

BLACKFRIARS

absolutely, instead of merely relatively or reflectively, beautiful, and that they have been granted the inspiration more or less to justify their madness.

The muster includes Hopkins and Yeats; the war-victims Owen and Rosenberg; T. E. Hulme, Monro, Aiken, H. D., M. Moore; Pound and Eliot; Read, the Sitwells, E. and S.; L. Riding and R. Graves; and—to be brief—many others, down to number thirty-seven, born 1916. It is a thrilling book. If a pragmatic recommendation be desirable, there is always Mr. Roberts' final paragraph—. . . To read merely to concur in the judgments of our ancestors is to inhibit all spontaneous response and to miss the pleasure of that reading which moulds the opinions, tastes and actions of our time. The first important thing about contemporary literature is that it *is* contemporary: it is speaking to us and for us, here, now. Judgment can only follow an act of sympathy and understanding, and to let our appreciation grow outwards from that which immediately appeals to us is both wiser and more enjoyable," etc. It is true anyway that to refuse to read this poetry, from fear of being deceived, is to risk stifling one's capacity to read poetry at all. RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

ESSAYS ANCIENT AND MODERN. By T. S. Eliot. (Faber & Faber; 6/-.)

The appearance of this volume of Mr. Eliot's essays is an event to be welcomed. The first five essays were included in the former volume *For Lancelot Andrewes*. Five have been added. For the ten Mr. Eliot himself claims "no greater unity than that of having been written by the same person." But since he is a conspicuous example of a mind alive and at one with itself, this is, in effect, no modest claim. In that living unity lies the value of the book and the significance of Mr. Eliot.

These ten essays are an expression of his opinion on a number of subjects, but we venture to think that his conclusions are of no account, or at most of secondary account. It would be so easy to miss his essential achievement were we concerned merely with agreeing or disagreeing with his opinions. Mr. Desmond McCarthy was possibly quite right in his recent attack, but to reduce the work of Mr. Eliot to that sort of "expert" criticism would maim it beyond endurance.

He has set out, like so many others, to form a catholic point of view, and, unlike so many, he has brought that effort to its natural maturity. There is a stage in the development of the mind when it appears to crystallize, to become wedded to conclusions, to fixed forms of material expression. The mind of its nature requires this. Dogmatic religion, far from doing violence to the mind, is the objective counterpart of a subjective requirement.

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From the outside this appears to be stagnation, or at best superstition. But the defect lies outside and not inside. It lies with the Shaws and the Wellses whom Mr. Eliot mentions as types. Unlike many of his contemporaries he shows this sort of mature crystallization, a reverence for material detail; a step, in a sense the final step, in a development that few come to make, and certainly very few modern thinkers. In a confined literary sense it may be true that the Shaws and the Wellses belong to a past generation, as he suggests, but their approach has not gone out of fashion. It is not a modern characteristic to appreciate how "the spirit killeth but the letter giveth life." In fact the whole of the modern situation is diseased with an over-dose of the spirit. Everyone is anxious to construct his own world untrammelled. In these circumstances the spirit freezes instead of coming to a natural maturity, as Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells have frozen. And even at its best and most attractive, as in Philip Leon's *The Ethics of Power*, this religion of the spirit absolute leaves a sense of mental indigestion, a sense of "too much of a good thing," apart from the lacunae that a metaphysical analysis would bring to light. These truths Mr. Eliot discussed from a literary point of view in his own analysis of the age, *After Strange Gods*.

The value of this book, then, is not that it shows forth the author as a fine piece for the literary museum, but that it is the work of a living and mature mind, not merely the author of the *Waste Land*, questioning and criticizing, but the author of *Ash Wednesday*, offering the synthesis for a solution.

MARK BROCKLEHURST, O.P.

THE ANGEL IN THE MIST. By Robert Speaight. (Cassell; 7/6.)

Le bien est toujours le produit d'un art, wrote Baudelaire; and one does not need to swallow *dandysme* whole to appreciate the truth in the statement. Baring, the fine Catholic in this novel, puts it thus: "The great man sees himself as so much raw material, rich or poor as the case may be, and he sets about the making of his soul. . . . The soul must be made, must be immensely artificial, but it must be moulded from its own nature. Nature by itself won't do at all. . . . Everything good in this world is artificial, and most exquisite, most artificial of all, is sanctity." For this moulding fortune provides a diversity of material and tools: joy, suffering, love; courageous effort, prayer, the intuition of the reality to which the made soul is to approximate. The art of living is complex of thinking, willing, doing, making; Helena Vaughan made herself through the love-catastrophe with all its implications, for out of these the art of the stage in its full splendour came to be revealed to her and expressed through her. "Her whole life has been a novitiate for the performance which we saw