

whom it is committed, is purely accidental, and it is only after this death that the heroine discovers why the adultery was sinful. It is as though sin is a trick lost in a game played (perhaps in all innocence) with God. But she also learns that God was right and she was wrong.

The style in which Miss Macaulay's heroine records her impressions is perhaps a bit too

simple-minded. This may put off readers with a fastidiousness that does not see beyond the fastidious. I think that this curious, fresh, happy book, so lovable in its faith that life can still be enjoyed and even be made into a potent good, will be read by many people for whom it will come as an intimate discovery, for many years to come.

Stephen Spender

THE MAGGOT AND THE CHINAMAN

"Y'see, when the Chinese want to prepare a very rare dish they bury a fish in a tin box. Presently all the lil' maggots peep out and start to eat. Presently no fish. Only maggots.... Well, when they've finished the fish, Chris, they start on each other."

"Cheerful thought, old man."

"The little ones eat the tiny ones. The middle-sized ones eat the little ones. The big ones the middle-sized ones. Then the big ones eat each other. Then there are two and then one and where there was a fish there is now one huge, successful maggot. Rare dish.... 'N when there's only one maggot left the Chinese dig it up—"

"Snap out of it, Pete. How the hell do the Chinese know when to dig it up?"

"They know. They got X-ray eyes. Have you ever heard a spade knocking on the side of a tin box, Chris? Boom! Boom! just like thunder."

"CHRIS" is Christopher Martin, *alias* Pincher Martin,* temporary Lieutenant, R.N.V.R., peace-time juvenile lead in second-rate repertory. Also, a second-rate man. In military and naval circles *Pincher* attaches itself to Martin as inevitably as *Dusty* does to Miller, *Nobby* to Clark: but the nickname could not be happier; Martin is the essential grabber, of parts, scenes, main chances, and especially of other men's wives. In fact, a very successful maggot: but his ship is torpedoed, he finds himself washed up on a nasty, naked, North Atlantic rock (presumably, Rockall), and hears the Chinaman's spade beginning to knock.

Mr. Golding has wished to write what must inevitably be called a new *Robinson Crusoe*, but one in which individual solitary man is stripped to a much starker nakedness than was Defoe's desire or intention. This is true in the physical sense: Martin has no purling streams or groves of coconuts, only a gale-lashed half-acre of

mussel, anemone, seaweed, and granite. Without rescue, he cannot survive more than a few days at most. It is also true in the moral sense: *Crusoe* possessed a personally interested God beneath whose ever-watching eye he moved about his daily tasks of carpentry or fishing, and to whom he turned to pray at night. Death, he trusted, if it were to come, would bring him into his God's presence. But Martin has no creed beyond that of the necessity of self-preservation, and the death he fights is only a Chinese darkness, an ultimate snuffing-out. Stripped of all human comfort or contact, he is reduced to the will-to-survive and to the intelligence that serves that will—the intelligence that is also the only thing that separates him from the lower animal and vegetable life he shares his rock with. The material this intelligence has to work with is fantastically limited and impoverished, a few shells, weeds, and stones; but part of the interest and excitement of *Pincher Martin* lies in watching how ingeniously the castaway deploys these petty resources. Martin is not at all a nice man, but he is a brave and clever one, and if these qualities were sufficient would deserve not to perish.

Tour-de-force is another word difficult to avoid in discussion of this book. Mr. Golding has evidently been fascinated by the magnitude of the technical problems he has set himself: how to keep up suspense, "dynamic," with a cast of one and no change of scenery. I am put in mind, on all sorts of occasions, of the first sentence that reverberated from the hollow confines of *The Unquiet Grave*: "The more books we read, the sooner we perceive that the only function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece." It is a hard saying, perhaps too hard, for it excludes the unmasterly but nevertheless entertaining writer, who has surely fulfilled a function even if in spite of himself; but I think a just one. A criterion at the very highest level, it is obviously only the rare and outstanding writer who deserves the compliment of being judged by

* *Pincher Martin*. By WILLIAM GOLDING. Faber. 15s.

it. Mr. Golding is such a writer, and I find myself wondering whether he does not, on page 1, propose to himself the creation of a tour-de-force rather than of a masterpiece, with all the differences of approach that the two terms imply. But surrounded as we are by so many rabbits of literature nibbling the lettuces of life; and by the endproducts of their nibbling—

Life, passed through them, no longer is the same:

As meat, digested, takes a different name—

we are not to be ungrateful for the tour-de-force. And certainly this both beautiful and nightmarish story, with its endless wash of salt water, hallucinatory surge, will take a lot of forgetting. Only I would beg Mr. Golding to excise his final sentence in future editions: it cheapens the book and belies its finest values. Besides, that precise particular trick has already been pulled by O. Henry long ago.

SUPERFICIALLY very different from *Pincher Martin*, Sr. Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps** has certain essentials in common with it—though I would say that the author is certainly in pursuit of the masterpiece rather than the tour-de-force. The hero is a composer who has made some pretty pickings, but lost his real creativeness, in the film-music racket; he lives in some unnamed great city of the United States, and its futility, corruption, and materialism are destroying him. A sudden chance sends him to the headwaters of the Orinoco in search of primitive musical instruments. He discards his smarty-party mistress, Mouche, who has tagged along for the lark, takes a native mistress in her place, and is gradually absorbed into the great natural cycle of the jungle—which is described in passages that are superbly moving and evocative. Like Pincher Martin, he is submitted to successive strippings-off of the onion-skins of civilisation; but whereas Mr. Golding sees essential man as a pair of claws gripping a naked rock, Sr. Carpentier (surely with deeper sanity) sees him as part of nature, living as he can and dying when he must, but at any rate most truly himself when he is closest identified with her, mindlessly cruel as well as beautiful as she may be. In the jungle village, the hero's inspiration returns. But he is desperately short of paper. Suddenly the world of the city erupts upon him again, in the shape of an aeroplane sent by his posturing publicity-seeking wife to "rescue" him. He yields to momentary temptation and flies back, intending to return at once with adequate supplies of ink, paper, and whatever else the jungle cannot provide for him. This

return is brilliantly managed by the author: the contrast between the "noble" savage virtues and the venalities of organised society is so strongly felt, and conveyed, that argument or protest seems useless. Finally, the hero returns only to find the gates of his retreat shut against him.

The Lost Steps has provoked extremes of critical, or pseudo-critical, comment. Dame Edith Sitwell and Mr. J. B. Priestley have welcomed it rapturously: the critic of the *Times Literary Supplement* found it distinguished for "thundering tedium." My own opinion, for what it is worth, is firmly with Dame Edith and Mr. Priestley. It is one of the very few contemporary novels that I am ever going to read again. Its hostile commentators accuse it of naivety and turgidity. Naïve it certainly is not. It is *simple*, which is an entirely different thing; and it is simple because it is sane. Sr. Carpentier criticises our Western world not from a "provincial" or "urban" or "moral" or "philosophical" viewpoint but from one that seems to me best characterised as simply "human," in the widest and best sense of that word. As for "turgidity," a certain bravura and, what would be considered in Printing House Square circles, overwriting cannot be denied—any more than it can be denied that I am probably the first reviewer ever to have squared the circle. But it must be remembered that Sr. Carpentier is a Latin, and a Central American Latin at that, and that one man's turgidity is another man's delicate restraint. A lot of reviewers would be a good deal less *frigid* if only they would learn to relax.

BUT what has the jungle itself to say? M. Camara Laye, whose childhood autobiography, *The Dark Child*, made a considerable impression last year, was born in 1924 in a Malinke village in French West Africa, though he has now transferred himself by way of mission school and technical college to Paris. His first novel, *The Radiance of the King*,* is also partly a discussion of Western man's need to rediscover some of the virtues he has left behind him, though it is an allegory of the search for God as well. The hero, Clarence, a white man, is rejected by his own kind as a no-good who cannot settle his gambling debts or hotel bill, but accepted by the blacks once he has learned humility. He desires to serve the black King of Kings, and the body of the book is concerned with his efforts to find and be presented to him. *The Radiance of the King* is episodic, fantastic, and symbolic in the way that Mr. Amos Tutuola has taught us to expect of the African writer—

* *The Lost Steps*. By ALEJO CARPENTIER. Gollancz. 15s.

* *The Radiance of the King*. By CAMARA LAYE. Collins. 13s. 6d.

whose concept of narrative evidently approximates fairly closely to that of Homer. But the mention of Tutuola immediately suggests a crowd of significant differences. Mr. Tutuola has refused to become a *déraciné*, he sits in his village and spins tall, totally-African tales in a wonderful pidgin: M. Laye presumably writes impeccable French (Mr. Kirkup's translation is so transparent and idiomatic that it does not read like a translation, in any bad sense, at all)—and he has obviously read Kafka. His is a more complex, and perhaps a more typical problem for the educated African, than Mr. Tutuola's; but that does not prevent *The Radiance of the King* from being a most readable and subtle piece of fiction in its own right, as well as a valid expression of the interaction of African and European cultures.

AFTER months of near-drought, there is now a spate of really good fiction, and I wish I had the space to discuss some other books at the

same length as these. But as it is, I can do no more than recommend:

The Loving Eye. By WILLIAM SANSOM (Hogarth. 13s. 6d.). A pleasantly sentimental novelette, full of wish-fulfilment, in the author's very best manner. As pleasant to read as I hope it was to write.

The Valley, The City, The Village. By GLYN JONES (Dent. 15s.). Standard Welsh issue; "ideal autobiography" of the bright lad from Ystrad. But distinguished from the run of the rarebit mill by the quality of its writing and the delicacy of its outlook, and also (if one may say so) by its *genuine* Welshness.

The Sacrifice. By ADELE WISEMAN (Gollancz. 15s.). I did not care myself for the fetidly Hebraic atmosphere of this chronicle; the creeds and prejudices of older-generation East European Jewry, here extravagantly praised (whatever is, is right), seem to me, however sincerely held, peculiarly unattractive. But perhaps this is only my own uncharity. Other critics, including Dr. David Daiches, have praised it highly.

Hilary Corke

A CHURCH OF COMPROMISE

OF ALL the institutions created by the English empirical temperament the Church of England may be said to have proved the least successful. Despite a certain contemporary intellectual adherence, whether of the Eliot, the Auden, or the Betjeman flavour; despite a certain upper-middle-class return to Church attendance as a defence against post-war social change; despite the periodic, somewhat nauseating, religious exhortations of the popular press; the Church of England remains, I should imagine, in a steady decline. English dislike of the doctrinaire and dogmatic, English love of *ad hoc* organisation and of compromise has reason to boast—however tedious the boast may become—of Parliament, Common Law, and the Civil Service; religious convictions have proved less susceptible to such an approach. After the lost battle of the 19th century, the Church of England decided to strengthen herself by the acceptance of scientific knowledge; the acceptance, in fact, has tended to undermine rather than justify her position. It would not be surprising if this anxiety to incorporate science produced another boomerang. It is tempting to the Church to take the "science" of parapsychology to its bosom; if she does so, she may find that she has handed over the very source of personal mysticism to science. Paradoxically, in the one sphere in which the Church of England

has refused compromise, she has probably also done so to her own loss. Towards mystics, inspirationists, and prophets the English Church has in general been unbending, although like Wesley they have so often insisted on their devotion. The Roman Church has usually known how to include or to discipline her visionaries; the English Church lacks power to discipline, she has been unwilling to include. It would be shallow to attribute this to the social flavour of the Church of England, nevertheless English visionaries have tended to come from the lower middle-classes. It is perhaps impossible for a church of compromise to compromise far with the uncompromising.

Nevertheless Mr. Balleine's fascinating study of Joanna Southcott* and the stream of prophets and cranks who have continued her teaching down to the present time is, as he clearly sees himself, an indictment of the Church's religious comprehension. There are many aspects of the story, which he tells both wittily and sympathetically, that will interest the psychologist, the social historian, and the student of biblical prophecy, but the chief aspect that would, I should imagine, strike a Christian is the sad waste of religious devotion,

* *Past Finding Out*. By G. K. BALLEINE. S.P.C.K. 15s. 6d.