

REVIEWS

into a disciplined and expressive unit. Again, one wonders how Professor Miller can assert that the 'prosodic slackness' of Arnold's *Stagirius* verses, 'and the sing-song of their feminine rhymes match the terrible spiritual slackness and despondency which is their meaning.' Can we believe that any mimetic theory of literature is hospitable to *that* sort of comment? By the same token, when Professor Miller offers a full—and ingenious—explication of Hopkins' *Pied Beauty*, because its philosophical bearings run true to his exposition of Hopkins' thought, we may ask whether there is any sense in which an even better poem would have contributed less to an authentic understanding of the poetry as a whole.

The central power of this book—its clear march of ideas—is not amenable to exemplification in a brief review. But the reader will not miss the acute criticism of Browning's dramatic monologues, or the fine observations on the 'impenetrable obscurity into which space fades' in Arnold's verse; and above all he will not miss the potent and economical discussion of *Wuthering Heights*. Here, we see the justification of Professor Miller's method by which he takes a writer's complete *oeuvre*, and weaves a network of quotations in order to catch the form of the mind that generated the fiction. The author moves here within a limited area, and brings in to great effect the Gondal poems and the 'Butterfly' essay for enrichment of his theme. If he inclines to overstress the theological tendency of *Wuthering Heights*, he nevertheless writes with perception both on the detail of the book and on the structure—particularly in his demonstration of the two ways in which the stories of the elder and the younger Catherine are involved with each other.

It seems to me that *The Disappearance of God*, if it is a success, is a success of a precarious kind. The thrust and pulse of the argument does not, I think, always echo the felt pressure of the works from which it is supposed to have emerged. Professor Miller has both sense and sympathy; but he is too eager to assert his own pattern. Students of Victorian literature should consult this book—with the appropriate caution—and will be able to determine whether their sense of disappointment is due to its inherent frailty or to the fact that Professor Miller has produced something that is not quite literary criticism, not quite a history of ideas, not quite a set of spiritual biographies, but a piece in a *genre* of its own. I think the method is viable; we need not demand that Professor Miller should all at once create the taste by which his practice of the method is to be appreciated.

JOHN P. WHITE

A CENTURY OF SOCIAL CATHOLICISM, 1820-1920, by Alec R. Vidler; S.P.C.K.; 25s.

Dr Vidler's new book is an expansion of his 1960 Scott-Holland lectures and provides an admirable synoptic view of the main trends of nineteenth century social Catholicism, the main attention being necessarily focused on France, with supplementary chapters on Germany, Belgium and Italy. Writing with charac-

teristic lucidity the author skilfully combines a considerable amount of historical detail with frequent and illuminating quotations from contemporary sources. As the best available introduction to the subject it deserves a wide circulation, one's only regret is that for its size, it is expensive at 25s. Dr Vidler's approach is refreshing, for all too frequently such accounts are either heavily academic in the general field or veer towards pious biographical sketches of the leading figures. Catholic writers in particular have tended to be over-cautious, with a notable reluctance to discriminate between the various aspects of the movement or to apply sufficient critical judgement to the content and relevance of the ideas and proposals outlined; they tend to give a misleading impression of the consistent development of a fairly coherent and uniform philosophy, a smooth progression of smoothly reasonable and moderate endeavours.

The present author, however, paints a far more relevant and interesting picture, stressing the great variety of the different groups and their publications; their sudden emergence, growth and decline; the far-reaching theoretical debates between the groups; their frequently strained relations with ecclesiastical and political authorities and amongst themselves.

Three major themes emerge from this study which are of particular interest to us today. In the reaction of concerned Catholics to the inhuman social consequences of the industrial revolution, it is possible to distinguish not only between theoretical and practical preoccupations, but also, and more significantly, between reforming and revolutionary trends. The former, generally speaking, seeking the revival of the forms and social relations of the corporations destroyed by the French Revolution and the introduction of ameliorative legislation; the latter rejecting this as inadequate in the face of desperate social problems, seeking some quite different form of social order altogether, moving in the direction of socialism. In England the reformist and corporative tradition has predominated to the exclusion of an effective social Catholicism of the left; the reiteration of the distinction is important now that Catholic radicalism is again becoming an issue within the English Church.

A second consideration is that of the curiously ambivalent position of the majority of social Catholics, whether of the right or the left. It is a facet of the general liberal dilemma which within the Church has carried over into the twentieth century in a peculiarly insistent form: the realization that far-reaching changes were demanded coupled with the incapacitating fear that the changes once started would accelerate under their own momentum and destroy the privileged position of the innovators themselves, whether that privilege was one of social ease and advantage or the enjoyment of minority culture and values: the fear that radical changes of the social structure to obtain the extension of the franchise, education and cultural diffusion might imperil the continuance of the very values which inspired the changes. There is thus a constant hesitancy and bent for generalised argument, both urging and restraining, laying most emphasis on the educating of a respectable artisan class and the efficient organisation of charitable relief. Buchez and his followers in the 'Atelier' of 1840-50 consti-

tuted 'the only attempt of which we know to create a workers' movement under Christian inspiration'.

The historical factors which made this hesitancy understandable, especially the coming of complete enfranchisement, are no longer present and yet this vacillation still bedevils our social outlook. Suggesting that one reason why the social Catholics were such a small minority in the French Church was that the clergy had no direct knowledge of the industrial proletariat, being recruited either from bourgeois or peasant stock, Dr Vidler indicates a continuing thread of the problem from the emergence of the movement to the present day. The broad movement could never pass beyond general declarations of principle and localised good works until reactionary illusions and liberal hesitancy were challenged by widely diffused detailed knowledge of the actual conditions to be remedied and the possible means of solution. Bishop von Ketteler, one of the major figures of the movement, appealed in 1869 for the introduction of contemporary labour and welfare studies into the education of the clergy, and the selection of clerics on travelling stipends to carry out field work. Almost a century has passed since then.

ADRIAN CUNNINGHAM

THE ABOLITION OF GOD, Dialectical materialism and Christianity, by Hans-Gerhard Koch; S.C.M. Press; 18s.

This book seeks to refute the anti-religious philosophy and propaganda of atheism, but, unhappily, it is its own little lyrical monument to failure. The fact that it is pedantic in exposition and exudes a sticky substance whenever it gets within range of 'God' is not the point; though it does prompt the question, 'We are supposed to be discussing great and living questions—is something a bit wrong—somewhere?' Its real and rather touching weakness is due to Mr Koch's total failure to enter into *serious argument* concerning the philosophical questions at stake (primacy of matter, social determination of belief, etc.), questions which he poses but only to discard as basically irrelevant, because 'faith, in the New Testament sense, does not mean an intellectual assent to truth' (p. 153). Mr Koch is plainly a straightforward fellow (in his way); if I were a marxist I should be very rude at this point. Not that we are presented with classical modernism; rather, we are offered, by this bourgeois martyr for that which is not true, a more insidious formula true religion = pure revelation = something not *known* to be true. But, to quote Nietzsche at the tender age of twenty-one, what I do not know to be true does not concern me. We return to an old piece of information: faith is not ordinary knowledge, but it is knowledge, in an extreme form. To deny this is to sacrifice either Christianity or honesty.

Nor is there *any* discussion of the political issues at stake: the validity of Marx's historical laws, the viability of his economic prediction, the new culture of socialism. The author prefers to appeal to 'the illumination of faith and the power of love'. Mr Koch is being a bit—shall we say haphazard? Has he not yet realized