

THE MYSTERY OF MARY, by R. Bernard O.P.; B. Herder Book Company, 37s. 6d.

This is an American translation of a book that has already been reprinted several times in France. It is a comprehensive work of meditation on our Lady, designed for everyone, in which theology and edification are blended, with a preponderance on the side of theology. Throughout, the author stays close to his sources, with constant references to scripture, the magisterium of the Church and St Thomas Aquinas. It is to be regretted that full advantage is not taken of some of the best of the more recent Mariological development by theologians. The book appears to have suffered in translation, so that it has the fault of so many works about Mary, a tendency to glutinize what otherwise could and should be useful statements. Surely we ought to be spared, for example, the reference (on p. 64) to 'the charm inherent in the vocation of the purest of adolescent girls'; and there is a good deal in this *genre* (p. 123): 'she espoused the sorrowful destiny of her beloved Son with every fiber of her being'. Though I have been unable to obtain a copy in the French, it seems likely that this sort of thing may have been quite acceptably phrased in the original. These failings mar, but do not destroy, the genuine value of the book.

ROBERT SHARP O.P.

MARY SAVE US, translated by K. A. Trimokes S.J.; Paulist Press, 50 cents.

In our centrally heated and somewhat enervated religious societies in the West you will come across many little books of devotion. These are sold in large numbers, probably because they are excessively sentimental, but they are not unlike pop records in that while they give you a slight titillation of the flesh and make you feel warm and cosy inside, they make no challenge upon your mental or spiritual resources. They are often rather nauseous compilations which I am inclined to think do more harm than good.

Such publications are shown up for what they are by this small book of prayers composed by Lithuanian refugees in Soviet Russia. These prayers have all the qualities that the others lack. They are a direct response to a human situation. They are in no way pretentious. They have no really great claims as literature. They are written by simple people who were taken from their homes and put into prison camps in Soviet territory thousands of miles from their villages in Lithuania. They have no great literary garnishings, they are surprisingly lacking in metaphor or sudden flashes of style and they have not the great rumble of rhythm that we are so used to in our own well loved prayers which have come down to us through the centuries. Yet reading these, nobody can doubt that they are a genuine response and a genuine appeal to God from people who find themselves in truly terrible conditions and seek help directly from him. And because of this their very simplicity—their almost stark nature—is very moving.

O HEAVEN, BLESS THIS DAY OF TOIL

A day of hard toil is dawning.  
 Blessed Trinity, I wish to glorify You  
 by patience and respect  
 for my fellow workers.  
 Give us wisdom and strength  
 to endure calmly all misunderstanding,  
 contempt, and hatred.  
 Bless those dear to me,  
 my whole nation, and especially  
 the defenders of my fatherland,  
 orphans, and all those who suffer for the Truth.  
 Unite us all by lively faith,  
 unquenchable hope,  
 and love that knows no bounds. Amen.

As much as one loves the great prayers which have been handed down to us by men of genius in the past, it is perhaps refreshing and good for us to read something which comes direct from the hearts of simple people. And when we read these we not only find our own ordinary daily fears and hopes realised in simple language, but we are able to see them afresh. There has been much criticism of the Church for listening again and again to the same old words. This is often an unfair criticism, but at the same time there is something in it and it does not hurt us to read the prayers of people whose words come from their hearts and from the depths of despair and degradation.

O LORD, BLESS MY SLEEP

The day has closed its eyes.  
 Fatigue closes my eyes.  
 My feelings have dried up,  
 my strength has left me.  
 O Lord, I thank You  
 for all Your graces of today:  
 for health, strength, and food,  
 both that of soul and of body;  
 for every good heart, for every pleasant thing;  
 for hope, for my native tongue  
 that I hear in this strange country.  
 I thank You for the suffering,  
 hatred, and all shortcomings  
 whereby You tested me.  
 Lord, I beg of You peaceful rest  
 for myself and my dear ones. Amen.

I hope that many people will read these and read them again and be refreshed by them and perhaps come back to them, and also maybe be helped in formulating their own wishes and desires when in communion with almighty God.

JOHN GRIFFIN

RETURN TO BELIEF, by Yvonne Lubbock; Collins, 21s.

This is an account of an intellectual journey over half a lifetime from agnosticism to Christianity. There are by now a good many books on the subject, but this one presents some unusual features.

After a preliminary account of why she became dissatisfied with the materialist dogmatism of her contemporaries, Mrs. Lubbock considers the problem of immortality, which, after a brief survey of some of the independent evidence, she concludes is inseparable from that of the existence of God. The God of Plato is so much more attractive than the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, that the adoption of the latter by mediaeval Christendom for the philosophical articulation of its faith is surprising. The pantheism of Spinoza she finds hollow and unsatisfying, and she is disappointed by the arguments of Descartes and Leibniz for the existence of God, whom they seemed to require merely to plug the leaks in their systems. From Kant is learnt the importance of the experiencing subject in religious belief, and this truth is reinforced by Kierkegaard; with the help of Hegel there are discovered important inner meanings in those doctrinal elaborations of Christianity which had previously seemed so unnecessary and irrelevant. There follows a series of very brief sketches of the great religions, of which Hinduism is said to embrace too many contradictory opinions to be intellectually satisfying, and Buddhism to be obsessed with the negation of life and desire. Judaism explicitly looks forward to a climax beyond itself, while Islam, much as it has to teach the West as far as religious observance is concerned, has no theological doctrine to offer that is not already in Judaism or Christianity. Next comes an account of Christianity dealing with its characteristic doctrines, the nature of faith, and the Church. There is a most useful appendix of quotations from the philosophical and religious writings to which reference has been made.

The remarkable erudition of this book, and the systematic manner in which it is laid out, may mislead the reader into believing that it is very closely argued. But the characteristic search is apparently rather for emotional than for intellectual satisfaction. Someone of a different emotional make-up, if he had made this pilgrimage at all, would have had to make it by a very different route. Irreligion is certainly capable of finding a more solid intellectual foundation than it seems to have done among those of the author's contemporaries at whom she pokes fun. But with these reservations, the book may be heartily recommended; it has the atmosphere of a philosophical cocktail party, at which the reader is introduced to a large number of interesting people, past