

THEY ASKED FOR A PAPER, by C. S. Lewis; Geoffrey Bles; 16s.

Professor Lewis's writing still bears the springtime bloom of *Perelandra* and *The Great Divorce*. Of course there is a deeper perception and a warmer sensibility, but one is still astonished (I think that is scarcely too strong a word) by the fresh keenness of mind that he brings to bear on subjects as diverse as Sir Walter Scott and the Majesty of God. The papers in this book written at various times over the last twenty years bear no more claim to homogeneity than the mind of the writer. Different readers will light on different points for comment. I was most notably impressed by the awareness of God as a Person, especially in the last two papers; one a sermon, the other an address to the Oxford Socratic Club. In the address to the Socratic Club Professor Lewis argues with a clinical detachment and a lively wit, but all these energies are bent to showing that belief is the response to a person, and so religion is not the conclusion of an argument but a state of being which engages the whole of a man. In the last paper, '*The Weight of Glory*', we are treated to a splendid (in the true sense of that word) account of Beatitude. Again and again one is delighted at the way in which Professor Lewis keeps his head amidst the clouds of glory, and by sustaining a firm line of reasoning not only lights up our minds but brings theological truth into immediate perspective. 'Perhaps it seems rather crude to describe glory as the fact of being "noticed" by God. But this is almost the language of the New Testament. St Paul promises to those who love God not, as we should expect, that they will know Him, but that they will be known by Him'. Time and again ancient truths are given a 'shot in the arm' like that. Professor Lewis loves perennial truth; he pleads for more *pudor*, 'shyness where men ought to be shy', and will stand no humbug about worn-out notions like the literary impact of the Authorized Version. All the time it is our minds that are receiving the 'shot in the arm'.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

THE OXFORD BOOK OF WELSH VERSE, edited by Thomas Parry; Clarendon Press; 25s.

Sir Thomas Parry, in his introduction to an anthology of nearly four hundred poems from the sixth century to today, emphasizes the strength of the Welsh bardic tradition but rightly questions the assumption that its rigid formalities have prevented a spontaneous poetic evolution. It is true that the technical requirements of Welsh *cynghanedd* (which so fascinated Gerald Manley Hopkins, and indeed considerably influenced him) can seem a sort of acrostic, but in fact they correspond to the genius of the language. There can scarcely be another literature in Europe which reflects so remarkable a continuity.

This admirable collection takes its proper place in the Oxford Books of Verse, but one is left regretting the limited audience it must have. It is of little

help that the notes should be in English when the text is entirely in Welsh. In the case of a language such as Welsh, unhappily little studied outside Wales except by philologists, it might have been better to have chosen fewer poems and to have provided a simple English prose version. Verse translations can rarely give a true impression of the special quality of Welsh poetry, depending as it often does on a pattern of assonance and internal rhymes hard to convey in another language. But some help might have been made available to those whose Welsh is unequal to so rigorous a test.

The selection has been made with a proper respect for the claims of the classic past as well as of the far from dormant present. The great formal odes of Dafydd ap Gwilym and Tudur Aled link up with the impressive *Marwnad* to Sir John Edward Lloyd by Saunders Lewis, the many anonymous sixteenth century lyrics with the ingenious *englynion* which still remain a national pastime today. If evidence were needed of the Welsh poetic achievement, this Oxford Book would be definitive proof. Admirably edited, and printed with the restrained dignity with which the Oxford University has made us familiar, this is a specially valuable book just now when the Welsh language is assailed by so many influences that could destroy a heritage of such immense value not merely to Wales but to the whole western tradition.

I.E.

ON MORAL COURAGE, by Compton Mackenzie; Collins; 25s.

The latest in the very long list of Sir Compton Mackenzie's books is an appropriate summary of his achievement, for here is a subject to match many of his own enthusiasms: one, two, that allows him to wander in memory, to call on his own vast experience of men and events and to strike some hard blows against every variety of Establishment.

He interprets his title widely, so that his heroes include very unlikely companions—Edward VIII, Conan Doyle, D. H. Lawrence, the German officers who plotted against Hitler and Oscar Wilde. (Sir Compton's attitudes sometimes seem ambivalent, but no one need complain, for his freedom allows him to tell some splendid stories—especially about Lawrence). As for his villains, they of course include Hitler, Whitehall and Archbishop Lang, as readers familiar with his earlier books would expect. So discursive is his method, so irresistible are the associations that keep crowding in on him as he writes, that his initial theme seems often to be forgotten. But its essential implications—that conscience matters supremely, and that history is full of reassuring examples of inherent courage and decency when the time of testing comes—are always present.

This is a delightful, humane and always readable reflection of one man's wisdom, for in his time Sir Compton has revealed plenty of moral courage on his own account. He has always had a healthy suspicion of power and its abuses, and he has an enduring respect for those who have dared to keep freedom alive.

I.E.