

## R E V I E W S

THE HOUSE OF THE OCTOPUS; a play in three acts. By Charles Williams. (Edinburgh House Press; 5s.).

It is still too early to estimate the permanent significance of Charles Williams' work. Up to his sudden death this summer he was still experimenting in technique and his brilliant vivid questing mind was reaching towards its maturity. It is characteristic that his last play, "The House of the Octopus", seems essentially a young man's work. It is a study of martyrdom, a poem cast in play form. The non-Christian power is the Po Lu of his more recent poems which was becoming a permanent symbol to his imagination; its plot lies in the interweaving of sudden apostasy and long endurance—the "coinherence" of Christian souls. The primary effect achieved is that of tightening and relaxing tension. It is marked throughout with an abnormal strength of focussed imagination. For it is impossible to divorce Charles Williams' literary achievement from his personality.

His very rare capacity for personal friendship and the spontaneity of his compassion, of his generosity and of his love were integrally one with the intuitive power that underlay his prose and focussed his poetry. Through it he had ceased to be derivative and had pierced through layers of the unreal towards acceptance. He may be remembered as the first of the Romantic Movement to be no longer in revolt. His essential function was to initiate.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

THE OPEN MIND. By Georges Bernanos. (John Lane, 8s. 6d.).

A fitting sub-title for M. Bernanos's new novel would be "Mortal Sin in a French Village". It is a terrible picture of evil: the cumulative evil of self-seeking, jealousy, lust and suspicion hidden away under the peaceful façade of French provincial life. The setting and the characters matter little enough: here is the battleground M. Bernanos has chosen, and it is as good a one as any on which to stand and watch Good and Evil struggling for the possession of the last rampart of all, a man's mind.

The seriousness of M. Bernanos's theme, his passionate conviction that here is something that overshadows all the public battles and revolutions which haunt the headlines, makes *The Open Mind* one of the important books of the last few years. It makes the usual novel, even the usual "Catholic" novel, seem a novelette in comparison. But it has grave defects if it is to be judged by the standards of the medium M. Bernanos has deliberately chosen—fiction. The monotonous craziness of his characters—the wild woman from the chateau driving her giant mare over the countryside; the fantastic "professor", M. Ouine; even the priest, battling unavailingly unless the tide of damnation—invites no compassion, no interest even. The novel has the crude, if powerful, distortion of a Doom on a medieval church wall. We are appalled; but there is no tension, no concession to even the smallest

hint of humanity. After all, pity goes hand-in-hand with terror. And the sinner is not beyond the range of love. I.E.

FIFTEEN CRAFTSMEN ON THEIR CRAFTS. Edited with an introduction by John Farleigh. (Sylvan Press, 12s. 6d.).

Bookbinding, Embroidery, Jewellery, Metal Engraving, Music and Craftsmanship, Pottery, Printing, Silversmithing, Smithcraft, Spinning and Weaving, Stained Glass, Textile Printing, Wood Engraving, Woodwork, Writing and Lettering—these are the crafts dealt with in this admirable *summa* of the right making of things. Each craft is entrusted to an expert practitioner, describing his own ideals and methods. A dozen pages of illustration complete a noble book.

"A craftsman", says Mr. Farleigh in his Introduction, "must be brought back into the main stream of life if civilization is to partake of that most important 'quality' that only the great craftsmen can give". And a notable feature of the book is the virtual unanimity of the contributors on the right relation of the craftsman to a sane society. Too often books about arts and crafts suggest the function of the craftsman as necessarily isolated, redeeming the wicked world of machines and mass-production by his example—and at a distance. It is true, of course, that the craftsman's position is nowadays often at variance with the demands of a plutocratic commercialism. But, as Bernard Leach rightly points out, "Changes are taking place in the basic order of our society and therefore, in the period of reconstruction which will follow the war, we have a possibility which never really presented itself to Morris and his friends of achieving for craftsmanship its true place in a modern community".

The fifteen craftsmen do not waste their time with theories; they describe, with enthusiasm and unique authority, their own jobs—and an accurate account, say, of the making of a harpsichord by Carl Dolmetsch is second only in interest to watching the craftsman himself at work. There will be increasing room in society for the craftsman, working with a single intention, believing in what he does, endowing it with all that he can give of skill and devotion. And the argument of this book is the unanswerable one of the thing made, and made well. The extent to which the machine-made thing can be influenced by such integrity is happily illustrated in the Curwen Press's production of the book.

Whatever may be the future place of the skilled maker of things in society, it may well be demanded that at least things made for worship should be the product of the skilled workman, mastering his material, and not of the anonymous factory indifferently disgorging brass fenders or brass tabernacles. It was "the wise of heart, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom", who were commanded by God to make Aaron's vestments. I.E.

BECOMING A MAN. By Stanley B. James. (John Miles; 8s. 6d.).

Whether the brevity of Mr. James's autobiography is due to the