

Mystery. What criterion have we to allow us to accept Boehme as a mystical authority? The Catholic will always approach 'mystical' writings, even those of the greatest such as St John of the Cross, with his terms of reference firmly fixed in the living Church in which he finds the true and living Gospel always being expounded, the true Word of God, the revelation of the mystery. But for Mr Hobhouse it is quite the opposite; having discovered the light reflected in Boehme's pewter pot he can approach the Bible itself with new confidence for he feels that he has new light to discern the objectionable from the true in the Bible itself. He has apparently been taught by the mystics what is 'unchristlike' in the New Testament, what books have to be rejected and what can be explained by allegorical interpretations. Such an approach is surely not only presumptuous but also dangerous. It is of course the devout modernist's approach which ends by offering the whole Bible as a burnt holocaust and leaving men without a vestige of Christian hope. Yet with the surety of a faith grounded in the living Christ one can read the mysterious effusions of such a man as Boehme with interest and even with profit. C.P.

THE SEVEN CHRISTIAN VIRTUES. By Hugh Ross Williamson. (S.C.M. Press; 9s.6d.)

This is Mr Williamson's third attempt to state his case. There was the play *The Seven Deadly Virtues* about 1934, and the pamphlet *A.D.33* at the beginning of the war and it does not need the author's statement in the Introduction to the present work that *A.D.33* was 'withdrawn from circulation as it contains much of what I now see to be heresy' to convince one of the sincerity of this book.

The theme of this book is that there is nothing new about the seven Christian virtues. 'Temperance, Fortitude, Justice (and) Prudence were the four virtues recognised by the general moral consciousness of Greece—and therefore of the ancient world.' Faith, Hope and Love characterised the outlook of the Jews. The meaning of these seven virtues was transformed by the 'internal logic of the Cross'—and he analyses the revolution which Christ originated in their meaning.

It is a penetrating study, lucidly written and with a profound understanding of the Catholic position—the whole book will repay reading, but if you need an aperitif read the short last chapter, 'The Christian Virtues in a Post-Christian State'.

TERENCE TANNER.

DIALOGUE WITH AN ANGEL. By Sister Mary Jeremy, O.P. (Devin-Adair Company, U.S.A.; \$2.)

In the response evoked by metaphysical poetry, sympathy is half the battle: sensibility the other half. However with this particular kind of religious poetry the critic must always be wary of allowing his personal sympathy to outrun his critical sensibility; of becoming a prey to dogma for the sake of dogma. So let it be said straightaway

then that a slim volume of poetry, set in Perpetua type, bound in Della Robbia paper boards and written by an American Dominican nun are all factors likely to make the English critic suspicious. So often in the past these factors have been synonyms for preciosity and triteness. It is with some misgiving therefore that one opens Sister Mary Jeremy's book, *A Dialogue with an Angel*: but a second glance dispels misgiving—and reticence can be thrown to the winds. Automatically one is tempted to re-echo Thomas Merton's words: 'This volume of verse . . . is one of the best to have come from the pen of any Catholic poet in America'.

Alice Finnegan, as Sister Mary Jeremy began her literary career in 1933, was never of the *avant-garde* school. Instead her poetry has always been shapely and formal; her vocabulary derived principally from Greek and Latin words; her music built up out of assonances and four-line stresses. She has vigilantly eschewed both wordiness and pure verbiage so that often her meaning is highly concentrated. She ends a poem on Hopkins:

I am gall, I am heartburn. Were. God rest your soul
and it is a line in its context, with its one-word middle sentence, which is almost telegraphic in its power. Concomitant with this power, she brings to subjects such as Christmas and Easter her own freshness of vision: a freshness whose originality is in no way dwarfed because in earlier centuries other Christian poets have travelled along the same way as herself. For instance she begins a poem on the Annunciation thus:

'Hail', says the courteous angel, 'full of grace'
and another of her poems contains the line:

All Hail I will not say, for that did Judas cry.

In each case one feels that though the originality of phrasing may have come at a moment of inspiration, it belongs to a genus of inspiration which is only achieved (and carried through) by an ardent earlier apprenticeship to technique: out of past strivings new poetic feats are accomplished. In short her talent is fastidious without being finicky; modest without being mean.

Indeed, folly as it would be to let the extravagant and hyperbolic claims of some of her American contemporaries become current on this side of the Atlantic, it would be equally unfair to let this first book pass in England without giving some more just and local hint of its quality: and for that hint perhaps the fairest indication would be to say that there are some half-dozen poems in *A Dialogue with an Angel* whose altitude of quality is such as to put them on a par with the best work of the late Lilian Bowes Lyon.

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE.

OLD TESTAMENT STORIES. Dom Hubert van Zeller, O.S.B. (Burns Oates; 6s.6d.)

To review this little book is not a very easy task. One hesitates between praise and blame. It is excellent that the Old Testament