

What confusion there is when in contrast with *spiritual* the following words are used, often as equivalents: *natural, worldly, carnal, material, temporal*. Add *lay*, and the mischief is complete. Holding that moral good should not be cut away from other goods, she criticises the identification of spiritual values with other-worldly values, and their being set in opposition to this-worldly values, which are considered as purely material.

It must be admitted that a long tradition in religious literature talks as though ultimate good were hereafter (is not that, when you look at it, an insociable idea?) and preaches a totalitarianism in which moral good extinguishes every other good, sin every other evil. The spiritual writer should extol the heroism of St. Peter Claver labouring to save souls in the slave-trade, but not that he made no effort to stop the vile business.

R.N.

NOSTRADAMUS, OR THE FUTURE FORETOLD. By James Laver. (Collins; 12s. 6d.)

The diseased egotism of dictators is said to be susceptible to the flattery of soothsayers. The star-peddlers of to-day find on the whole, however, that whilst there is a wide private market for horoscopes, the best field remains the Sunday newspapers. Here astrologers who have never studied the stars, and seers who have only seen the editor, too often display the future in detail to their own profit, the policy of the proprietors, and anything but the public good. In the sixteenth century it was more profitable to practise to royalty, and the stars concerned themselves almost exclusively with court intrigue. There was no court fuller of mystical mountebanks than that of Catherine de Medicis, who had a retinue of astrologers, necromancers and off-colour characters who combined the goetic arts with straightforward poisoning. Of the predictors, the most famous was certainly Nostradamus. This man was born in 1503 at St. Remy, and was of Jewish descent. He studied mathematics, philosophy, and medicine. He was no doubt as capable a physician as the resources of the time permitted, and he gained a high reputation for combatting the plague, as well as by retailing love philtres, face-creams, quince jelly and prophetic almanacks. In 1535 he published the first edition of the *Centuries*—stanzas of versical predictions in a French which was mixed with Latin and the dialect of the Languedoc. Many of his contemporaries, and most orthodox literary historians, have thought them hopeless nonsense. Nostradamus certainly won a considerable fame, however, especially when one of the stanzas was interpreted as foretelling the death of Henry II in 1559. The seer himself died in 1566.

Generations of scholarly cranks—usually ultra-legitimist French royalists—have interpreted the *Centuries*, and have naturally discovered plenty of instances where the extremely obscure little tags

of doggerel can be pinned, with more or less success, to contemporary events. For those who love anagrams, cherish the Baconian theory, or have a taste for cryptography, it must be great fun. Unfortunately, perhaps, it has also attracted Mr. Laver. Unfortunately, because Mr. Laver is a scholar, and writes entertainingly. He tells how he was a sceptic about Nostradamus, but became with study increasingly to believe that there might be something, after all, in his predictions. This book catalogues his increasing satisfaction that some powers of divination did visit this particular astrologer, who is towards the end openly and apparently without any overtones referred to as 'the prophet.'

The evidence does not, to the layman, carry irrefutable weight. Nostradamus himself says somewhere that he wrote down everything 'under a figure rather cloudy than plainly prophetic.' But whilst it means that he cannot easily be proved wrong, it means even more definitely that he cannot be accepted as right. Mr. Laver is impressed by a stanza about a king of Britain who dies after being recommended to the throne by his father, after which 'Lonole दौरa topique,' which means that Lonole, which it is pointed out is an anagram of Olleon, present participle of the verb 'ὀλλυμαι, to destroy, will speechify. Mr. Laver proceeds with the suggestion that Ole Nole is 'as near as a Frenchman might be expected to get to the "Old Noll" of popular speech': therefore, Lonole equals Oliver Cromwell. Later on Hitler appears as Hister.

It can only be said that Mr. Laver's belief that there is *something* in Nostradamus is not likely to be shared, from the assembled evidence, by a number of readers of this book.

C. J. PENNETHORNE HUGHES.

THE BIBLE AND SOCIETY.

THE RED BIBLE: AN ANTHOLOGY. Compiled by Sidney Dark. (Gollancz; 5s.)

Nowhere has social injustice been denounced with such strength and such authority as in the Bible, and it is important that this plain truth should penetrate both the ignorance of materialist revolutionaries and the complacency of ordinary *bien-pensants*. There is, therefore, room for an anthology of those Biblical passages which bear most directly and powerfully on the problems of our times; it appears, however, that Mr. Dark is not the man to make it. His texts are too few, he has missed some particularly 'Red' passages, and his introductions and glosses are as clumsy in thought as in expression. One example: 'In the Bible, God is the friend of man . . . Friendship, charity or love, call it what you will, means, it is made clear, understanding, the readiness to forgive, the avoidance of bumptiousness, and the liberty, equality and fraternity without which a satisfactory human society is impossible.'

W.S.