

BLACKFRIARS

It is as if the mind had nervous fingers,
Could touch and apprehend yet not possess.
The light is buried where the darkness lingers
And something grateful in me wants to bless
Simply from happiness . . .

BENET WEATHERHEAD, O.P.

EVERY CHANGING SHAPE, by Elizabeth Jennings; Andre Deutsch; 25s.

This book is concerned with the relationship between the making of poems and the nature of religious experience. Versions of certain chapters originally appeared in various reviews, and this fact may in part account for the uneven quality of these studies; but only in part. The author is dealing with a theme of the greatest importance: the difficulty of living the life of prayer with the equipment of the artist. The peculiar anguish of this tension has been expressed (yet expressed in triumph) by St Augustine and by St John of the Cross, and it is not perhaps surprising that the chapters on these two writers should fall far short of studies which required less ambition, notably those of Simone Weil and Hart Crane, which seemed to me the most rewarding in the whole series. A certain verbosity mars other chapters: dismaying, because her prose appears to lack the very qualities which most distinguish her verse, the quiet power of understatement and the spare controlled line. One could hardly believe that she would so frequently use stock phrases such as 'effectively', 'depicts vividly'. The weariness of writing books about books has seeped into her style. If she had been moving in her right element, verse, she would have found a mode of expression at once more astringent and more vivifying.

Lovers of silence can acquire a reputation for garrulity when they go on talking to their neighbour out of charity. This situation has its anguish, too. Curiously, a kind of charity may lie behind some of the more diffuse chapters in this book, the charity that a silent man learns to show towards his own loquacity.

In the study of Simone Weil, the author, in a penetrating analysis, achieves the concentration, freshness and quiet energy of someone who is at last moving freely in a strange element. In Simone Weil's asceticism there is a kind of self-humbling which can appear to sail dangerously close to the most deadly and subtle spiritual pride. Elizabeth Jennings, in a phrase of clearest insight, says something which, so far as I know, has not been said before about Simone Weil: 'It was not humility that she lacked but rather that she possessed the wrong kind of humility'. That is to say, she assigned to the moment of prayer 'the kind of anxiety which, in human experience, is only proper to the artist—the anguish of the poet, whenever words seem to fail his experience'. Gustave Thibon put his finger on the root of this conflict when he said that there was a terrible self-will at the heart of her self-stripping; the inflexible desire that this stripping should be her own work and should be accomplished in her own way. Again, Elizabeth Jennings brings out in an arresting way the Jewish need

to wander which lies deep in Simone Weil, so that, even when she is talking of 'waiting on God' she was always 'active, exploring, feverish for fact. Even stillness and attentiveness were matters for intellectual examination'. This chapter bears and rewards close examination. One would indeed wish for it to be developed further in a later work.

MARGARET WILEMAN

THE MONKS OF QUMRAN, by Edmund F. Sutcliffe, S.J.; Burns and Oates; 30s.

THE TREASURE OF THE COPPER SCROLL, by John Allegro; Routledge; 35s.

Popular excitement about and interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls is on the wane. Yet books and brochures have poured out of all manner of presses unceasingly. Only now is it really possible to assess in a quiet scholarly way, after some thirteen years, the total of what has been found, and can we use the new knowledge to throw light on the ancient world and on the background of the New Testament. Fr Sutcliffe in *The Monks of Qumran* has provided a thorough and sound introduction to a study of the whole field of Qumran studies. He is not grinding an axe or airing a theory, but gives reasonable views and keeps close to the texts. The ordering of the matter is admirable. Thus we get chapters on the discovery of the library, the site, the buildings, the economic life of the community, the date, the 'Teacher of Righteousness' (inevitably!), the main heads of doctrine (a most valuable section), ways of life and customs and relations with Christianity. The most relevant texts of Philo and Josephus are provided to permit comparison. Illustrations, a bibliography and some valuable notes contribute to the usefulness of the whole. The 'monks' of Qumran is not so much an anachronism, as an attempt to characterize the men of Qumran. They were in fact first and foremost a religious community or brotherhood; and in that very conscious of being a chosen portion, the Golah of Israel, etc. We do not, however, accept the dust-jacket's suggestion that Fr Sutcliffe was the first thus to characterize the men of Qumran. Theodore Gaster had stressed this aspect some years ago, and indeed had moulded his rather too free translation in terms of that viewpoint.

Fr Sutcliffe in addition gives us a translation of most of the accessible texts. There is no doubt that the translations are more accurate, but, alas, literal translation has made away with the poetic quality, thus:—

'I give thee thanks, O my God,
for thou hast dealt wonderfully with dust
and with a figment of clay has worked
deeds mighty, exceedingly, exceedingly'.

A translator who is completely accurate and sensitive to the various literary styles, especially the poetry of the hymns, is yet to be found.

The Treasure of the Copper Scroll adds to Mr Allegro's repertoire of writings on the Qumran finds. The treasure, however, is not that which is depicted on