

readable, enjoyable, and spiritually profitable testimony to the efficacy of Divine Grace.
W.J.D.B.

The Weakling and The Enemy. By Francois Mauriac. Translated from the French by Gerard Hopkins. New York, Pellegrini & Cudahy. pp. 219. \$3.00.

The most recent of Francois Mauriac's writings to reach English readers are two short novels published together in one book: *The Weakling* and *The Enemy*. Both are absorbing, powerful, and dramatic tales of wickedness and depravity, revealing the mastery of fiction which makes Mauriac one of the few outstanding contemporary novelists writing in any language. Both are deeply theological in concept, probing far beneath the surface of things into the recesses of men's minds, leaving them unshielded for judgment in the brilliant light of their eternal destiny. Both are mighty and satisfying dramas, yet both give rise to questions which M. Mauriac leaves quite unanswered.

Despite their similarities, *The Weakling* and *The Enemy* provide a stimulating study in contrasts. *The Weakling* is very much the shorter of the two, and the more recently written; it was published in France just last year. *The Enemy* is a much older work, first appearing in French in 1935.

In *The Weakling*, Mauriac recounts the story of a degenerate family of old French nobility, inbred, withered, comparatively impoverished, totally out of touch with the social changes time has wrought all about them. An unlovely, ill-natured woman out of the ranks of the middle class has married the pitiable scion of petty aristocracy out of love only of his title. No one is prepared to accept her as anything more than the woman she had been born—neither the *Baronne*, her proud and disdainful mother-in-law, nor the country folk around the manor, who eventually grow to scorn her owing to an affair, trivial enough in reality, but magnified into something of great substance by the wagging tongues of the village. Her marriage was an object of horror to her; it was made doubly unbearable by the presence of her awkward, driveling son, the repulsive image of his father. This wretched lad on the verge of adolescence is one of the most vividly drawn characters Mauriac has yet created. The appalling misery in which he passes his days and nights at Cernes in a world of dreams and phantasies ends in bitter tragedy, after his one real chance for happiness vanishes when the Communist schoolteacher refuses to undertake his education for fear of complication with a patrician family

against whose very existence he is ideologically pitted. Told with remarkable economy of words and extremely effective use of symbolism, here is a promenade of melancholy figures all in persistent progress toward decisive tragedy.

The Weakling draws its strength from the magnificent portrayal of its characters; but *The Enemy* is not so much the story of the personages themselves, as it is of the forces that mold their souls. It is more the story of what happens to men, than it is of men themselves. The novel is an account of a French widow, deeply imbued with Jansenistic ideas, who raises her two sons in an austere, religious atmosphere, shielding them from every source of contact with the wicked world. The older boy is on his way to the priesthood, but consumed with tuberculosis, he dies while still a seminarian. The younger boy reaches manhood, apparently robust in virtue, yet completely inexperienced in coping with the temptations his mother had never let him know. At the first encounter with the enemy within himself, he loses the battle dismally, and cracking wide apart, yields himself without reserve to the sin he had been so relentlessly taught to hate. His Parisian affair with a loose Irish woman, a former friend of his mother, is described at rather wearying length; the corroding consequences of unrestrained passion are detailed in all their revulsion. Seemingly unable to help himself out of these sinful connections which weigh heavily on his conscience, a grave illness eventually comes to rescue him, bringing a sudden reaction, the sacraments, and his mother. The action moves slowly in many places, with extensive ramblings in a philosophic vein. It is not nearly so perfect a model of fiction as *The Weakling*.

These are two believable narratives about most interesting people; both succeed admirably in keeping the reader's attention rapt as the scenes are relived. They have all the qualities of a successful novel. Yet in each of them there is an unpleasant element of mystery. Novels like these are not written merely to entertain; they are too significant for that. But M. Mauriac's message does not come very clearly through his pages; it is difficult to grasp just what he is trying to say. In *The Enemy* the surrender to passion is too thorough and inevitable for comfort; and the reclamation comes about by chance alone, not by any deliberate act. The whole process of return to grace is sketched briefly and timidly, the author assuring us that he is not capable of portraying a man's actions under grace. It is startling, too, when we realize that the Communists are the only contented and happy people in *The Weakling*. Why this overwhelming preoccupation with vice and weak reflection of virtue? In both novels, religion fails utterly in the lives of those who profess it. There are many possible explanations,

but there is no obvious one. If we did not know so surely that all this came from a Catholic pen, we would wonder exceedingly.

L.K.

Leisure the Basis of Culture. By Joseph Pieper. New York, Pantheon, 1952. pp. 169. \$2.75.

The phraseology "intellectual work" and "intellectual worker" have in a sense been adopted by the Communistic ideology in its death struggle with Christianity. So, Christians must beware lest even their speech betray them. There is only one thing left to do. That is, to return to the old, true distinction between the servile and liberal arts. The difference must be made to live in its true, pristine reality. If all men are forbidden servile works on Sunday, then all have the obligation to perform the liberal arts on that day. There is no one in the Christian scheme of living who should not have time for leisure. Leisure is the basis of culture. Both leisure and culture intrinsically depend on a true, living worship of God. Take religion out of a man's life and you have destroyed leisure and culture, for then man is engaged full time *in work*, fulfilling the needs of the flesh. This is the basic theme of Joseph Pieper's latest opus.

Two separate essays, in the brief, concentrated style typical of the author, are packed into this book of less than 200 pages. The first is on leisure itself. The second is an analysis of what takes place when a person philosophizes. The first essay, *Leisure*, is the easier to read. In many ways it is more important. It represents a valuable source book of material for lecturing, preaching, and just plain thinking. It could well be required reading for every college student.

The second essay, *The Philosophical Act*, deals with the initial interest of the curious mind. When the mind is brought face to face with an event whose cause it does not know, it is left in a state of wonderment. If the experience does not lead to despair of knowing the answer, and the desire for knowledge is thoroughly aroused, man is equipped to set out on the wonderful adventure which hides under the often misconstrued term "philosophy." The teacher who keeps burning within the heart of the poor struggling beginner the desire to know the answer is the successful one. For teachers not naturally gifted with the ability to stimulate student interest this second essay should prove particularly profitable.

These two essays are timely, presenting problems confronting modern man in the educational and cultural areas. Those who treasure culture would do well to manage sufficient "leisure" to read this book.

A.G.