

over, as change is the law of life, there is every reason to believe that certain judgments made by Fr Merton, which to a very mature theological mind may seem somewhat naïve, will in time, with him, adjust themselves to the complex realities of human life.

If Fr Merton succeeds in doing all this while at the same time retaining his hold over his large and diverse circle of readers, he may well prove to have been the most widely influential spiritual writer of the day. Meantime, *The Sign of Jonas* is worthy of everyone's attention in some degree, and the final chapter we commend to all as a small masterpiece of descriptive writing and meditative soliloquy.

R. VELARDE

VAUX OF HARROWDEN. A Recusant Family. By Godfrey Anstruther, o.p.
(R. H. Johns, Newport, Mon.; 25s.)

If anyone should ask what interest a family history has for readers of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, the best answer would be: 'Read this book and see for yourself'. But as an encouragement to do so, some outline of the reasons for that interest may be attempted.

To begin with, though it is indeed family history, it is also something more. It is more even than a closely documented account of the passion and death of the Catholic faith in an average English midland county. It can be read and appreciated as both of these things, but it can be understood at a deeper level to be a microcosm of a part of England's story, the story of the life of the spirit, of the still undecided battle for her soul. Now Englishmen are practical and pragmatic people, more swayed by ideas if these are embodied in living people than by theories that remain abstract. Hence we feel better able to approach a problem with sympathy and understanding when we can envisage it in human terms. This is true of the Reformation, when men were divided by a conflict of ideas, principally by two opposed concepts of what kind of Church God had founded. These concepts, however, were not at war in a void. Their actions and reactions have been abstracted by historians from the lives lived at various levels, international, national, family and personal, by multitudes of different people. The actual events, choices and changes which confronted actual people are the real stuff of history, and make points of contact with ourselves who likewise know what it is to struggle in daily life with problems half-understood and situations not of our making. History comes alive when it becomes personal, and that is why biographies and historical novels are so popular.

What the insight of a Benson or a Prescott achieves in bringing seemingly forgotten issues to life by depicting them in a historical novel peopled with convincingly imagined characters, Fr Anstruther achieves by exercising similar imaginative insight upon real men and women whose lives and

deaths he has so sympathetically recreated for us that we cannot but share their triumphs and tribulations. The tribulations are more obvious than the triumphs in these pages, for humanly speaking this story is ultimately one of tragedy and eclipse. But it is precisely because the author does not let the wealth of detail he has so patiently assembled and so dexterously knit into a vivid narrative, obscure the significance of his story, that we never forget that 'humanly speaking' is not everything where grace is at work.

But grace presupposes nature, and of human nature, its frailties sometimes setting off other traits of clear sanctity, there is plenty in his rich gallery of portraits. Though relatively well-known priests like Garnet and Gerard rightly occupy much of the picture, it is the figures, hitherto shadowy or unknown, of lay men and women which lend it such distinguished new colour. Not all the staunch recusants among them were saints, nor was the Faith any guarantee of success or happiness in a world of calculated injustice. Yet amidst the deepest shadows flash out again and again glimpses of the long perspectives of God. Even human vision can already distinguish that the tragedy and failure were relative and not absolute. The Faith was never wholly lost in this country as it was, for example, in Scandinavia, where Catholicism has begun again from nothing.

To English homes from which, decade after decade, men and women slipped away to fill more than a score of English religious houses abroad, came the missionary priests to find shelter. Wherever they went Mass was said, and where Mass was said the Faith survived. True, we often cannot trace these Mass-centres or name those who kept the Faith for us. When the penalty of discovery could be death, a secrecy hid them which may remain impenetrable, especially after intervening centuries of neglect and destruction have removed what tangible evidence this underground Church left of its presence. Much of the story of our Church will remain known only to God till the end of time, but not all the evidence has perished. It lies scattered in fragments, awaiting historians to piece it together with the loving patience Fr Anstruther shows. His detailed narrative, securely based on an extensive range of original sources, gives colour and emphasis and telling detail to the general picture we have of life in England under persecution. Such a documented study helps to explain how, despite the worst that force and fraud could do, while there were families like the Vauxes and the Treshams and others less known but deserving no less honour, the Mass could not fail. Its preservation is the hidden theme of this absorbing book.

It should deepen our love for the precious heritage of the Mass to learn to what heroism ordinary English men and women could rise in its defence. Even our seemingly so indifferent world might reflect that without devoted laypeople to shelter and finance them at risk of their own lives and fortunes, all the priests in England could have been rounded up in a year and the

Mass utterly suppressed. Further, it was these lay helpers who, by the openings they created, largely made possible the apostolate of the priests to the lapsed and to non-Catholics. If we are ever tempted to consider the lay apostolate of today a new-fangled or unproved missionary method we might ponder the parallel.

In paying tribute to the author for what is obviously the fruit of years of devoted labour, let us couple with him a publisher who has already given us *Stonor* and who has the courage of his conviction that books like that and the present one will win Catholic readers by the proud appeal of their story and non-Catholics by their historical interest and freshness. Historians of the period would like a better index than we are given, but the general reader will not find its shortcomings spoil his enjoyment of a stirring story beautifully told.

DAVID ROGERS

THE FURTHER JOURNEY, by Rosalind Murray (Harvill; 12s. 6d.), provides a penetrating sequel to the author's first Catholic book, *The Good Pagan's Failure*. In the first book she had written of her first impact with the Church from her 'good pagan' surroundings. Now she writes, after ten years as an educated convert, of the hard but fruitful remoulding of her life into a Catholic form. There were some strange paradoxes to be resolved; for example, it is of interest that the sacramental Presence at first appealed to her while she could not attach any importance to the historic Christ, and yet at the same time she was drawn to an over-spiritualised ideal of the Christian which had more in common with Plato than with Christ. Only after these years has the whole integrity of the Christian person become a reality to her with the necessary connection with the sacraments and the imperfection and weaknesses of those who make up the Mystical Body. The convert must plunge into the purifying waters perhaps for some long time after having abandoned the pagan humanism. There are many 'deeps' that will cleanse in the end though they seem at first repellent—such as 'the good Catholic', the magical attitude to certain religious practices, the unedifying Catholic who 'falls short in just those virtues which they (the non-Catholics) prize most highly: truthfulness, honesty, integrity, public spirit, the essential virtues of the humanist morality'. All these 'practical barriers' come eventually to be seen in the true perspective of the last supernatural goal of man and play their part in widening and deepening the life of the generous convert. Miss Murray rightly considers that her own experiences and difficulties are to some extent typical of the educated Catholic who comes from the milieu of what she calls the 'Yogi Pagan'. For this reason her book will appeal particularly to the non-Catholic who is puzzled by the Catholic Church and the behaviour of many of her members and also to the convert who is confronted by these common problems that accompany the intelligent person as he is assimilated into the body of Christ.

C.P.