

had, unbelievably, passed away for ever. Professor Ghirshman has, therefore, good reasons for closing his book with the end of the Sassanian Empire. This voluntary limitation gives his book a remarkable unity of character, reinforced by the fact that the author is dealing with periods and civilizations into which he has delved for long and fruitful years as an archaeologist, whether at Susa, at Shahpur or in Bakhtiari-land. As some token of this work, we have, in the now-familiar Pelican style, forty-eight pages of plates, excellently chosen and reproduced. But, what is still better, Professor Ghirshman has a gift for clear and captivating exposition. Whether he writes of Iranian Prehistory, of the Achaemenian Empire, of the Parthians or of the Sassanians, his chapters are crowded with vivid and detailed pictures and brilliant summaries of the origin, development and expansion of one of the world's noblest civilizations.

He has also been extremely well served, in this edition, by the translator, Miss Margaret Munn-Rankin, Lecturer in Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Cambridge. Under the wise direction of Professor Mallowan, who is the general editor of the Pelican series of Near Eastern and Western Asiatic Archaeologies, she has produced an eminently readable and attractive version of the work, which appeared in its original French edition in 1951 as *L'Iran des Origines à l'Islam*. The following passage (from page 186) may serve as a specimen and, no doubt, as a stimulant to the appetite: 'The Persian Empire (of the Achaemenians) provided the banks with new opportunities. . . . Under the Achaemenians genuine private banks were established, and their business records have been preserved, like those of the bank of the descendants of Egibi of Babylon. . . . This bank carried on the operations of pawnbroker, floating loans and arranging deposits. . . . Current accounts were operated and cheques were in use.' One might add that the cheque is, in fact, believed to be an Iranian invention.

This book is a very valuable contribution to Iranian studies.

CYPRIAN RICE, O.P.

THE YOUNG AUGUSTINE. By John J. O'Meara. (Longmans; 21s.)

'*Tolle lege, tolle lege:*' is the urgent invitation which the jacket of this book addresses to the browser in the bookshop. If he gives in to this pleasant plagiarism of the publishers, he will find a sympathetic but by no means fulsome account of how and why, and in fact whether St Augustine responded to those words on the occasion that made them famous. It has indeed been held that the whole episode was the product of Augustine's lively imagination, and that he was not converted to Christianity when he thought he was, but only to the

mystical philosophy of Neo-Platonism. Professor O'Meara rightly devotes little space to this quaint absurdity of Alfarc's. The ingenious and usually more plausible speculations of other scholars receive more attention, yet in a way which avoids frightening the reader, as the author puts it, with all the panoply of *wissenschaft*.

The author's intention, which he executes very competently, seems to be to translate the *Confessions* into the idiom of modern biography. The background is carefully drawn in, the rhetorical exaggerations of the subject's own narrative are explained and discreetly toned down, his intellectual and moral development is presented in humane terms, which make the explosion of the '*tolle lege*' it finished in seem natural and inevitable.

Perhaps indeed just a shade too natural and inevitable. The author, having censured the prejudices of dogmatic psychology in other Augustinian scholars, is so anxious to avoid the stigma of devotional prejudice himself, that he discounts the supernatural element in Augustine's conversion too thoroughly. Surely any conversion, if genuine, is a supernatural event. We do not quarrel with him for divesting the episode 'of any air of mystery or miracle', or for treating the mystical hyperboles of the *Confessions* as the rhetorical devices they clearly are, or for emphasizing that Augustine's conversion was in keeping with Augustine's character. But the Doctor of Grace, one may suppose, would have frowned a little to see a biographer of his writing, 'This passage from Rousseau . . . may show how much of Augustine's final crisis could be purely human, and above all how a sudden . . . and lasting transformation . . . can be achieved without any appeal to supernatural grace, in the twinkling of an eye.' (p. 181). Certainly the facts of Augustine's conversion do not furnish us with empirical evidence of grace, because grace isn't something one can experience directly in the raw, like 'mystery or miracle'. It acts through the natural powers of intellect and will and imagination, just as providence works in the ordinary occurrence of natural events. A religious man doesn't experience grace. What he does do, quite rightly, is attribute his experience to grace; and that surely is the significance of the mystical rhetoric which both Newman and Augustine, whom Professor O'Meara so aptly compares, make use of to describe their conversions.

Perhaps, too, not quite enough weight is given to Augustine's very powerful imagination as an important and sometimes dominant element in his character and behaviour. His adherence to the Manichees for example—how could so exceptionally intelligent a person stomach all that tommy-rot, that so palpably childish explanation of the universe! Isn't the answer that Manicheism wasn't a rational system appealing to the intelligence, but a highly coloured mythology—

and as ancient mythologies went, a very coherent one—appealing to the imagination? And Augustine's was the ebullient imagination of a very young man, who still tended to mistake fantasy and day-dreaming for thought.

But these minor points notwithstanding, this book is an excellent biography, presenting Augustine to the modern reader as the almost ingenuously human person he really was, and not as the repellent and incomprehensible man he can perhaps easily be mistaken for. Or rather I trust I can say it is only the first volume of a biography, and that we can hope for a sequel from the author on that much less known—and if the truth be told really much more interesting—person, the old Augustine.

EDMUND HILL, O.P.

COLLECTED POEMS 1954. By C. Day Lewis. (Jonathan Cape and The Hogarth Press; 21s.)

With this *Collected Poems 1954* Professor Day Lewis celebrates his silver jubilee as a poet; the earliest book here reprinted was published in 1929. Since this is a celebration, then, let us get the criticisms over quickly and settle down to the congratulations. First, it is a great pity that he has not anthologized for us from the first three books; it is especially embarrassing now to read what he wrote in the days when he was a fellow traveller with 'Wystan' and 'Rex'. True, they were written as sequences, as he points out in an introductory note, but I think that few would read them now for the message or effect of the sequence as a whole, and many would be put off the fine lyrics to be found in them by the technically competent but uninteresting ones with which they are filled out. Secondly, it emerges from this volume very clearly that the introspective poems, whether early or recent, but especially the unpleasant 'Sketches for a Self-Portrait', are not the best.

That said, there is plenty to admire: to start with, the unflinching technical competence and the occasional brilliance, from the early lyrics with interior rhymes to the hexameters of 'Dialogue at the Airport' (and notice how end-rhyme and assonance are introduced for the cadenzas of the three characters), from the revived alliterative line to the country dance measures of Jig and Hornpipe, from the rhetoric of 'Parer and M'Intosh' to the simplicity of 'The Stand-To', to the rhetoric of 'Flight to Italy' again. He is above all a craftsman; he should be, after all those translations, which are represented here only by one from Virgil and two from Valéry. But two other things seem to the reviewer to be cause for rejoicing; the journalistic slickness which overloads early poems with conscientiously modern imagery can now give place on the one hand to a serious simplicity, perhaps a profit from