

did he find in their behaviour any direct reference to antiquity. Here was a nice party of Greeks enjoying themselves, making a spot of baldoria as they say across the Adriatic, and that, mercifully, was all. (Incidentally, why was more use not made of Greek music? The Royal-Occasion score was so nobly, vaguely generalised that it merely succeeded in laying a pall of respectful depression over the proceedings.)

Less clear of pretension, but still on a higher level than the rest of the film, was the passage introduced by George Seferis' superb domed head. Gielgud's reading of his verse was rather too churchy and the statuary sequence, for which Michael Ayrton was apparently responsible, need not have confined itself so much to anthology pieces. Nonetheless, there was at last some pressure of feeling and intelligence behind the words and one found oneself watching the camera's activities with a certain interest, even if one didn't agree that Greek sculptures should be made to *move* in so melodramatic a fashion. Elsewhere, the camera work matched the narration all too faithfully. The film was visually often "beautiful," but only in the sense that a succession of Greek lantern slides can be beautiful. In the cinema's terms, surely we deserved something better than this reverent, evenly-paced panning from sacred object to sacred object?

As documentary, this expensive loving film is entirely retrograde, a decadent incident in the long British affair with Greece.

D. S. Carne-Ross

## Mauriac, the Witness

WE HAVE no major intellectual nagger in England at the moment, no great master of words to keep flaying the hide off convention, in the manner of Shaw, Wells, and Orwell. The Angry Young Men, in so far as they exist, have proved to be merely irritable and personal. I had great hopes once of Priestley and Muggeridge, particularly of Muggeridge, but both have misfired up to now, I don't quite know why. What we need is some firmly-based, intelligent man with a gift of satirical phrase, who could think in public once a week and keep us stupider, more complacent, people on the hop.

In France, François Mauriac has fulfilled this requirement in his own particular way, ever since the end of the war. Whatever reservations one may wish to make about his quality as a creative artist or about his depth as a thinker,

it must be agreed that he has been a very effective thorn in the side of the French bourgeoisie. Sartre has done a lot of theorising about *engagement* and is undoubtedly a much bigger brain, but his polemical writing is always too complicated and diffuse. Camus has retreated into a noble silence. In the fitful apostolic succession of the great dissident Intellectual Witness, the mantle of François the First, Marie Arout de Voltaire, the scourge of the Church—after gracing in turn the shoulders of Émile Zola, Anatole France, and André Gide—has fallen on François the Second, the Catholic novelist, whose pronouncements of the last five years are contained in his recently-published *Bloc-Notes* (Flammarion, Paris).

Theologically, I think, Mauriac is on the Left, and politically on the intelligent Right. He began his post-war journalistic phase by contributing leaders to the Conservative *Figaro*; then he helped to found the Catholic monthly, *La Table Ronde*, and published a regular diary in that; when the atmosphere there began to prove uncongenial, he moved to *L'Express*, the *mendésiste* weekly run by J.-J. Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud. This paper has nothing Catholic about it. Its tone is secular, intelligent, managerial, sophisticated. It calls itself *Le Journal de la Nouvelle Vague*, that is, the paper of the new generation created by the rapidly rising birth-rate, who are eager to modernise the country and shake off the trammels of recent history. Although *mendésiste*, it has no strict party alignment. It combines fervent patriotism with the condemnation of colonialism, and a genuine interest in the working-class with a bourgeois ethos. On particular issues it may take its stand to the Left of the Socialists, but in its household hints it tends to assume that electric mixers and fitted carpets are within the reach of all, and will refer to a £20 or £30 coat as "*un petit manteau pas cher*." Mauriac, now seventy-three, is the elderly *enfant terrible* of this young paper. He has the back page to himself; there he lambasts the politicians, needles away at his literary colleagues, occasionally introduces a spiritual note, and sometimes—as during the recent de Gaulle crisis, disagrees with the general attitude of the rest of the paper.

Understandably, Mauriac and *L'Express* are attacked from both Right and Left. The Algerian *colons*, who have threatened to assassinate Servan-Schreiber and beat up Mauriac, look upon them as traitors to their country and their class. The Left-Wing sees them as enlightened capitalists, whose hearts may be in the right place but who have no organised doctrine and are obviously not going to saw off the branch they are sitting on. Mauriac, in particular, has often been accused

of enjoying the best of all worlds. It is true that he shares the privileges of wealth, being a member of a wine-growing, Bordeaux family. He has a large country house, Malagar, where he has often been photographed and which figures prominently in *Bloc-Notes*. His literary career has been one of unbroken success; he was elected to the French Academy before he was fifty, and in 1952 he received the Nobel Prize. In November 1958, General de Gaulle awarded him the *Grand-Croix de la Légion d'honneur*. His diary records his movements between one comfortable dwelling and another and tells of meetings with all sort of prominent people. By championing the North Africans and the worker priests, by constantly denouncing the degeneration of French justice, by engaging in violent polemics with a great many of his well-known contemporaries—Guy Mollet, Maurice Schumann, Pierre-Henri Teitgen, Edgar Faure, J.-P. Sartre, Jean Cocteau, etc.—has he not just found a gratifying way of filling his declining years by becoming a public figure of a new kind, and exercising his talent for invective without much danger to himself?

There is something in this criticism. He is certainly not a fanatical self-immolator: like Simone Weil, whom he is always careful to quote with respect as being of a superior nature. The possibility of his being actually manhandled is rather remote. Also, his behaviour is not without a certain imitativeness. He obviously compares himself to Émile Zola and Anatole France, who were hated by the Right Wing during his boyhood as he himself is now hated. He was also very sensitive about Gide's greater influence. He seemed quite transparently jealous of him, irritated by the fact that he appeared to manage so well without God, and keen to take over his position when he died. But like Gide, too, he is a subtle man, who is always prepared to make public confession of his weaknesses, so that they cannot be held against him. He has admitted that his public activity developed when his inspiration as a novelist began to fail. He knows that his motives are impure; that he enjoys giving rein to his sarcastic verve. But he turns this very neatly by saying that, ultimately, he is not helping his reputation as a writer, because his most successful sallies will be forgotten, with the mediocrities who prompted them:

Am I completely disinterested, then? Undoubtedly! But with too much passion, and often too much pleasure, so that I mistrust my motives.

Actually, this mistrust makes no difference. He goes on behaving exactly as before.

These impurities and self-contradictions having been admitted, however, it still remains

true that Mauriac, the polemicist, serves a very good purpose. He could not, as an ordinary journalist, write in the same manner or carry the same weight. As a landowner, an Academician, a Nobel Prize winner, and a *Grand-Croix de la Légion d'honneur*, he is a force to be reckoned with. It is as if, having devoted the major part of his career to describing in his novels what is most acrid and narrow-minded in the private lives of the French bourgeoisie, he had, after winning official recognition, decided to step outside the claustrophobic atmosphere of his fiction to attack the public behaviour of the same bourgeoisie. He emerged, as it were, from the tangle of vipers, which was one childhood fixation, to re-fight the Dreyfus Case, another childhood fixation. And his record is very good: he was against Franco during the Spanish Civil War, he was genuinely pro-Resistance during the Occupation, he opposed the vindictive post-war purges, he was in favour of the worker-priests, he supported Mendès-France against all the more short-sighted, place-seeking politicians, and now (while still remaining on good terms with Mendès-France) he supports de Gaulle. He sees de Gaulle as an arbitrator, who can perhaps hold the balance against the army, bring the Algerian War to an end, and set the machinery of justice working properly again. He has thus played an important part in influencing the middle classes in favour of de Gaulle for the right reasons, and if the present experiment went wrong, I think he could be trusted to oppose de Gaulle, also for the right reasons. This does not add up to a political creed, of course, but at least it represents the seasoning of expediency with certain valid principles of conduct.

It is not a matter of indifference that the most famous living French Catholic should write:

It would seem that, for some Christians, politics means freedom to do things that they would not allow themselves to do in their private lives. They are scrupulous in the confessional-box but unprincipled in the Cabinet room. That is why they have proved to be the most pernicious politicians of the last ten years.

There is vanity, but also a grain of truth, in the following remark:

The writer who observes politicians and members of Parliament, as Mactertlinck observed ants and bees, disturbs them by the mere fact of looking at them.

As an old man loaded with honours, he makes the sort of comment that would also be useful sometimes here, if it were not left to journalistic whipper-snappers and rogue dons:

It is a great consolation for the French people to know that in the midst of so many public

disasters, M. Antoine Pinay has been able to continue taking the waters....

Anyone can see that M. Georges Bidault, with all his brilliant qualities, is guilty of one major sin, which is his stubbornness in denying his mistakes, in gainsaying the facts of history, in yielding to the elementary passions aroused in him by the clear-sightedness of those who have rubbed his nose in the appalling consequences of his acts....

It is obvious [in 1956, after the police had searched the flat of Professor Marrou, a critic of repression in Algeria] that Professor Henri Marrou has always been politically unreliable because from his earliest youth he was passionately interested in Saint Augustine, who was a Berber. In choosing, from among all the saints in the calendar, precisely the one who may have family connections among the Algerian rebels, the philosopher-historian justified the action of M. Bourges-Maunoury's police, who have been to rummage amongst his papers....

Because Mauriac, the journalist, is a public

embodiment of principle in this perhaps facile, but effective, way, I wonder if, in the long run, he will not prove to have been more significant than Mauriac, the novelist. Opinions differ violently about the quality of the novels. I have just re-read four of the best known and have been confirmed in my old impression that the religious feeling in them is very thin, and the so-called conflict between Sin and Grace very contrived. What I see in them—apart from some good descriptions of bourgeois pettiness—is the very mundane working out of a private obsession, hetero- and homo-sexual, which is in conflict, not with a religious conception of the personality, but simply with an early conditioning against sex. The novels are really impure in that Mauriac seems to be using a literary form to achieve a dubious emotional release, disguised as a spiritual preoccupation. There may be more spirituality in the frankly impure and often virulent pages of the *Bloc-Notes*.

J. G. Weightman

## Another Fallen Idol?

### *Charles Beard, and How Historians Work*

**M**ANY ENCOUNTER readers, not themselves professional historians, must have wondered at the intensity and acrimony provoked by Professor Hexter's article on the rival views about the causes and nature of the English Civil War. How is it that issues of the dead past should arouse such fierce passions? Ought there not to be by now an accepted answer to the whole question? We are not, after all, dealing with some obscure intrigue never to be illuminated until the last archive yields up its secret, but with a great public debate leading to a clash of arms and regicide. Surely it must have been obvious at the time, and still obvious now, what it was all about, and who chose which side, and why. Do they really not know, or is it that academics require controversy to keep alive, or awake, and that since theology is out of fashion, history has to provide the issues to be fought over?

I do not think such questions from the outside either unfair or irrelevant; they arise not only from a natural desire to be properly informed, and to have in the hinterland of one's mind a recognisable and unchanging and, therefore, reliable picture of the past, but also from the fact that historians have tended to give to the general public a picture of themselves (and their

motives and their methods) which does not easily square with such incidents as the prolonged debate over the rôle of the gentry in early Stuart England.

What they say they are doing is seeking for truth on the basis of documentary and other evidence about the past, interpreted according to recognised methods, and therefore capable of standing up to scrutiny and criticism. If the documents have been wrongly interpreted, or if new ones come to light, then some part of the story may have to be revised or even jettisoned. But the process of revision will be gradual and continuous, and each generation will build with confidence on the foundations laid by its predecessors.

Now although this is, of course, true enough for some of the field of history, and for some of the time, it bears little relation to what actually happens; in particular, it tells us nothing of why certain topics excite attention at certain times, and lead to direct clashes of opinion, while other themes are allowed to slumber, scarcely disturbed by the efforts of thesis-mongers to document the obvious and prove the indisputable.

I am not raising here, I hasten to add, the old question of the extent of a historian's "objectivity," or that of his ability to recognise "sub-