

POET & RECLUSE

Emily Dickinson stayed indoors for a decade—

THOSE lines, from an early poem by W. H. Auden, discouraged me for many years from wanting to know more about her. In their way, of course, they were true enough, for Emily Dickinson did shut herself off from society and the outside world, and lived what might seem to be the life of a typical puritanical, disappointed nineteenth-century spinster.

In reality, she was very different. "The Soul selects her own Society," she said, and the company of her family and her chosen friends well compensated for the loss of the not very exciting social life of the New England village where she lived; while the fact that she rarely stepped outside the bounds of her own garden did not lessen her delight in nature. At a time when most American poets could see the world only through blurred Wordsworthian spectacles, she caught her tiny, telling snapshots sharp and clear on the lens:

How a small Dusk crawls on the Village
Till the Houses blot
And the odd Flambeau no men carry
Glimmer on the Street.

If "puritan" means "joyless," as, too often, it does in common use, then Emily Dickinson was the least puritanical of poets.

Yet, though she was obviously quite at home with the sober life of her sect, she was not happy with the rather crude revivalism which was sweeping New England in her time; and, while she was still at school, she refused to profess to the "conversion" which was more or less expected of all the pupils. From then onwards there was always a sharp edge of scepticism to her beliefs, and it was this that made her into a poet:

My period had come for Prayer—
No other Art—would do—
My Tactics missed a rudiment—
Creator—Was it you?

A conventional faith would not have sparked her off like this, but the tension between acceptance and questioning, between confidence and terrifying doubt, gave her a sudden intense insight into the unseen, the timeless, the eternal. Most nineteenth-century visions of eternity are obviously literary in origin: even Emily Brontë leaves you wondering whether they are her own or those of the fictitious inhabitants of Gondal. But Emily Dickinson convinces you that her experiences are real and are entirely her own:

THE COMPLETE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON. Edited by Thomas H. Johnson. (Faber, 84s.).

These Heavenly Moments are—
A Grant of the Divine—
That Certain as it Comes—
Withdraws—and leaves the dazzled Soul
In her unfurnished Rooms.

Disappointed in romantic love she admittedly was, though her sister and her sister-in-law both asserted that it was Emily who resisted and not the man she loved. Yet even here she

By NORMAN NICHOLSON

made her renunciation into a positive strength, and so translated her knowledge of love and her sense of loss into the life of the spirit that it is sometimes impossible to tell whether she is speaking of God or death or the Rev. Charles Wadsworth or all three at once:

Midnight—Good Night! I hear them call,
The Angels bustle in the Hall—
Softly my Future climbs the Stair,
I fumble at my Childhood's prayer
So soon to be a Child no more—
Eternity, I'm coming—Sir,
Saviour—I've seen the face—before!
In that fusion of the imagery of

earthly and heavenly love she is writing, of course, in the long tradition of the mystics. Elsewhere she is quite astonishingly original. Her rhythms may be merely repeated, though subtle, variations on a few hymn metres, but her language is startlingly new and her metaphors are the most daring in the whole of nineteenth-century American poetry. Eliot surely learned something from her; Sylvia Plath certainly did.

Only about half a dozen of her poems were published in her lifetime, and those which were published after her death came out in a heavily punctuated and revised form which lost much of their original spontaneity. In 1955, however, Thomas H. Johnson brought out a three-volume variorum edition in which the poems were printed, with alternative versions, exactly as they were written. From this he has now chosen one version of each poem to make up the present collection.

Since there are 1775 of them it still amounts to a pretty formidable book, but the general level is surprisingly high—especially in the middle years, when Emily Dickinson wrote a poem nearly every day. Some are just doodles or false starts, but by far the majority contain at least a phrase or an image that gives a little shock of pleasure, while literally hundreds are the work of unmistakable genius.

With this volume in hand no one should doubt that the recluse of Amherst, Mass., was one of the most adventurous spirits that America has yet produced.

Early Church history

THE first chapter of Church history has to be written largely out of the New Testament. It is here accordingly presented by a German New Testament scholar. The "times" he deals with run to about the middle of the second century. His book first appeared in Germany eight years ago. This expanded translation is the work of his former pupil, R. A. Guelich, who has added references to books and articles in English.

In a field where so much work is being done this book performs a valuable service in gathering up the fragmentary historical contributions made or implied by studies of the various New Testament writings. Critically sifting this material, Professor Goppelt builds up, as far as possible, a coherent picture both of

APOSTOLIC AND POST-APOSTOLIC TIMES. By Leonard Goppelt. (A. and C. Black 40s.)

the growth of the Church as an institution and of the enunciation of its theology.

His own point of view, while it certainly does not lead to a mere repetition of the Acts of the Apostles, does not require him to offer large corrective supplements to St. Luke. He does not automatically exclude the miraculous, and so is able to explain the rise of the early Church from the Resurrection and Pentecost, not from the "Easter faith" of the disciples. Similarly he brings out what is distinctive in primitive Christianity as well as what harmonizes with its environment.

His systematic presentation, thoroughness and solidity will commend this as a useful textbook, even if its density sometimes acts as a reminder that it was not written in English. The content provides one or two other reminders of this sort.

It is hard, for instance, to reconcile the fact of Bishop Lightfoot's work with the view advanced here that nineteenth-century Englishmen studied the Apostolic Age without reference to German scholarship. On a more fundamental matter the writer strongly emphasises, in traditional Lutheran fashion, the distinction between New Testament Christianity and the "early Catholicism" of the Apostolic Fathers. Indeed the only figure of later Church history to appear in the

Period saga

A FEW years ago R. F. Delderfield, with the publication of "A Horseman Riding By," gave us a quite outstanding novel-cum-documentary. A family saga in the great English tradition, it had a Devon background as rich and red as the soil of that delectable county.

God is an Englishman is also a novel-cum-documentary, but on a grander scale than its predecessor; it ranges from the dark Satanic mills of the North to the coombes of Devon, from the Scottish border to the Kentish coast. Because Mr. Delderfield's canvas is so large and his picture so vast, the essential documentary detail so carefully collected and collated lacks some of the precision that made "A Horseman Riding By" so notable a portrait of South-Western England. But God is an Englishman is a first-class piece of a work, an excellent chronicle of nineteenth-century prosperity containing some sharp reminders of some of the misery on which too often that prosperity was raised.

The England of the nineteenth century presented for all to see an era of expanding economy, with all its good and bad accompaniments; the mesh of railway growth, the painful travail of trade unions, the import of workers from overseas, the rise of large family businesses, and the creation of a new and wealthy middle class. Back to this land of promise and poverty comes Adam Swann, with two essential assets, ideas and

GOD IS AN ENGLISHMAN. By R. F. Delderfield. (Hodder and Stoughton, 42s.).
THE STONES OF LETHORONET. By Fernand Pouillon. (Jonathan Cape, 35s.).

capital—this last being a gorgeous necklace of rubies collected on an Indian battlefield.

Disillusioned with the Army after service in the Crimea and India, he intends to break the military tradition of his family and to seek his fortune in trade. Adam's story is a success story. He is singularly happy, on the

By T. R. OWEN

whole, in his choice of wife (romantic), colleagues and employees. His adventure into the haulage business prospers and grows: wherever the railway cannot go, and sometimes where it can, Adam's vans penetrate into the English countryside.

God is an Englishman is a quite admirable novel, a fine picture of Victorian England becoming, as it falls into perspective, so different from the orthodox acceptance of what is implied in the sneering term "Victorianism." It is a novel in which the necessary homework involved in its creation does not overcloud the story, and in which the characterisation is uniformly excellent.

IN both the circumstances of its writing and in its subject-matter The Stones of Le Thoronet is an unusual volume. Fernand Pouillon is an architect who "in the course of thirty years' professional life has built in Europe, Asia and Africa the equivalent of ten towns for fifteen thousand inhabitants." In 1960 Pouillon was imprisoned for offences against French company law. While in prison he wrote both an autobiography and the remarkable volume under review.

Based on his research, architectural experience and personal meditations, the book—one can hardly call it a novel—is an almost day-to-day account of the building of a Cistercian abbey. Every conceivable circumstance seems to combine with another to militate against the builder's task, not least his own failing health and religious conflict; physical and spiritual obstacles surround him at almost every step. But gradually and triumphantly the building goes on, an allegory of the Church's own agony in its struggle towards perfection and the Kingdom.

The result is a noble and enthralling book which makes demands on the reader and rewards him accordingly.

James Kirkup has long lived in Japan, and his new book, Japan behind the Fan (Dent, 48s.), may well claim to be the most thorough and informative account available in English for the general reader. The author's approach is sympathetic to both the sophisticated and primitive sides of Japanese life and his intense personal involvement in the country of his adoption makes his book, which is well illustrated and well written, exceptionally readable.

By WILLIAM HORBURY

book is Luther, who is twice brought in to prevent the reader being carried away by the penitential system of the Shepherd of Hermas.

The translation is generally clear, apart from the misleading wooden use of "the office" to denote the Church's ministry. This is a work which will be valued by students of Christian origins, and should help many to set their New Testament reading in perspective.

Christian classics

OF two further additions to the SCM Press's noble "Library of Christian Classics," the more interesting to the general reader is Volume XVII, Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation (100s.). This contains, in English translation, the "diatribe" by Erasmus on the freedom of the human will translated and edited by Dr. Gordon Rupp (in collaboration with A. N. Marlow); and the counterblast from Luther, on the bondage of the will, translated and edited by Philip S. Watson (in collaboration with B. Drewery).

The interest of this tremendous Reformation argument lies both in the perpetual puzzle which the subject itself poses to the human mind in every generation, lost, like Milton's damned, in "the wandering mazes" of free will and predestination and the absolute foreknowledge of God; and also in the violently opposed personalities of the two contenders.

Erasmus is seen as cool, logical, satirical, detached, sophisticated ("Erasmus," complained Luther, "is an eel. Only Christ can grab him."); Luther as rabidly fanatical, with classical learning also at his fingertips but supremely and magnificently seized by the sense of the awfulness of God's power and the gravity of man's sin. This volume is a very fine presentation of one of the great historic Christian controversies, in which the modern reader is given all the help by the editors and translators which is required for understanding.

Volume XIX, Melancthon and Bucer, edited by Wilhelm Pauck (100s.), contains the former's textbook of Protestant dogmatics (Loci Communes Theologici) and the latter's treatise on social ethics (De Regno Christi), in good English translation. Both are significant documents for an understanding of the Reformation, though, it must be admitted, somewhat painfully prolix by modern standards.

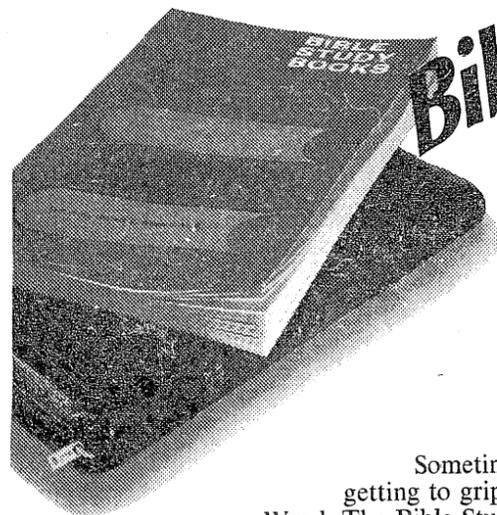
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