

almost without contact. There is an occasional strange slip; thus Gervase of Tilbury is quoted in a footnote as 'Gervasius von Tilbury'. There are some stranger omissions; there is no reference to the close Irish associations of Gruffydd ap Cynan which is perhaps the key to the twelfth-century amalgam of much Welsh and Irish Legend. But no criticism can affect the fact that once again Professor Loomis has placed Arthurian studies in his debt.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

EARLY IRISH LYRICS: EIGHTH TO TWELFTH CENTURY. Edited with translation, notes and glossary by Gerard Murphy. (Oxford: Clarendon Press; London: Cumberlege; 42s.)

The critic's remark that Old English poetry is a small body of verse almost completely surrounded by scholars has been applied also to Old Irish verse. It is a mild criticism and, like many others, an exaggeration. But it does suggest a truth. The reader of modern Irish has until quite recently been cut off from first-hand acquaintance with this early poetry by reason of the archaism of the language in which it is written; furthermore, although this early verse has been vividly illuminated by the critical studies of modern scholars, the results of their labours are likely to have reached English readers only indirectly, or as *caviare* to the general. This gap between scholar and common reader is effectively bridged by Professor Murphy with his anthology of fifty-eight Irish lyrics composed between the eighth and twelfth centuries. The student of Old and Middle Irish will find every facility here: textual and metrical notes, variant and restored readings, and a glossary that is really helpful. Indeed, from the point of view of critical apparatus this work is likely to establish itself as a standard book of reference for years to come.

Translations of verse, however, always pose a problem. How convey what, in the last analysis, is untranslatable? Should the translation be free or literal? Kuno Meyer chose the former, forty years or more ago, and achieved memorable results; Professor Murphy prefers the latter and achieves accuracy, but loses much of the haunting beauty of the originals.

Though primarily intended for the serious student, this book is one that cannot fail to interest lovers of literature in general. Untrammelled by the conventions of the bardic schools and the demands of princely patrons, these early examples of the Irish lyric tradition are delicately wrought, and when touching on personal experience they have an extraordinary sincerity and directness of feeling. The anonymous poets cared little for fame, in many cases it is through

accident that their verse has been preserved. A gem such as 'The Scribe in the Woods' is a colophon in the Priscian MS at St Gall, while the well-known Pangur Bán—'The Scholar and his Cat'—occurs among the marginalia of a manuscript in the monastery of St Paul at Unterdrauberg, Carinthia.

Their period saw the height of the anchoretic movement in Ireland, and the blackbird sang with a new note in the woods above Loch Laíg. In centres such as Tallaght of Maolruan, Swords and Finglas the native culture had met the Latin tradition of the Church on relatively equal terms. The resulting synthesis gave to Europe its first vernacular Christian literature. Understandably therefore more than half of the present anthology is given to 'Monastic Poems'—the composition of monks and hermits, and the verse ascribed to St Patrick, St Colmcille and St Ita.

The second part, 'Secular Poems', indicates that the spiritual awakening of a people was as varied in its manifestations as it was intense and passionate. 'Liadan and Cuirithir' has all the bitter-sweet of the world's great love-songs, while the ebb and flow of the Atlantic echoing throughout 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare' adds power and poignancy to that almost incredible anticipation of Villon's genius in *Regrets de la Belle Héaulmière*. Included here too are the best of the Fiana poems with their evocation of May-day, skimming swallows and whispering rushes and the sea asleep.

Enough has been said to show the importance of this book, and how it brings home to the reader the variety and richness of early Irish poetry.

AUGUSTINE VALKENBURG, O.P.

IRISH JOURNEY. By Halliday Sutherland. (Bles; 15s.)

When, in 1955, Dr Sutherland paid a flying visit to Ireland in deference to admirers who had been pressing him to write a book about the country, it was by no means his first visit. But if the distinguished author was too preoccupied on these earlier occasions to gather anything more than a superficial impression of Irish life, he clearly had even less time to spare on this latest and more leisurely visit. Indeed, the impression one gets from the resulting *Irish Journey* is that Dr Sutherland could have written it just as easily without ever setting foot in Ireland. For granting that he spent days in Dublin and in the West, and that he swept through south-west Munster to Cobh, Killarney and Doneraile, his book is at the most only a vehicle for the expression of many preconceived ideas about things Irish. A title such as 'Ireland Debunked' would therefore be less pretentious than *Irish Journey*.