

HEROIC SONG AND HEROIC LEGEND, by J. De Vries; Oxford University Press; 10s. 6d.

This book is described in the preface as a general introduction to heroic epic. Its author, Dr De Vries, hopes it will stimulate the non-specialist reader to a 'closer acquaintance' with this poetry, but however fascinating his discussion of the problems of authorship and evolution which occupies the first eight chapters of the book, this can only make sense to those who have already read and enjoyed the epics and have some idea of heroic and epic material. The synopses included in the text are not sufficient to replace this knowledge and without it the meaning as it stands is, in several places, lost or obscure.

What then is the book? It surveys a large section of the field of heroic epic, with emphasis on the European examples. First of all instances from specific countries are discussed. These range from the Old French 'Song of Roland' to the Indian 'Mahabharata' and the 'Kalevala' of Finland. The last five chapters deal with the common ground of heroic epic, the concept of the hero related to history, mythology and religious life, and the poets and reciters whose work and livelihood the epic is. All this is interesting material but the breadth of the survey means that it is incomplete in detail and leaves one with a sense of frustration. This is sharpened by the occasional tortuousness of the language, possibly a fault of the translation. However, one is frustrated chiefly by the absence of an obvious pattern in the whole thought of the book and an introductory chapter which would guide one's mind through the discussions and set out the intermediate and final objectives would do a great deal to make this a more appetising work.

CHRISTINE THIRLWAY

## Shorter Notices

THE CONCISE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN POETS AND POETRY, edited by Stephen Spender and Donald Hall (Hutchinson; 50s.) is well-produced, informative and almost impossible to put down. Its general articles provide a useful background to something like three hundred individual poets, the notices of whom vary in length according to an objective assessment of their importance and are free from axe-grinding; they are signed with the initials of the contributor and one of several valuable indexes at the back allows one the added interest of identifying them. The poets included bring one up to the contemporary scene, though here perhaps the editors have slipped up in omitting the American William Stafford and the English Charles Tomlinson.

B.W.

## SHORTER NOTICES

It is not easy to visualise anyone using the *DICTIONARY OF FICTIONAL CHARACTERS* compiled by William Freeman (Dent; 25s.) as an authority, since it is hardly complete (no Peter Simple or Chucks from Marryat, no Clovis from Saki) and there are mistakes about well-known characters in more recent widely-read works (e.g. the Montdoreas had only one daughter, Leopoldina=Polly: George Knox had Anne for his second wife, Sybil is the daughter of the first marriage), but a great deal of entertainment can be got from it for even if it is not complete (and how could it be?) the compiler's net has been cast pretty wide.

B.W.

When David Jones' *IN PARENTHESIS* (now issued as a paper-back, Faber; 9s. 6d.) first appeared in 1937, his epic of the 1914-18 War was at once recognized for the 'work of genius' (in Mr T. S. Eliot's phrase in his introductory note) it undoubtedly is. It could scarcely ever be a popular book: the demands it makes in terms of sensibility and language are not easy ones. But it belongs to a very small group of formative books, and one can confidently say its influence will continue to grow. Unhappily this new paper-back edition, although it claims to include the frontispiece and illustrations, is (at least in the copy we have received) without these essential elements in its total effect. The recent American paper-back edition contained them, remarkably well reproduced, and it is of some importance to know why Messrs Faber have sacrificed the evidence they give of Mr Jones's other—and equally great—achievement.

P.W.

W. H. Auden in *A CHOICE OF DE LA MARE'S VERSE* (Fabre; 6s. 6d.) has made a most valuable selection from the work of that fine and now neglected poet. Here we have examples of some of the most felicitous and subtle word-music of the central English tradition, the visual sense of an acute observer of natural things, the horrified compassion, spectral imagination and ultimately the wisdom of a man for whom poetry was a path to wisdom. The book ends with the long poem *Winged Chariot* in which that wisdom was finally expressed. The whole is illuminated by Mr Auden's own fine intelligence in the Introduction he has written for it.

B.W.

MATTHEW ARNOLD, by Lionel Trilling (Unwin University Books; 25s.) was worth re-publishing, just now when fresh work is everywhere being done on Arnold. Its value is that it steadily covers Arnold's whole development, leaving nothing undiscussed, and making the necessary relationships—with French and German literature, the English Romantics, Oxford, Thomas Arnold, Rugby, and the cultural movements they focus. Trilling comes out as Arnold's expositor rather than his critic. Strong in scholarly tact, he labours over the 'thought' in the poetry, keeping his real judgement ('as a poet, Arnold

## BLACKFRIARS

cannot escape the impeachment of being "made") in undertones. Peculiar demands are made upon this tact in the sections on 'St Paul and Protestantism' and 'Literature and Dogma'; Arnold's notion of religion as 'righteousness' or 'morality touched by emotion' turns out to be more complex, and more representative, than it looks at first.

M.M.

THE ODES OF DANTE, translated by H. S. Vere-Hodge; Oxford University Press; 30s. Dante's twenty three *canzoni* (here called odes *faute de mieux*) contain some of his finest and most original poetry, but they are very little known. Here they all are, nicely printed, with an English verse translation *en face*, using the same stanza and rhyme patterns. A gallant effort, even if foredoomed to fail . . . However, the versions are generally accurate from the point of view of the sense; and Dante's subtle technical procedures are pretty well explained in the Introduction: and the brief notes accompanying the text are helpful and sensible. So on the whole a welcome volume.

K.F.

Routledge & Kegan Paul's 'Rare Masterpieces' series, which some years ago provided an English translation of Aquinas' commentary on the *de Anima*, now follows it up with one on the *Physics*. But this is a rougher, more technical work, and the translation is little more than a transliteration, 600 pages of it for 70s. with hardly a note of explanation. It is hard to see what anyone without a fair knowledge of scholastic thought (and therefore, presumably, some medieval Latin) is going to get out of it.

L.B.