

Blackfriars

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC POETRY. Compiled by Maurice Leahy; with a Preface by D. B. Wyndham-Lewis. (Cecil Palmer; 6/-.)

Catholics should be grateful to Mr. Leahy for compiling an anthology such as this, which if it cannot be claimed as epoch making is at least epoch marking, since it provides for Catholic and non-Catholic alike, well-printed black and white evidence of the existence of a group of poets of no mean order who are members of the household of the Faith.

In his delightful prefacing essay, D. B. Wyndham-Lewis, comparing the English with the French Catholic contribution to poetry, decides that as the trade of poetry in England has always been respectable, and as the English 'do not greatly care for works of imagination produced by shabby, unfortunate, and possibly infectious men,' it is so much the poorer by the lack of that note of overwhelming penitence which enters French poetry through the works of Villon, Verlaine and Germain Nouveau (Humilists). And later diagnosing our condition he says 'Those of us who sin cannot make good poetry, and those of us who write good poetry do not sin—at any rate, not enough at the time of writing to produce a Ballade of the Hanged or *Les Faux Beaux Jours*.' But the question of whether members of the Catholic Poetry Society might profitably cast lots for who should indulge in flaming sins, and who become 'holy ragamuffins' for the ultimate enrichment of the Catholic contribution to poetry, is one to be thrashed out between the man of prudence and the man of art. Certain it is, the attitude of our own sinners is more decorous; they do not batter on the front gates of heaven, but unobtrusively seek the tradesman's entrance, hoping their apologetic knock (or ring) will not remain unanswered.

The selection itself, though containing many good things, cannot be regarded as all-embracing of the best in poetry written by Catholics. For instance, to mention but two names out of several, one would have expected to find some examples of W. H. Shewring's distinguished work, and readers of *BLACKFRIARS* will note with surprise the absence of any of Elizabeth Belloc's choice verses. Perhaps this will be remedied, for there is a note which says 'It is hoped to add later some pieces which are unavoidably held over.' Pleasant as the book is to the eye, one would willingly have forgone the arrangement of one poem per page in order to have had a larger selection.

A browse among the contents reveals several favourites, some of which have already appeared in other anthologies. The

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range varies from the thundering of G. K. Chesterton's 'The Towers of Time,' the grand sweep of Alfred Noyes' 'The Burial of a Queen,' and the intensity of Lord Alfred Douglas' sonnet sequence 'In Excelsis,' to the quiet tones of F. W. Harvey's 'Prayer: That I may be taught the Gesture of Heaven' and Canon John Gray's 'The Night Nurse goes Her Round,' the delicacy of Mary Woellwarth's 'Our Lady of Silence,' and the charming fancy of Helen Parry Eden's 'Back from Italy,' and W. R. Childe's 'A Song of the Little City.'

On closing the book the thought remains that had Mr. Leahy cast his net more widely and not confined his choice so exclusively to contemporary poets, the volume might have been considerably enriched. Perhaps we may hope he will some time compile an anthology of Catholic poets which would not exclude those who are recent but not strictly contemporary, as, for instance, Michael Field, whose beautiful poetry is indeed Catholic.

K.M.K.

THE WELL-SPRINGS. By Alphonse Gratry; translated from *Les Sources* by Rev. S. J. Brown, S.J. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; 5/-.)

At last, thanks to Father Stephen Brown, S.J., we have an English edition of Père Gratra's *Les Sources*. To those who have already come to know the rare spirit of the old nineteenth century Oratorian, this will be very good news. Père Ramière, S.J., spoke of him as: 'A penetrating mind, an ardent soul, a heart brimming over with affection, sympathetic by nature and in character disinterested and generous,' having 'all the qualities that can make a man capable of winning and fascinating others.' A contemporary writer said: 'The good that is in Père Gratra is that he has wings . . . He is a dreamer, but his dreams are of the kind that carry you into a higher world, of the kind that give me a fever of enthusiasm.' And in the Introduction to the English edition, Father Stephen Brown says: 'He speaks to the deepest instincts, *the latent enthusiasms of the soul.*' The italics are the reviewer's, for this phrase is the key to Père Gratra's enchantments. He was an apostle of the mind. He was jealous that his God should be loved with the whole mind, as well as with the whole soul. And he knew well how to rouse in the mind of the smallest and least student, a hunger to find God by the laborious pilgrimage of the reason, as well as on the obedient wings of faith. This was the book that Ollé Lapruné, the two Perrauds, Henri Perrey and many more made their gospel of study. It was the principal inspira-