

REVIEWS

SURPRISED BY JOY. By C. S. Lewis. (Geoffrey Bles; 15s.)

This is an admirable book for which Christians should be grateful. Dr Lewis gives an account of his progress through atheism to the the Christianity which he had abandoned in early youth. His preface warns the reader that 'the story is, I fear, suffocatingly subjective'. But here his self-criticism is wide of the point. So far from suffocating, it stimulates, intrigues and often moves. The diary of his gradual conversion has been guided by a remarkable sense of proportion and detachment.

Even those contemporaries who find the subject distasteful should be surprised by the power of memory which these pages disclose, and particularly by the brilliant light which they throw upon the splendours and miseries of childhood. They must also acknowledge the blend of sense and sensibility which confines this autobiography to the scenes and thoughts which are relevant to its special purpose, and its refreshing absence of self-pity. Nobody has written more candidly or with more balanced humanity about the enclosed squalor of his public school life.

The opening chapter tells the story of three occasions in childhood when the author was surprised by joy—

'... which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is a kind we want.'

The chapters that follow are in some sense the narrative of an attempt to identify the channel of this experience and to trace it back to its source. But they are much more than that. At the end Dr Lewis concludes that Joy was no more than a pointer and observes that the subject has lost 'nearly all interest' since he became a Christian. This is a fair instance of the candour which informs the story: yet Dr Lewis contrives, with apparent ease, to steer a course which keeps him clear of the arch and the embarrassing. Nor does he presume to invent an explanation where none has offered itself. Of the final, decisive moments he writes—

'I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. "Emotional" is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like

when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake.'

It is the terseness of this account which gives it such force. It comes within a page of the end of a book which deserves many readers, not least for the virile good sense of such passages as this—

'What I like about experience is that it is such an honest thing. You may take any number of wrong turnings; but keep your eyes open and you will not be allowed go very far before the warning signs appear. You may have deceived yourself, but experience is not trying to deceive you. The universe rings true wherever you fairly test it.'

DAVID LLOYD JAMES

WILLIAM WESTON. Translated by Philip Caraman, S.J. (Longmans; 18s.)

Encouraged by the great and deserved success of his translation of Fr John Gerard's *Autobiography*, Fr Caraman has now produced this companion volume. Superficially there is much in common between them. Both were written abroad and in Latin by Jesuits of long experience of the English mission; both were written at the behest of superiors and without thought of publication; both are eminently honest and spontaneous. They cover almost the same period, for Weston was in England 1584-1603, and Gerard 1588-1606. Also both these works had already appeared in English, though in translations that left much to be desired. But there the similarity ends. Gerard's book is one of breathless thrills that put it in the first rank of adventure stories. Fr Weston, on the other hand, has no such epic to tell. It was not his lot to meet with hairbreadth escapes round every corner. All but two of his nineteen years in England were spent in prison. Nor had he Gerard's tense and terse narrative style, nor his sense of humour and love of sport. His narrative is often interrupted by other people's stories, some of which are without point, and most of them of the 'marvellous' type that seem to have edified our ancestors. Not all Fr Caraman's great skill as a translator can give this book the tempo and the zest of the earlier one. Not that the book lacks interest or importance. It is a valuable and authoritative source for the tragic years 1586-88, and has by far the fairest and fullest account of the daily life of Wisbech prison. Also the final story of Edmund Nevil's three escapes from the Tower is in the best Gerard manner. But for all that the truth remains that Weston was a mystic who wins our admiration by his obvious piety and exceptional suffering rather than by his gifts as a writer.

Once again Fr Caraman has illuminated the text with copious notes.