

FRANCIS THOMPSON AND OTHER ESSAYS. By Fr. Vincent McNabb, O.P.
With an Introduction by G. K. Chesterton. (London: Blackfriars
Publications; 4s. 6d.)

These sixteen essays were first published twenty years ago as an offering to Fr Vincent at the time of his golden jubilee as a Dominican. Mr Hilary Pepler was a kind of arch-conspirator who edited the book with the attractive Ditchling Press imprint, inviting G. K. Chesterton to write his Introduction; and the whole thing was sprung upon Fr Vincent as a lovely surprise. It contains characteristic samples of his varied genius and perpetuates many of the pointed truths he would wish us never to forget, such as the seven principles (promulgated by the archbishops and bishops of England and Wales in 1929) underlying the Catholic attitude on education, principles which have become even more important with the passage of time and have a not merely local, but a world-wide relevance and might well be invoked at the present moment in such distant places as Argentina and the Union of South Africa. A writer reviewing the book in 1935 said Fr McNabb was apparently some sort of socialist who would yet walk Park Lane barefoot to save the soul of a dying plutocrat. If it contained nothing else, the book would be worth having for the two superb pieces, *The Call of St Patrick* (both English and Irish should take it to heart) and the Sermon preached at the funeral of Father Bede Jarrett. Some books soon go out of date, but here is one that, like good wine, improves with the years.

BERNARD DELANY

A VINCENT McNABB ANTHOLOGY. Edited by Francis Edward Nugent.
(Blackfriars Publications; 13s. 6d.)

'It seems to be generally agreed amongst those best qualified to judge', writes Fr Ferdinand Valentine in his *Father Vincent McNabb: A Portrait*, 'that Fr Vincent made little or no contribution to contemporary thought and theology.' When the reader has swallowed that and recovered his breath, he is told on the same page on the authority of one E. H. Haywood that 'He was not a good writer mainly because his mind moved with such dazzling speed that the medium was too slow for him'. There was something in him that was better than anything he ever wrote or said and he wrote rapidly not aiming at fine writing; but to say that he was not a good writer is sheer nonsense. And any one who disputes the fact should be recommended to take a look at this Anthology which contains fair specimens of his prose during all the years of his writing life. Even the Conferences which were for the most part spoken extempore and taken down by a reporter are good writing, even as writing; though obviously they can

convey nothing of the dynamic quality of the living spoken word.

The essay on Francis Thompson is repeated in this book; but many readers will think it is well worth the *encore* and the book is worth keeping for the tribute to G.K.C. written for BLACKFRIARS at the time of Chesterton's death. Fr Vincent (himself a holy man) salutes G.K.C. as fit associate with his fellow Londoner, St Thomas More and, like him, a great Englishman 'whose life bore quartering of philosophy, poetry, chivalry and holiness'.

The final paragraph of the Conference on Perseverance in Prayer (p. 173) is almost prophetic, where Fr Vincent, all unconsciously, describes what happened on his own death-bed when he faced slow starvation with heroic patience and a saint-like gaiety.

B.D.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST: THOMAS A'KEMPIS, A NEW TRANSLATION
by Edgar Daplyn, F.R.S.L. (Sheed and Ward; 6s.)

The author of this new translation of the *Imitation* rightly deplores the many defective versions of this golden book, so frequently mauled by translators who have sometimes cut and altered according to their own views and prejudices. Still, there have been some very good English translations, notably those of William Atkinson, Richard Wytford and the Jesuit Anthony Hoskins, not to mention the well-known Bishop Challoner. And to bring it up to date and satisfy the contemporary demand for modernizing our translations, we have the recently published rendering of Abbot McCann (Burns and Oates) and Leo Sherley-Price (Penguin Classics). It is difficult to say to which of these we would award the palm; both are so superlatively good; and both, we are inclined to think, are better than this latest translation.

No Scripture references are given and it is not always clear that Scripture is being quoted because the author has a version of his own. 'De lectione Santarum Scripturarum' is rendered 'Of reading holy writings', when clearly the Bible is referred to. Thomas A'Kempis is described as a Dutch monk. Isn't it an anachronism to call him Dutch? He was actually born in what is now Germany. He wasn't a monk, but a Canon Regular. And is the vigorous, lucid, rhythmical Latin of Thomas A'Kempis accurately described as 'a dead tongue'?

B.D.

THE MAKING OF A FRIAR. The Script of a Broadcast by the B.B.C. from the Dominican Priory, Hawkesyard. (Blackfriars Publications; 2s.)

This broadcast of the Solemn Profession of a Dominican laybrother is surely a model of its kind. The austere simple Dominican rite of Solemn Profession is impressive in itself; but its significance is