but he did his own thinking. His mind was remarkably clear. . . . In native endowment and in insight he seems to me to have possessed gifts comparable to those of any other American writer of his time, save possibly Emerson.'

But is not Poe entirely incomparable to any contemporary American writer, whether it was Emerson, Longfellow, Cooper or Irving, because of his ethical poverty and his abhorrence of purpose in art? Was it not this that made the 'Frogpondians' disapprove of him?

Perhaps the most interesting of the essays is *The Origins of Poe*. In this the poet's indebtedness to Byron, Moore and Coleridge is discussed, and it is shown how reflections of the *Giaour*, *Manfred* and *Lalla Rookh* appear in the earlier long poems *Tamerlane* and *Al Aaraaf* and the metre and even some of the words of *Lady Geraldine's Courtship* in the far later *Raven*.

'The tradition that Poe was neglected by his contemporaries is both true and false,' says Professor Campbell (p. 66), and then explains his meaning by saying that though no one recognised Poe as a great poet he was well recognised as a critic and an editor. Anyone may get the measure of the appreciation

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meted out to him in life by referring to Griswold's Anthology (1842). In it but three of Poe's poems are printed against nineteen by Mr. Jones Very and seventeen by Mrs. Sigourney. America disliked Poe and was reluctant to hail as a great artist the rather discreditable person they knew. They preferred him when he was making a success of journalism. An epitaph written by Stoddard probably represented the consensus of opinion in America at the time of the poet's death :

He might have soared in the morning light,
He built his nest with the birds of night!
But he lies in dust and the stone is rolled
Over the sepulchre dim and cold;
He has cancelled all he has done or said
And gone to the dear and holy dead,
Let us forget the path he trod
And leave him now to his Maker God.

In Europe it is thought that for redemption from ignominy Poe had to await the judgement of men of another tongue, for Baudelaire and the Symbolists were the first to hail Poe as genius and to raise him up to the high pedestal of world fame.

The Mind of Poe, though not intended for the general reader, is of great importance to those who specialise in American literature, and indispensable to a proper understanding of Poe. The evidence so assiduously assembled has been generously offered and many students must be grateful to Professor Campbell for presenting in this compact form the result of years of research.

U.P.H.

PETER ABELARD. By Helen Waddell. (Constable; 7/6.)

Those who have had the joy of acquaintance with Miss Waddell's earlier works have proof of the infinite labour of which the present book is the fine flower. The *Wandering Scholars*, in which she entered so intimately into the hearts and minds of the Clerks Marvellous of the twelfth century and earlier; her *Medieval Latin Lyrics* of which some, in exquisite translation, here reappear, were as its offshoots. But in the novel there is no impression of erudition; she has attained such complete mastery of her material that she can seize its essence. She is Taliesin, on whose lips, after year-long stirrings of Caridwen's cauldron, fell the three bright drops of wisdom.

The book defies analysis; the usual terms are too static for its vitality. One reaches the end, heart-wrung by vicarious anguish, exalted and dazzled by sheer beauty—a beauty so intrinsic, that only deliberate reflection reveals something of the