

## R E V I E W S

TIME MUST HAVE A STOP. By Aldous Huxley. (Chatto & Windus ; 9s. 6d.).

It is now almost forty years since Monsignor Benson, not long after his ordination as a priest in Rome, wrote a novel called *The Necromancers* : in it he dealt with one of the reasons why the Church forbids her children to take part in spiritualistic séances. Such souls only, says the novelist, as, being dis-carnate, have no other desire save that of return to the body in order that they may continue to indulge the flesh, can disengage themselves from the pre-occupation of life after death sufficiently to obey the summons from earth and are willing to try, through the intermediary of a medium, to re-enter a corporeal body. People therefore, whether they are impelled by curiosity or by intolerable grief, who put themselves into touch with the means by which the dead may, and often do, communicate with the living, thereby face an appalling risk : that of possession by a spirit intent on the gratification of an undying lust. The drunkard, the glutton, the lecher, these are the spirits who crowd into the medium's subconsciousness and may at times re-enter earthly life, so producing in otherwise living persons the phenomenon once known to alienists as Possession.

Robert Hugh Berson is not the only novelist who has written from a religious standpoint about the invasion of a living personality by the questing spirit of a ghost. Théophile Gautier in *La Morte Amoureuse* did this more than one hundred years ago, and many other writers before and since Gautier have made the same attempt. Mr. Aldous Huxley in *Time Must Have a Stop* brings his great virtuosity and his increasing knowledge of the human soul's predicament to bear on the far more incalculable adventure of the would-be invader who, being dead, seizes on the half-witted agency of a human medium in order to accomplish, not only a return to the flesh, but an escape from the Hound of Heaven, here represented as intolerable Light.

'Abruptly, there was a new and overwhelming flash of participation in the light, in the agonizing knowledge that there was no such right as a right to separate existence, that this clotted and disintegrated absence was shameful and must be denied, must be annihilated—held up unflinchingly to the radiance of that invading knowledge and utterly annihilated, dissolved in the beauty of that impossible incandescence.

'For an immense duration the two awarenesses hung as though balanced—the knowledge that knew itself separate, knew its own rights to separateness, and the knowledge that knew the shamefulness of absence and the necessity for its agonising annihilation in the light.'

The horror of the tale lies in the interposition of a group of sensation-hungry people in the Florentine villa, from the luxury of which the spirit of Eustace Barnack has been separated by sudden death, who insist on holding séances, before the wretched man has been buried, in order to enjoy the excitement of communicating with him, not because they love him, but because they cannot endure the boredom of the material comfort for which he and they have long since bartered all other good.

The centre of this group, through whom the whole story is told, is Sebastian Barnack, a boy of seventeen, already a poet of unusual gifts and accomplishments, a nephew of the dead man.

Alternately unhappy and ecstatic, Sebastian becomes the victim of his own temperament and of the half-insane hedonism of the society into which his uncle has brought him. All this is presented with the glittering satire familiar to readers of Mr. Huxley's earlier books. The scene is set back twenty years and changes from an upper middle class, almost ascetically Humanist family-life on Primrose Hill to the aesthetic atheism of moneyed English society in Italy. In the background, and drawn with less precision and realism, moves the figure of Bruno Rontini, the antithetical embodiment of everything Eustace Barnack was not. Rontini's death is the entrance into life for Sebastian. It happens ten years after Bruno had been thrown into prison on suspicion of complicity in an anti-Fascist plot. The book closes with a succession of extracts from Sebastian's diary, made during an air-raid in London. Here the detailed satire and the elegant perspective down which Mr. Huxley has remembered post-war folly, give place to an impressionism—perhaps pointillisme is a more exact analogy—which is not altogether satisfactory. Absorbing as the final chapter is, it makes too sudden a transition from the alternating depth and shrillness of those preceding it, so that this book, in the greatest sense the greatest of his novels, is at the same time not so good technically or artistically as some of its predecessors.

NAOMI ROYD SMITH.

FOSSETT'S MEMORY. By Christopher Hollis. (Hollis and Carter; 9s.)

A welcome but not very substantial memory. It serves as the occasion for his brother-in-law to record his conversations with friends and relatives of Robert Fossett; these are interesting enough, sometimes very serious: Mrs. Fossett quotes Virgil gracefully and Michael Paravane indicates something of the meaning of Catholic doctrine. The blurb correctly describes them as 'gradually feeling their way out of confusion,' but progress is still slow and somewhat uncertain, so that it is difficult to see in what the 'coherent and courageous philosophy of life' will consist. It was salutary for Virgil to hope, and to know that 'somehow or other the gentle things win in the end,' but we should feel happier about