

'Les ouvrages anciens ne sont pas classiques parce qu'ils sont vieux, mais parce qu'ils sont énergiques, frais, et dispos,' Sainte-Beuve tells us. But Mr. Eliot, in defining a Classic with Virgil as his standard, is more exacting. The qualities he requires for a Classic are 'maturity of mind, maturity of manners, maturity of language, perfection of the common style, and comprehensiveness.' After surveying the great monuments of European literature, he finds them all defective in one or more of these qualities, and therefore concludes that the only Classical Poet, absolutely speaking, is the poet Virgil.

But, Mr. Eliot is careful to point out, to say that Virgil is the only absolutely Classical Poet, is not at all to say that he is the greatest poet that ever lived—a statement which, as he says, is really meaningless. Still less is it to say that, because Latin Literature produced the only Classical Poet, it is therefore greater than any other literature. Readers of this address will remember the saying of Remy de Gourmont that 'Classical Roman Literature died of Virgilian perfection,' and Mr. Eliot says much the same thing. Indeed, it is by no means an unqualified advantage for a language to culminate in a Classic, and whether it does so or not is largely, Mr. Eliot maintains, a matter of chance. But to say that Virgil is the only Classical Poet properly so called does mean that Virgil supplies a criterion and standard of criticism of which we must never lose sight. As Dr. Mackail has said so well in the masterly introduction to his text of the *Aeneid*: 'for the enormous and chaotic production of the present age, it is more than ever essential to have a standard of quality, to preserve and study the masterpieces. This standard Virgil gives' (Mackail, *Aeneid*, Intro. lxxv).

It is not for us to criticise the thesis we have tried to outline and, indeed, so fascinating, so lucid is the whole exposition that criticism is charmed and, almost in spite of itself, silenced. The importance of this address must not be judged by its length, for in a very small space Mr. Eliot has comprised a vast survey. He has argued his thesis so enchantingly and so clearly that it is hard not to believe that it will take its place among the few, very few, masterpieces of our time, to stand beside, if not to outlive, the *Essay of Sainte-Beuve*.

BRUNO S. JAMES.

DAFYDD AP GWILYM: Selected poems translated by Nigel Heseltine. (Dublin: The Cuala Press; 12s. 6d.)

THE GREAT HUNGER. By Patrick Kavanagh. (Dublin: The Cuala Press; 12s. 6d.)

Rarely nowadays can one want to begin a review with praise for the look of a book. The present examples of the work of the Cuala Press are a happy reminder of what good craftsmanship can do. They are not exotics: indeed they have the plain type, strong paper and simple binding of boards and linen which characterised the

Ditchling Press in England. In other words, here are books with a limited appeal which yet deserve publication. A private press can do a valuable job for literature as well as for the art of book making if it avoids the temptation to produce exorbitantly priced collector's pieces, with all the signing and numbering and the *de luxe* racket.

Ireland should be able to use its neutrality to good effect in the field of publishing. And Mr. Heseltine's translations of a medieval Welsh poet and Mr. Kavanagh's long poem about Irish rural life are just the things which a commercial publisher would inevitably ignore but which a private press is justified in producing in a limited edition. Yeats once said that 'No poetry has a right to live merely because it is good. It must be the best of its kind.' Again, 'Down in Sligo one sees the whole world in a day's walk, every man in a class. It is too small there for minorities.' Which is to say that the criterion of a metropolitan mass-production may have no sort of relevance for a whole range of writing—the best of its kind,' but that kind isn't a Book Society choice or in demand at Boots.

The gesture of the Irish publication of an English translation of a Welsh poet is delightful, and Mr. Heseltine's easy prose versions are astonishingly loyal to the original. Much is sacrificed: the resonance of language, the rich elaboration of the classic Welsh prosody. But there remains more than an echo of Dafydd's lively fancy, his passion for the detailed loveliness of trees and snow and hair and eye. Thus the Wind, 'Trumpeter of the sky nightly crossing the wild wasteland, dry and swift, trampling the sky on your vast journey, shooting the idle snow down, scattering it like a vain pile of chaff, through the surf your temper flies over the sea.' It is a pity that no indication is given of the original Welsh poems. And Dafydd's birthplace was *Bro Gynin*, spelt so.

*The Great Hunger* is a sardonic study in rural futility: 'He will hardly remember that life happened to him,' is Mr. Kavanagh's summary of an Irish peasant's days. It is not at all a 'sweet' poem, but it is certainly a healthy rejoinder to the naive optimism that sees all virtue in life on the land while ignoring its frequent sterility, 'Where the seed gets no chance to come through To the fun of the sun.'

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

THE ORIGINAL ORDER AND CHAPTERS OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL. By F. R. Hoare. (Burns Oates; 10s. 6d.)

Theories about the Gospels which are based upon mathematical computations are apt to be somewhat tiresome to the non-mathematical and suspect to the ordinary critic, who may perhaps feel (not always justly) that figures can be made to prove anything. Here, however, arithmetic is invoked in support of a theory now by no means new that for some unknown reason the original auto-