

SOME RECENT GERMAN BOOKS

IT has lately been complained that Catholic publicity in England lies in the hands of middle-aged adolescents; our continental brethren, on the other hand, seem to grow in youthful generosity as they come to maturity. At least that is true of the authors contributing to the *Christe Heute* series edited by Hans Urs von Balthasar and admirably produced by Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln. Perhaps the most salutary of the new volumes for English readers—who so readily equate the Faith with medievalism—is *Das Experiment Europas* by the Viennese historian Friedrich Heer. Heer courses over European history like a spring gale, blowing aside Catholic, Protestant and Liberal prejudices in order to reveal the diversity of gifts and beliefs in the rich European tradition; he says, for instance: ‘without the Enlightenment our scientific sobriety, freedom of conscience and civic rights would be inconceivable’. That is but one instance of the refreshing judgments which one encounters on every page. A similar élan characterises Balthasar’s *Schleifung der Bastionen*; the crumbling bastions are, of course, those of the medieval city, and Balthasar sees their fall as providential, the impetus towards the catholic mission. His reflections on ‘tradition’ are particularly interesting and valuable, as showing that it means almost the opposite in the Christian tradition from what conservative social theorists mean by it. And it is in the light of this principle that he ventures to assert: ‘The future of the Church depends on whether lay people are to be found who are prepared to live directly from the Gospel teachings and transform the world in the light of them’. One layman who seems to be prepared to do this is François Mauriac, whose *Der Stein des Anstosses* also appears in this series. Although this collection of discursive observations has little shape, it leaves us feeling that we know Mauriac personally—and, more important, says many things which are always being mentioned in conversation amongst Catholics but are scarcely ever breathed in public. It is for the health of the Catholic community that these opinions should be expressed, since our very salvation depends on our not meriting the taunt of André Gide: ‘Catholics do not love the truth’. (Two other recent volumes in the *Christe Heute* series are Hugo Rahner’s *Der spielende Mensch*—a revised version of his Eranos lecture—and a collection of de Lubac’s essays on the spiritual sense of Scripture.)

A person whose thought seems to blossom more vigorously and youthfully the older he becomes is Hans André the biologist; this is only to be expected of one for whom life means rooting oneself ever more surely in the ultimate Reality who is eternal youth. It is extraordinarily difficult to give an adequate impression of his latest work (*Vom Sinnreich des*

Lebens: Otto Müller Verlag, Salzburg), because the Vision of the Creation which it presents touches off all the resistances in our contemporary obsessional neurosis, i.e. positivist natural science. I use the term 'obsessional neurosis' purposely because the effort demanded for understanding André's thought is the same kind of effort as is demanded for the curing of a neurosis; there is the same sense of pain, the same refusal to accept what one really knows—and then finally the tremendous sense of liberation, of seeing the world clean and fresh for the first time as if it were the morning of Creation. Whether describing the growth of his beloved plants, or outlining the evolution of animals, whether meditating with St Thomas on act and potentiality or with the poets on the meaning of our homeland, André is enabling us all the time to see the drama of the Word in Scripture and the drama of the Word in Creation as manifestations of the same God. *Vom Sinnreich des Lebens*, despite occasional obscurities, is a magnificent book; I recommend it to all philosophers, theologians, poets and Christians for whom the springs of life seem to have dried up.

Another liberating work is that by the Munich psychiatrist, Freiherr von Gagern (four slim volumes: *Selbstbesinnung und Wandel*, *Glückliche Ehe*, *Harmonie von Seele und Leib*, and *Geschlechtliche Reife*. Verlag Josef Knecht) which should prove once and for all that an expert who has really mastered his subject can communicate his findings in reasonably simple language. There is an engaging simplicity in von Gagern's common-sense solution to questions over which people have tortured themselves and others. For instance, in answer to the interminable question of whether the experience of mystical marriage and of the sex act are the same, he says, why not ask someone who has had both? Lucie Christine had, and said that there was a world of difference between them. This will illustrate the spirit in which von Gagern advises us in matters of bringing up children, marriage, finding our vocation in life, etc.

A more technical work on psychology is *Psychoanalyse und Synthese der Existenz* by Igor Caruso (Herder Verlag, Freiburg). An interesting account of how psycho-analysis has developed from a technique into an attempt to answer ultimate problems—often surreptitiously—Caruso's book is primarily valuable for the cases he quotes, those especially in which he illustrates analysis to be a personal encounter with two-way traffic. Having shown how often the analyst's 'neutrality' is an illusion, he boldly goes on to maintain that the fruitfulness of analysis finally depends on the 'Christ-archetype' in the personality of the analyst. Though he does refer shortly to the dangers of this view he might have underlined them more.

Finally there are two books in the solid German tradition, *Bindung und Freiheit*, edited by Albert Hartmann (Verlag Josef Knecht) and *Der*

dialektische Materialismus by Gustav Wetter (Verlag Herder, Freiburg). The first is a series of essays by different experts on the meaning of *Humani Generis* for philosophy, biblical study, Evolution, etc. All the essays are very correct, informative and somewhat wooden; they will help people to see what it was all about without greatly enlightening those who knew already what it was about. Wetter's study of dialectical materialism was originally published in Italian and was immediately acclaimed as the most comprehensive and objective treatment of the subject so far. It would certainly be rash for anyone now to venture an opinion on dialectical materialism without first consulting his Wetter, in which he will find many surprises. The similarities between scholastic thought and this form of materialism will surprise many whose knowledge of it is derived from apologetic pamphlets.

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REVIEWS

PASCAL: HIS LIFE AND WORKS. By Jean Mesnard; translated by G. S. Fraser. (The Harvill Press; 18s.)

It is only a little over a century since the original text of Pascal's *Pensées* was first published. Before 1844 the world had had to be content with the unfaithful version put out by Port-Royal in 1670, served up periodically with a few additions and, once, by Condorcet with a new classification on 'philosophic' lines. Since Faugère carried out Cousin's plan of making the original available, study upon study of Pascal's thought has appeared. The tempo has increased with time until, during the last ten or fifteen years, the quantity of new works about him has become very great indeed. The monumental studies of his thought by Abbé Baudin and Jeanne Russier lead us deeply into his world and relate him ever more broadly to thought currents of his time, particularly to Descartes and the *libertins*. Textual criticism, after the first great stride of 1844, has advanced more slowly and up to recent years we were still living on Brunschwig's recension of 1897. Then, in quick succession, just before the war, during and after it, came the studies and editions of Tourneur, Couchoud and Lafuma. The last, basing his conclusions on a study of the oldest manuscript copy of the *Pensées*, which he considers was made immediately after Pascal's death, claims to have discovered that philosophers' stone of Pascalians, the plan of the writer's *Apology for Christianity*. M. Mesnard condenses M. Lafuma's reasoning into four pages, which is small measure for arguments that lead to so novel a conclusion, but M. Lafuma's work is accessible to readers of French, and M. Mesnard