

## BLACKFRIARS

### REVIEWS

#### THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

THE UNKNOWN GOD. By Alfred Noyes. (Sheed & Ward; 7/6.)

'What you worship without knowing it,' said St. Paul, speaking to the Athenians of their altar to the Unknown God, 'that I proclaim to you.' Mr. Noyes says something similar to the great agnostics of the Victorian era. You may ask what we of to-day can possibly have to do with them. But Mr. Noyes deals with them, not because of their own intrinsic and permanent importance, but because his book is a record—a finely conceived and beautifully written record—of how he escaped from the prison of the dead, meaningless universe to which Victorian agnosticism had apparently condemned mankind for ever. It is only bare justice to acknowledge at once that we are here in presence of a great book, and one that will be of permanent value.

'Nobody born in this century,' he writes, 'is likely to have experienced the throes of that sharp severance of human nature from the noblest hopes that the race had ever cherished. . . . I remember the cold sense of reality, and the deepening shadow of a new loneliness that crept into the mind and heart of one boy of sixteen who began to read Huxley in the last decade of the nineteenth century.' But he escaped from the prison in which he found himself, and he escaped by climbing on to the shoulders of the very men who had imprisoned themselves and him. For, when he came to study them attentively, he found that the greater agnostics of the nineteenth century—Spencer, Darwin, Huxley—all affirmed, at least implicitly and under one aspect or another—something of which an intelligent theist could only say (in St. Thomas's phrase): 'But this is what we mean by *God*.' Even Haeckel was found among the unconscious prophets, even he 'betrayed more than once his unconscious agreement with the fundamental beliefs of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.'

'This is what we mean by *God*.' But there seems to have been hardly any one on the religious side to say this intelligently, and if the title of the book still has point to-day, theologians may well ask themselves why. Mr. Noyes says truly enough that a Plato or an Aristotle in the *religious* camp would have transfigured the conflict. Reading some of the extracts from Spencer given here, one wonders how long he and St. Thomas would have disagreed. Certainly the arch-agnostic, had he been told something of the *philosophia perennis*, would not have

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wasted the time he did in attacking the carpenter theory of creation (as he called it), and other anthropomorphic theology he found in third-rate theologians, under the impression that it was the orthodox Christian doctrine. One of the many valuable services rendered by Mr. Noyes is to make us realize afresh the supreme importance of a real understanding of the true doctrine of God, and especially of those truths so much insisted on by St. Augustine and St. Thomas—I mean, for instance, the truth summed up in St. Augustine's phrase: 'Si comprehendis, non est Deus,' and the truth that God is at once immanent because so transcendent. Has all this vital doctrine about God ever been presented to English readers in such worthy English and at the same time so lucidly and cogently as it is presented here?

This is, perhaps, the most valuable part of the book, but there are other things in it hardly less valuable. We can but refer to the argument for the existence of God drawn from the presence of Beauty and other values in the universe, and to the specific argument for Christianity. Mr. Noyes has written nothing that is not arresting, and the whole book will well repay study. The reader may doubt whether Mr. Noyes' statement of one or two doctrines (*e.g.*, the Fall and the Atonement) is altogether acceptable, but he is not likely to question the greatness of the book as a whole, the fine quality of its thought and expression, and the surprisingly wide, yet accurate and discerning, reading of its author.

L.W.

**THE MYSTERY OF STIGMATA FROM CATHERINE EMMERICH TO TERESA NEUMANN.** By Jeanne Danemaris. With an Epilogue by Georges Goyau of the Académie Française. Translated from the French by Warre B. Wells. (Burns Oates & Washbourne; 5/-.)

Wide reading, travel in search of the most reliable information and, in the case of Teresa Neumann, personal observation, have gone to the making of this book; and the writer recounts with lively charm the adventures of her quest. Except for the mention of some other stigmatized, ancient and contemporary, the book deals with Catherine Emmerich and Teresa Neumann alone.

One is impressed by the scrupulously searching investigation and supervision of cases of stigmata by the ecclesiastical authorities to discover its origin and prevent all possible fraud. Catherine Emmerich, indeed, was treated with needlessly cruel indelicacy. When inclined to be repelled by the publicity which the stigmatized have to endure, we must remember that to stop all visits and all scientific investigation would be to stop the