

REVIEWS

SELECTED MYSTICAL WRITINGS OF WILLIAM LAW. Edited with notes and 24 studies in the mystical theology of Law and Boehme and an enquiry into the influence of Jacob Boehme on Newton. By Stephen Hobhouse (Foreword by Aldous Huxley). (Rockliffe; 25s.)

This handsome book has in ten years reached a third printing (second edition) and the foreword is new. Quite justly it claims to be the only available work in which something other than the (early) *Serious Call* can be studied. And anyone attracted by that will be glad to gain access to more. For to publish all the nine volumes of the 1892-3 edition, together with any later discoveries, would be a risk few would care to undertake. Yet of course it must always remain that selections are bound to be—well, selective: your doxy may not be my doxy! Still in 228 pages enough should be contained to please most, and few will know Law so familiarly as to desiderate much besides.

Then from p. 239 on are added firstly nine notes on the nine longish selections. Then (pp. 295-377) come twenty-four studies with a wide background of subjects treated in or arising from Law's mystical writings, e.g. Boehme, how to read his works; God and man as trinity; God as substance; mystical analogy; the soul as fire; universal redemption. Pages 391-2 contain a short bibliography around Law and Boehme. The fourth chapter shows that Newton owed naught to Boehme, but that he had imbibed some of the Platonist More's mysticism.

Huxley's foreword argues that in a complex world we are forced not only to abstract and generalise but also to select subjectively our facts and then to jettison the 'chiels 'at uinna' ding'. So, as society is never homogeneous and as each person belongs to a different mental species, there are thus no grounds for believing in the homogeneity of the Ages of Faith. All men are ever what their chromosomes made them. So we reach the conclusion by p.x that human diversity is only to be explained by Mendelism which leaves God out of account, rather than by the more primitive Augustinism that brought God's name in. Now, does Mr Huxley forget (or not know) that Mendel was an abbot, Catholic and Roman, of an Augustinian community? For scientific facts as long as they remain purely in the domain of science can seek their explanation solely from material sources. But had Mendel been asked whence his rabbits ultimately drew their life, he would have pointed higher than his row of test tubes (he need not have borrowed his patron's exact explanation). Where then is the antinomy?

Hobhouse's notes, studies and appendices cover a wide field and are almost an introduction to Boehme also. Pages 355-67 discuss Law's sources and refute the idea that to Boehme he owed all. His library (incomplete) at King's Cliffe, Northants (famous later to the

cryptogamist Berkeley) shows in its 600-odd books his width of reading: one source may have been St Bonaventure; another would be the eleven volumes he owned of Fenelon. He had Tauler and Ruysbroeck and seven volumes of Mme Guyon. But Hobhouse considers that St Thomas would not have appealed to him, though he thinks that Suso's influence on him could by research be shown and that of the five Cambridge Platonists (he owned seven at least of their books).

The frontispiece displays a page of Law's writing and the type of the book is most attractive. 'St Gregory of Nyassa' (p. 395) is a quaint misprint.

R. BURN

THE PAIN OF CHRIST AND THE SORROW OF GOD. By Gerald Vann, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications; 3s. 6d.)

We are glad that this book has been published, first, because we think that any series of sermons preached in Westminster Cathedral should deserve to be printed, and this one certainly does; and also because the 7th chapter is a paper read at the Aquinas Society, and surely most of what is read there should not be allowed to die, but should survive in 'collections' dealing with more or less homogeneous subjects. But no subject can matter more to men, especially just now, than 'wrong' and 'pain'.

Fr Vann begins with Gethsemani and, wisely, with quite simple thoughts. We notice that he uses Caussade's expression 'The Sacrament of the Present Moment'; and are we wrong in thinking that we are coming across it nowadays with remarkable frequency? Probably it suits us when we feel impotent in face of the world-tragedies of today; and Fr Vann, in his chapter on 'The Stillness of Mary', keeps reminding us that there is *never* 'nothing to do'. And are we not justified in thinking that the doctor Luke, and he alone, uses the word 'agony'? The 'death-struggle' took place in the Garden: this may deepen our sense of awe, when we realise the serenity at the heart even at the Abandonment on the Cross. Chapter II dwells on the Betrayal—and are we not inevitably inclined to concentrate, during Maundy Thursday, on worship at the 'Altar of Repose', despite the Liturgy's insistence upon Judas? Even the extinguisher of the Tenebrae candles used to be called a 'Judas-hand'. And in how much of our life do we not echo—not even Judas's 'That is He!', but Peter's 'I know not the man.' There may be a special value in the insistence (C. III) on the *freedom* of our Lord's sufferings. Religious rhetoricians used to dwell upon his *Father* laying on the scourge, driving in the nails. We see what they meant: but I remember the staggering words used indignantly to me by a young dock-hand: 'I never could kill the child of me own brain!' It took a whole evening to pacify him.