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THE EDITOR'S TABLE

Realms of Gold

TO-DAY, when it is sadly true that the study of the Greek language appears to be on the decline in English education, yet—paradoxically—there seems to be an increasing demand for translations of the masterpieces of Greek literature and a reviving interest in the myths of classical antiquity. Much of this is due to the great work of scholars like Sir Richard Livingstone and Professor Gilbert Murray, but much, too, is due to the fact that the Greek language and the Greek spirit refuse most stubbornly to lie down and die.

It is nearly a hundred years since Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote his "Tanglewood Tales" and Charles Kingsley his "Heroes." Both books were ostensibly written for children, and these more sophisticated days tend to reject them as childish, though this is surely a superficial view. The stories that they tell are perennially fresh, and no excuse need be found in any age for a new interpretation of them.

The myths and legends of ancient Greece have come down through the ages by a multiplicity of channels, but the chief source was the Alexandrians, from whom, in his turn, Ovid derived so much of his material. In his new book,* Mr. Rex Warner explains how he has gone back far for most of his tales, to Ovid and to the *Metamorphoses* in particular. Where can better stories be found? And who can tell them better? Ovid gathers up his material and presents it with a charm and delicacy that are unrivalled in this particular genre. The lightness of his touch and the ingenuity with which he passes from one story to another show him as the perfect master of his particular craft.

Ovid is, above all others, the poet of the Renaissance, and "the sweete, wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare." A knowledge of the Greek myths is indeed necessary for the enjoyment of English literature, and if Bottom, Snug and Quince knew the old tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, a later generation must not lag behind. Mr. Warner tells the stories again with a charming freshness, and there can be no better test of this than to read them aloud to almost any audience—be it never so sophisticated. It is always spring-time here, and the morning sun is always shining, while the seas are blue, the waters cool, and every woodland and mountain and river hides or reveals a nymph or fairy. They are not so easy to find in crowded cities or on tarmac roads! It is indeed something to "have travelled in the realms of gold" with John Keats, and to catch—however faintly—a glimpse with Wordsworth of "old Proteus rising from the sea."

"Ah! Solon," said the old Egyptian priest to his visitor, "you Greeks are always children; there is not an old man among you. You are all young in your souls." Perhaps that is why these old Greek tales come new to the listener each time, even if they are read a thousand times. It is the way of a child to want the old stories over and over again. "Gorgons and Hydras and Chimeras dire" never grow out of date.

Though in the distant ages in which these tales first came into being there was horror and brutality in plenty, yet in the course of time, these elements (passed through the filter-beds of the Alexandrian and Roman poets) seem to have lost their grossness and savagery, and all that is left is the refined gold of story-telling pure and simple. Mr. Warner has done his work well, and it may be truly said of this book that "with a tale forsooth he commeth unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney-corner." Even on the lowest levels these stories make a welcome change from conflicting ideologies and the developments of nuclear fission!

* *Men and Gods*. By Rex Warner. (Macgibbon and Kee, 10s. 6d.)

UNORTHODOX PROPHETS

ENTHUSIASM. By R. A. Knox. (Oxford University Press, 30s.)

THIS substantial and impressive volume of six hundred pages, the fruit of more than thirty years of reading and reflection, of writing and rewriting in the interstices of a busy life, has its best commendation in a profoundly moving paragraph of the author's prefatory dedication. "To be sure," writes Mgr. Knox, "when the plan of the book was first conceived, all those years ago, it was to have been a broadside, a trumpet blast, an end of controversy. It was to fill up the picture outlined in Bossuet's 'Variations,' in Mochler's 'Symbolik'; here, I would say, is what happens inevitably, if once the principle of Catholic unity is lost! All this confusion, this priggishness, this pedantry, this eccentricity and worse, follows directly from the rash step that takes you outside the fold of Peter! All my historical figures, Wesley himself included, were to be a kind of rogues' gallery, an awful warning against illuminism. But somehow, in the writing, my whole treatment of the subject became different; the more you get to know the men, the more human did they become, for better or worse; you were more concerned to find out why they thought as they did than to prove it was wrong. The result, I am afraid, is a hotch-potch."

It is by no means obviously that; and it is certainly a great deal more than that—a major contribution, not only to historical scholarship, but also to that mutual understanding which is one of the indispensable preliminaries to the reunion of Christendom.

The work is modestly defined in its sub-title as "A chapter in the history of religion with special reference to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." It is indeed primarily concerned with a group of kindred religious movements between 1650 and 1750: Quakerism, Jansenism, Quietism, Moravianism, Methodism. But the pattern under observation is one of constant recurrence in Church history; and there is also the delicate and complex problem of filiation to be considered in the particular manifestations of it. Consequently Mgr. Knox has found it necessary to sketch in not only the proximate background of mediæval heresy, of Anabaptism and the pre-history of Quakerism, but also the remote background of Donatism, Montanism, and the Church in Corinth. He has further added, by way of epilogue, a few vignettes from the early nineteenth century to show that enthusiasm did not die with John Wesley.

The purpose of the author is not to criticise enthusiasm, but to interpret it, although his interpretation is, naturally, not uncritical. His main point is that "in itself enthusiasm is not a wrong tendency but a false emphasis." Its classic symptom is what he calls "ultra-supernaturalism": "the attempt to root up nature and plant the seed of grace in fallow soil, instead of grafting the supernatural on to the natural, after the timorous fashion of orthodoxy." But if his analysis of the problem is clear and confident, his conclusions are

reserved. "There is so much right on both sides. . . . What right have we to assume that the man who lays credit to a heavenly illumination must be either a saint or a fraud? . . . What praise such men will have in eternity, it is not ours to judge; to their own Master they stand or fall. . . ." The Church is built on the foundation of the prophets as well as of the apostles.

This book will therefore confound those who expected it to be a refutation of all the heresies. "I have only dealt with certain selected points of view; they were not exactly heresies, and I have not refuted them." It will equally confound those who expected it to be superficial and facetious. It is not facetious, although it is extremely witty; and it is anything but superficial. On the contrary, it shows abundant evidence of diligent and exact study, and it is carefully documented. A professional historian, with better library facilities, might have quoted less at second hand: but this is a mere detail.

What is supremely valuable is the independence of the author's judgment and the clarity of his analytical distinctions: for the subject has been treated hitherto, for the most part, in a very slipshod and muddling fashion. It is salutary, for example, to be advised that Churchmen must not regard Madame Guyon "as a kind of honorary Protestant," nor equate Jansenism with Quietism, nor Waldensians with Cathars. And the professional historian will respect an author who has actually read the books which he describes.

The general reader will enjoy the epigrams, and the nimble academic wit that flashes through these pages. "If theology is endemic north of the Tweed, revivalism is an exotic." "Perhaps the leading characteristic of seventeenth-century English enthusiasm was the distinction, thus early made, between the Christ of history and the Christ of experience." "Enthusiasm never managed to take over the direction of the Reformation movement: but the theology of enthusiasm influenced profoundly the Reformation attitude towards life." These are memorable insights; and not less memorable, in another vein, is Mgr. Knox's delicious and devastating treatment of "The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon," or the curious information that "Mr. Lacy, the adherent of the French prophets, who discoursed at large in Latin, is reproved by Nathaniel Spinckes for crediting the Holy Ghost with a large number of solecisms in that language, duly set out in a footnote."

But, when all is said and done, the academic wit and the academic scholarship by which this volume is so brilliantly distinguished are of far less importance than the mature wisdom and the spiritual insight and the intellectual clarity and charity by which it is pervaded. This is a book from which Churchmen can all learn and for which they can all thank God, particularly at this time.

PASCAL'S WAGER

PASCAL'S PENSEES. Bi-lingual Edition, French Text with an English Translation, Brief Notes and Introduction by H. F. Stewart, DD. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 21s.)

BLAISE PASCAL is one of the creators of modern thought. During the last eight years of his life he was making notes, just as ideas happened to occur to him, for an Apology for Christianity. These are the famous *Pensées*, last translated into English about fifty years ago. The late Dr. Stewart's translation, with the French text and a multitude of brief but very valuable notes, makes every Christian thinker his debtor.

The *Pensées* are here arranged in the order of the projected Apology, which makes for ease in studying his thought, as it reflects the movement of his mind on his absorbing theme. A little more than a quarter of the whole, not fitting into that scheme, is printed under the heading of *Adversaria*. Dr. Stewart's order is an immense improvement on that of Leon Brunschwig, but as the latter has become classical, it might have been an advantage if references to its numbering had been included in the present edition.

Pascal was a mathematician of genius. This did not distort his thinking on reality. But his mathematical bent helps to explain the famous "wager" which shocked Voltaire and many another. Pascal was the founder of the theory of probability, which still concerns mathematicians and philosophers of the first rank. But when he wants to make his point for the unmathematical as well as for the

mathematician, he says: "To live as though there were no God, and no eternity, might be natural wisdom if you could be sure that there is—nothing. But you cannot be sure, and you dare not be indifferent. You must make your bet in this matter. Live with God and for God, or live without God. You must choose; you are either a believer or not a believer. You must call head or tail. Suppose you decide that there is a God, and act accordingly. If you are right, you gain eternal blessedness; if you are wrong, you lose—nothing. And yet you cannot say that in so much uncertainty, men ought not to bet. You must wager; there is no option. You are embarked!" It is the mind those words symbolize—*vous estes embarqués*—that makes Pascal a significant link joining Socrates to Kierkegaard and the existentialists.

Pascal was the greatest of all French prose writers, but he was, of course, the child of his age. There is much in this book which had its message for seventeenth-century France but has little or nothing to say to the present age. There is need for an abridged edition of the *Pensées*, therefore, as there is certainly room for a new edition of the Provincial Letters, the last translation of which was reprinted two generations ago.

Admirers of the works of the late Michael Fairless will welcome the reprint of *The Roadmender* with others of his writings issued by Collins at 10s. 6d. Some striking woodcuts by Mr. Lennox Paterson illustrate the volume.