

## REVIEWS

THE MIND OF AFRICA, by W. E. Abraham; Weidenfeld and Nicholson; 21s.

Confronted with the impossible task of writing a book on the 'Mind of Africa' Professor Abraham has wisely confined himself to giving us the treat of an excursion through his own mind. The first African to become a Fellow of All Souls, and now Professor of Philosophy in the University of Ghana, he has uncompromisingly displayed to the reader the richness of his European cultural attainments and his tribal African inheritance.

It is, therefore, not a particularly easy book to read, for the Professor insists, quite rightly, that the mind of a person, let alone of a tribe, a nation or a continent, cannot be appreciated without considerable knowledge of its cultural background. And what, he asks, is culture anyway? In the first long section of his treatise he takes this problem firmly by the horns and if his wrestling with it leaves one in some doubt as to who is the winner, he does at least show himself a very worthy contestant. It is a difficult introduction but is leavened with a number of salty remarks which prove that the author is no 'ivory-tower' academic. One may criticize, however, his knowledge of history; Leo XIII was not concerned with the Council of Trent; and the Professor should brush up his theological information about polygamy.

The second section of the book, mainly concerned with a description of the culture of the Akan tribe, which has so strongly influenced the modern development of Ghana, is extremely valuable and much of it could be included with profit in the course 'De Anima' in a seminary. We tend in this country to dislike many of the manifestations of Dr Nkrumah's policy, as the one-party state has for us unpleasant overtones; but the African feeling in general for 'mystical bodies' is far stronger than that which is naturally possessed by our West European individualistic societies and one day we must come to terms with this. The Professor has not altogether succeeded in setting the Akan culture in the general perspective he planned in the first portion of the book; but, as he is able to do so much at the age of 28, we may with confidence look forward to a later expansion and clarification of his theme.

PAUL FOSTER, O.P.

SPENSER'S SHEPHERDES CALENDER, by P. E. McLane; University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana; \$5.00.

In this carefully documented work Professor McLane undertakes to prove that Spenser's *Shepherd's calendar* is a political commentary in allegorical form on two themes which were topical in the years 1578 and 1579. These themes are the marriage which Elizabeth I apparently purposed with the duc d'Alençon, a bride of forty-six and a groom of twenty-three, and the predicament of the state-controlled Church of England. In pursuance of this thesis the writer uses

every effort to identify the persons of the poem with associates of either Leicester or Bishop Young of Rochester, Spenser being a member and sympathizer in both cases. Some of Professor McLane's suggestions are new and interesting but, though his evidence is always worth considering, there is rather too much dependence on hypothesis to carry complete conviction. Is it really likely that Spenser would have made extensive changes and additions as late as August 1579 in a poem licensed for printing in the December and which may well have been finished in May? In an article published when this book must have been already printing (in March 1961), C. T. Wright advances serious reason for identifying E.K. not with the writer's speculative Fulk Greville, but with Edward Knight. This book contains much interesting information, but interesting to the historian rather than the literary critic since this thesis whether accepted or not, leaves Spenser the poet where he was.

SR MARY PAULINE, I.B.V.M.

ARNOLD THE POET, by H. C. Duffin; Bowes and Bowes; 21s.

On the last page of this short study of Matthew Arnold's poetry the author remarks, 'For years I have carried a pocket volume of his poems, and to walk over the downs making distressful love with Matthew and Marguerite, to sit beside the sea and share the anguish of Tristram, to move majestically with Oxus and the River of Time while riding on the top-deck of a country bus - to do these things has lifted me, for a moment, a little nearer heaven'. This passage suggests something of the nature and limitations of Mr Duffin's approach; one recognizes the genuineness and sincerity of his response to Arnold's poetry, a response obviously rooted in long acquaintance; but one also recoils sharply from the impressionistic vagueness of his manner. Mr Duffin has, in fact, written a belle-lettristic study of an astonishingly old-fashioned kind, as though the revolution in literary criticism of the last forty years had simply never happened. We may be increasingly dissatisfied with many aspects of that revolution, but a performance like Mr Duffin's reminds us what an immense debt we owe to it for the infinitely greater range and precision of the ways in which we can talk about literature.

Careful discrimination is particularly necessary when discussing Arnold, whose total *oeuvre* in verse contains a great deal of fine - even magnificent - poetry, but rather few totally successful poems. Mr Duffin, to be fair, is aware that some of Arnold's poems are better than others, but unfortunately his criterion of poetic merit seems rather closely linked to the amount of cheerfulness a poem contains. Though one can sympathize with his irritation with what he calls the 'ingrained sourness' of much of Arnold's verse, his approach to 'Dover Beach', not only Arnold's finest poem but one of the great poems of his age, is grotesquely inadequate. He allows it a certain merit, but complains