

Benedict Labre was born at Amettes, a village in the plain of Artois. Whoever has seen that great plain in the early summer will not easily forget those vast stretches of grass and of corn land reaching away to a misty distance, nor the impression of solitude and silence. The village of Amettes is not seen at first in its hidden valley. Outside the village is a farmhouse where Benedict Labre was born in 1748, the eldest child of a large family. This book tells briefly of the childhood of this pious, dreamy boy who attended the village school until his parents, having decided that he was more likely to become a priest than a farmer, sent him to a priest uncle to carry on his education. But Benedict did not know what God wanted of him. Neither when he was with his uncle, nor, later, when he lived with another priest, nor, for years afterwards, did Benedict know with any certainty the nature of his vocation. For a time he was drawn to the Contemplative Orders. He tried more than once to enter the Cistercian Order (referred to throughout this book as the 'Trappists'), and he also offered himself to the Carthusians. But in each case the particular life was not for him. He did not return home. He wandered into Italy, taking food if it was offered to him on his way, or going without. He never begged, and the book tells the story most graphically of the pilgrim-saint tramping from shrine to shrine in Europe praying God to show him his vocation.

Benedict Labre died in Rome. We are told that his death was first proclaimed by the little children of the poor, who came out in hordes and ran through the streets, calling as they ran, 'The saint is dead, the saint is dead'.

His was a life unlike that of any other saint in the Calendar, and the book is well worth reading.

FLORENS ROCH

INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH FOLKLORE. By Violet Alford. (Bell; 12s. 6d.)

If we are to reintegrate our Christian religion into the general life of today we have to take into account the 'irrational religion' which remains even in an age which thinks it has rationalised most human activity. The traditional customs of the people which have come to be classified under the heading of 'Folklore' represent a body of instinctive religion that has continued without a 'Testament' or a Code of Rubrics or Law for thousands of years. The Christian religion has not despised or thrown out this 'natural' worship although it has had to struggle to prevent the irrational element from occupying the direction of religious worship and so turning the people towards superstition and magic. The advantage of this 'Introduction' is that the reader is given a glimpse of a great number of these customs that are actually observed today in England. What we still require, however, is a *Christian* introduction to give the reader a key to the connection between Christianity and folklore. Miss

Alford is too preoccupied with the idea of the antagonism between Christianity and paganism, or rather the surreptitious influence of paganism on Christianity, to be able to view the customs very constructively. It is in fact almost impossible for the students of folklore, which we are told here only became a word and a subject in the middle of last century, not to rationalise the irrational and so to kill what is vital in these customs. The revival of folk-dancing and the like in suburban 'village' halls holds some of the elements of sacrilege.

C.P.

RECENT THOUGHT IN FOCUS. By Donald Nicholl. (Sheed and Ward; 16s.)

A recent reviewer has said of Mr Joad that he has 'the rare gift of popularising philosophy without misrepresenting what he explains'. This is also true of Mr Nicholl, who has the even rarer gift of seeing with Christian eyes the relevance of philosophies so that he truly represents them in their bearing on life. Students who are used to the purely academic approach to existentialism, logical positivism, psychology and the other modern intellectual fashions may find the approach confusing. A man who spends hours staring through a lens at some tiny object is confused when he raises his head suddenly and is confronted by the vast and beautiful world of God's making. This is very much what Mr Nicholl does; gently but firmly he calls the thinker of today to think *wisely*, that is to think his thoughts in the light of the Eternal Cause. 'It is an attempt to see through modern thought—not to "see through" in the sense of debunking it but literally to see through it to the world.' It was not possible to do justice to the whole of modern thought in 250 pages, and many readers will regret the short review of Freud who surely deserves as much attention as his quondam disciple, Jung; but the reader is instructed on how to read and understand modern thought. His awe and fear of the 'specialist' is cast out by the love of the men who specialise and of the God who gives all men the power to specialise, and with this new confidence he is led to appraise the contributions of these modern 'heroes' to the life of man. Some may find a suspicion of the moralising tone here and there, but this will be because they do not at first sense the deep theological significance of what is stated, for example, about the need for complete surrender if one is to attain true knowledge. This is a book to give confidence and wisdom to the great number of people who would like to know what all this talk of Kierkegaard, Jung, Marx, is about.

C.P.