

works are made from French translations, not from the German, but, even worse, Fr John M. Oesterreicher's book *Walls are Crumbling*, first published in the U.S.A., is quoted from its French translation! Surely the translator might have taken the trouble to look up the passages in the original, probably accessible to him in the library of his own seminary. After this it is not surprising that the book should abound in gems like the following: ' . . . the night was filled with gelatinous and gloomy mass of

pantheism', 'The ultimate components of the universe, whose necessity Edith's mind grasped through the influence of her teachers, is what lay ahead of her mental development' and in ungrammatical monstrosities like 'irregardless of' and 'What the Synagogue produced, so could the Church, but the Law had to be made more loving'. I suggest the translator attend a course in elementary English.

HILDA GRAEF

PASCAL, by Jean Steinmann, translated by Martin Turnell. *Burns & Oates*, 1965. pp. xii + 304. 42s.

PASCAL, by J. H. Broome. *Edward Arnold*, 1965. pp. x + 250. 30s.

PASCAL by Jean Mesnard. (*Les Ecrivains devant Dieu*", *Desclée de Brouwer, Paris*, 1965. pp. 100.)

With or without the fresh impetus provided by the 1962 Tricentenary of Pascal's death, it is pretty clear that investigations into the manifold aspects of his life and work would have continued to add to our now very considerable knowledge of him. Fluctuations of taste there may have been, but Pascal's status is unquestionable. It is all the more to be regretted that Mr Turnell's translation omits Fr Steinmann's account of the three centuries of French reactions to Pascal. Perhaps he thought them parochial, a series of episodes in French intellectual history without any resonance in the world outside; and certainly it is possible to appreciate Pascal deeply without knowing what Voltaire thought of him, how Sainte-Beuve disfigured him, or what light the new Marxist interpretations of the relations between Jansenism and the *noblesse de robe* shed on Pascal's thought. But these things are a witness to the ability of Pascal to stimulate an infinite variety of apparently irreconcilable thinkers who yet find a focal point – it hardly seems to matter whether the point is a focus of hostility or amity – in the enigmatic fragments we call the *Pensées*.

The abbé Steinmann himself, who was killed in a tragic accident in Jordan three years ago, brought to Pascal a profound Scriptural scholarship and was able to give value to that – quite considerable – portion of the *Pensées* which deals with the Jewish people and the Old Testament, a part which has been largely disregarded in favour of the more speculative and introspective fragments. Not only does he redress the balance in this way, he

is among the most readable of the recent biographers of Pascal and skilfully knits together history and analysis. He is also known as editor of a very handy edition of the *Provinciales* and gave an interesting new look to the *Pensées* themselves by the use of an elementary device which, in its simplicity, should have occurred to previous editors but never did; the *liasses*, or folders, in which Pascal kept the drafts of his projected 'Apology for the Christian Religion', or at any rate the twenty-seven sections which he regarded as more or less in a completed state, had in the past been read and printed from top to bottom, without the rightness of the sequence being questioned. Fr Steinmann, following Zacharie Tourneur, made the contrary assumption that the sheets at the top of each *liasse* would be those Pascal had placed in the folder *last*, and that the bottom sheet was therefore the beginning of any given section. His own de-luxe edition, which came out after the French edition of this biography (1954), uses this new reading sequence, and although it is disturbing to find the familiar order inverted, some of the sections make much better sense when read back to front. Oddly enough, Mr Turnell, in his excellent foreword, does not refer to this piece of work, and it is important, because the abbé was not merely a fervent enthusiast but also a Pascal scholar of no mean attainments. Mr Turnell calls the book 'one of the most balanced and persuasive' of recent works on Pascal. M. Mesnard, in the bibliography appended to his own excellent little book, refers to it as 'lively, facile and rather slight'; and there is truth in

both views, though 'slight' is hardly appropriate when one considers the range of reading which has been involved.

'Persuasive', though, is another matter. The abbé was not a neutral, and if one compares, say, his account of the Miracle of the Holy Thorn, which Port-Royal regarded as a sign of encouragement from heaven, with that given by Dr Broome, we are clearly in different worlds. 'What are we to think today of the miracle?' asks Fr Steinmann. Catholics can have no grounds for doubting its authenticity [?] . . . The ecclesiastical authorities ratified it and committed themselves as far as they do in such circumstances. In one of the chapters of *Port-Royal*, Sainte-Beuve is unable to hide the disgust that he feels at this recrudescence of superstition. According to him, a coalition of fanatics and rogues tried to make out that a tiny abscess on the eye, which had been burst by too hasty a movement of Soeur Flavie, constituted a miracle in favour of the Pascal clan . . . But he is forced to admit that, at first sight, 'the miracle appears to have all the elements which make it authentic from the historical point of view'. No matter! He gives history a little twist, exaggerates the unimportance of the medical consultants, does not mention the necessity of an operation, the little girl's headaches, the suppuration, and the findings of the doctors . . . The truth is that Sainte-Beuve shows his hand when he quotes Montesquieu. The miracle did not take place because miracles never happen. He treats the miracle of the Holy Thorn as Renan treats the miracles of Jesus and Zola those of Lourdes. Like them he is ready to wipe out the testimony of history in the name of the most short-sighted philosophy that exists. Fr Steinmann's language is one of fervent but clear-sighted acquiescence, and it is a possible one and welcome one in the context of studies which regard the acceptance of miracle as an unhappy aberration in the history of a great mind. Dr Broome is more scholarly and more remote:

'In the peculiar atmosphere resulting from the stress of persecution, such a belief is not uncommon; and historically, at least, it could be defended in the sense that the persecution was halted, against all the probabilities. The Port-Royalists naturally exploited this event to the full in their attempts to retain public sympathy; but unfortunately, both medical and non-medical testimony concerning it is so unsatisfactory that rationalist critics can hardly

be expected not to charge them with superstitious credulity, or bad faith, or both.'

The importance of the miracle in Pascal's intellectual itinerary can be overstressed and the different values accorded to it by Fr Steinmann and Dr Broome serve to emphasise the difference in their approach. Dr Broome's intention is the very laudable and useful one of giving to the mathematical and physical work of Pascal a fuller treatment than it has so far received at the hands of English critics, who have dwelt on the apologetic or mystical value of the *Pensées*. A careful exposition of the relationship of Pascal's scientific work to the main lines of his thought needed making for a modern English audience, and this Dr Broome admirably succeeds in providing. He is also, however, very interesting on the lesser theological writings such as the *Ecrits sur la Grâce* which have suffered the usual fate of minor works living in the shadow of a masterpiece. On the whole, Dr Broome's book is a careful and painstaking piece of work, and provides the English reader with the necessary background to that final and personal effort which must always, in the end, be the confrontation with the *Pensées*. Dr Broome anchors them firmly in the theology and mathematics of their age and though his exposition is rather slow-moving compared with Fr Steinmann's learned excitement, it was well worth doing.

The latest complete edition of Pascal, which will no doubt, when finished, outstrip every other one, is at present being carried out for Desclée by M. Jean Mesnard. So far only the first volume has appeared, taken up entirely with biographical documentation. No doubt when he ultimately reaches the *Pensées*, M. Mesnard will have a number of manuscript readings which differ from those of his predecessors and send us back to worry out the text once again; meanwhile he has produced a little volume devoted entirely to a hundred page essay on the theme of God in Pascal, followed by thirty pages of extracts to illuminate this problem and the more particular one of the nature of Pascal's own spirituality. Not all the extracts are from the *Pensées*: some are from theological treatises, others from letters, and as a cheap and brief introduction to the essence of Pascal, without too much in the way of biographical trimmings, it could hardly be bettered.

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