

- BOOK REVIEW -

THERESE

Francois Mauriac

New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1947. (383 pps.)

Francois Mauriac, one of the greatest Catholic novelists, if not the greatest, has given us in this novel of *Therese* a penetrating analysis of the conflicts of a troubled soul. The test of a true literary work will not be applied to this novel in vain. Mauriac in this and in his other works has revealed himself as a profound handler of the delicate problem of evil. As he says in the foreward, people who "wear their hearts upon their sleeves" have no story for him to tell. For years *Therese* had haunted the mind of Mauriac until he finally decided to make her live in his pages. She was introduced to us in his book, *Viper's Tangle*, but her story has been left unfinished until now, when we can follow her towards the twilight of her life.

The story, in brief, tells us of a woman who was acquitted by a jury of an act they decided she had not committed, only to become an inmate of the inescapable prison she had built around herself because of her act. The motive was supplied when marriage made her the member of a family to which she was held accountable for her least act. Driven by dullness and boredom to do almost anything, unable to show any love for her husband, she rebels at having to submit to the common law of mankind, and so attempts, but unsuccessfully, the murder of her husband by poisoning with drugs obtained by a forged prescription, which was the cause of her trial. Her final ejection from her husband's household completes the first of the four phases into which the work is divided.

The second and third phases treat of some of her years of sin in Paris, in search of what she is never able to find—genuine love. Her life in Paris is almost a Hell on earth. A prisoner of the character she has assumed, she imagines the whole world in league to entrap her, and she spends the time inventing methods of escape. Her mind gropes for a solution to the perplexing problems confronting her. Who is the more guilty, she, for an attempted murder, or those whose selfishness and hardness of heart cause so much misery?

Before she left home she contemplated and even planned suicide, but she was not sure that "Nothing and nobody awaited her." She wielded great power for destruction and without any conscious willing on her own part she was able to infect those who were drawn to her.

In the fourth part "The End of the Night" we see her obtain some relief when, after seventeen years, her daughter Marie comes to take her back home. The family realizes that she will not live much longer anyway. Marie, now grown up, realizes too what anguish and torture her mother has gone through, and she determines to make the rest of her days as pleasant as possible.

Mauriac tells us that some day he may tell the story of how Therese "entered into the eternal radiance of death." He says he did not do so in this work because he had not yet found the priest with the qualifications necessary to hear her confession with understanding.

The setting for the greater part of this novel is in Argelouse, south-western France, where men live by selling lumber and resin and where many believe that the true value of existence is in earthly possessions. Mauriac compares the dry, parched land to the arid soul—the soul so empty of life.

You may find, perhaps, that this book is depressing at times. You may feel again that the author is guilty of a certain intellectual snobbishness when, for example, he presumes to pass judgment on our priests. It seems to me that this book was written for the highly educated, but the average reader cannot help but profit from it.

—W. J. DRISCOLL '50

POEMS

Lucy Gertrude Clarkin

Charlottetown, Red and White, St. Dunstan's University,
1947. (120 pps.)

Critics of Canadian poetry assert that our national poetry has too often centered around landscape rather than themes on human values generally. This accusation, however, cannot be levelled at the works of Lucy Gertrude Clarkin. Indeed, the majority of her poems are written on such inspiring subjects as the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the general struggle of life.

Mrs. Clarkin's poetry has an element of grief and broken dreams running all through its fibre. Many of her poems were

written to inspire the world-weary, the tired, to keep hoping until they attain their eternal reward. This idealistic type of poetry indicates the author's deeply religious character. Even a brief perusal of her poems will have an emotional effect upon the reader; love of God, sorrow for sin, hope for the future.

She was a purist with regard to the correct in form, and the lyrical in sound, and abhorred poetry containing any harsh words or phrases. She was a personal friend of the late Lucy Maud Montgomery, and an admirer of the great Catholic poet, Francis Thompson.

In health or sickness, Mrs. Clarkin was ever faithful to the **Red and White**; this benevolent task of writing a poem for every instalment made her work more arduous. Written as they were, at certain times of the year for this magazine, a large number of her poems developed some aspect of Christmas, Easter, or Spring. One of her best Christmas poems is, **For Us**, the last stanza of which reads:

He came in lowliness and trod
The way of years;
The thorns of pain he walked unshod;
He wept our tears,
Died on a cross to save us—and was God.

Some of her best religious compositions are; **Naim**, the miracle in which Our Lord brought the widow's son back to life; **The Test**, in which the poetess makes a comparison between the rabble at the Crucifixion and present-day individuals who claim to be Christians. She says they would have "followed on the Calvary way,

Who walk with God through every passing day.

Occasionally she departed from that deeper, more serious trend of thought to write delightful, lifting lyrics on lighter topics, as in **March Wind**, **From the Sea**, and **White Midnight**.

Though her war poems do not come up to the standard of the other types, one of them is outstanding—**A Field In France**. The scene is in a field in France where Canadians have fought with heavy casualties; a peasant is ploughing the field, and she exhorts him to do his work reverently, for "on this field died valiant hopes and fears." She finishes with the words.

Here should there be a good, abundant yield,
Canadian valour has enriched this field.

Some of her lines are so full of adroit thought that they may be used epigrammatically. The best example is her words to the young graduate, departing from his Alma Mater, degree in hand, on the threshold of life:

Commencement

It matters not how many men have gone the way you'll go,
It will be unblazaned trail to you, the road across the years;
And though the old, the weary-wise may tell you what they know,
Their wisdom cannot make you wise, their fears are not your fears.
Alone you must decide the way, alone decide the goal;
And life may scorch you with its sun, and whip you with its rain,
But if that courage born of faith be singing in your soul,
The flower of joy will bloom for you upon the briars of pain.

Her works were published in 1947, by the **Red and White**, St. Dunstan's University, Charlottetown, in recognition of her poetic genius, and to make her name better known.

The late Mrs. Clarkin was the finest lyrical poetess to come from Prince Edward Island, and is worthy of the highest praise. Certainly she deserves to be read more not only in the Maritimes, but throughout Canada.

This copy of Mrs. Clarkin's poems is on sale at St. Dunstan's, and may be had on application to **Red and White**.

—JAMES E. TRAINOR '49.

FISHERS OF MEN

Maxence van der Meersch

New York,

Sheed & Ward, 1947,

(272 pps.)

One of the greatest Christian writers which France has produced in recent years is Maxence van der Meersch. In **Fishers of Men**, currently translated into English, his interest in, and understanding of, the working class have been combined to produce a novel which portrays, in all its shocking aspects, the hard lot of the ordinary industrial labourer. He tells us of the "Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne", or "Young Christian Workers", or "Jocists." This is the force which has so greatly influenced the lives of so many young people, and enabled them to work hopefully, courageously, and unselfishly, and with a well developed technique to face and overcome many of the inhuman conditions under which they had previously laboured.

Young, poverty stricken Peter Mardyck, who tells us his story, is invited by Jules, a Young Christian Worker, to attend a meeting of his organization. After the meeting, Peter decides to join the Jocists. His first act is to carry a lighted candle in a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, the reward of which, so he believes, is a job with Cools & Co. Mr. Cools is the prototype of many employers—a most "respectable" man, until you've worked for

him. The social encyclicals of the Popes are wasted on him. His efforts to help his fellow workers finally lead to his discharge, which is quickly followed by a deep frustration that almost causes him to quit the J. O. C.

Jules persuades Peter to attend a meeting where he hears Father Cardijn, the founder of the Jocists, who inspires him to carry on with even greater zeal. Out of work, Peter, in addition to selling the Jocist paper (no easy task, for the reception afforded him is hostile and blows are common) becomes the friend and confessor of lost youth in his neighbourhood. Many of these are corrupted at an early age, and he is able to start the work of their moral reform. As a result of his work the law is brought down on the local bookseller, the supplier of pornographical literature. His influence spreads and soon parents and priests come to him for assistance and advice in dealing with youth. These boys regard him as their "confessor", and his J. O. C. chaplain says "all he wants now is the power to give absolution."

Finally the opportunity to bring Christ the Worker to those who need him most comes to Peter when he becomes an employee of Grouan Bros, Vassort & Co., where management is heartless and labour vindictive. One with the other workers, Peter shares their hardships, but nevertheless strikes out against injustice and cruelties. Soon he wins the confidence and friendship of many, including depraved women anxious to reform morally. A group of communists under an agitator named Beck are able to stage a strike and occupy the plant. Peter sees through their plans and works feverishly for his Christian Trade Union, of which he is the only articulate voice, against their C. G. T. His fearlessness places him in great danger, and more than once he comes near to death. He is able to gain some concessions for the unfortunate women who work in the factory. Finally the strike is settled and things return to normal. Much more could be said about Peter and his Jocist friends, two of whom we meet in the last pages of the novel.

Peter tells us his story with great simplicity and humility, with little attention to detailed descriptions and artistry. By the use of simple and direct language a realism is attained which would not otherwise have been possible. The author has succeeded in writing a propagandist novel, from which we can learn much about the J. O. C., by the reality of atmosphere, incidents, and characters. Here is what Rev. John Fitzsimons says about **Fishers of Men** in his introduction to the English translation, "(It) is more than a novel, more than a piece of reporting, it is a description of the Mystical Body of Christ in action, progressively incarnated in men and in society."

—ARTHUR MCINNIS '50.