

BLACKFRIARS

There is a wealth of patristic texts carefully chosen and which are a positive delight to read. We are grateful to the writer for placing his scholarship and long professional experience at our disposal, and in the authoritative treatise which he offers may be built a true and solid devotion to the Mother of God.

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

MISCELLANEOUS

TRADITION AND MODERNISM IN POLITICS. By A. J. Penty.
(Sheed & Ward; 5/-.)

In Distributist circles A. J. Penty has a well-earned reputation as a sociologist. The revival of the idea of Guilds, the organization of trades and crafts by the tradesmen and craftsmen themselves under the protection of national government, was due as much to his writings as to those of any other person. He was a dear, comical sort of man—the sort that, once you let him get a start, will not let you go until you've heard all about the latest phase of his ideas—a naïve person, innocent with the air of "one who knows," provincial, with a veneer of British Museum, one-eyed and a bore but full of zeal and kindness. (These personal details are necessary for, never was it more true, "the style is the man himself.")

This book, posthumously published, contains essays contributed by Penty to *The American Review* during the last years of his life. It contains essays on Socialism and Communism, Free Trade, Money and Machinery, and on the Restoration of Property. There is much sound thought in them and his opponents will be wise to take account of his criticism even though some of it is beside the mark. Undoubtedly the most valuable is the first part of the essay on *Money and Machinery*. In this essay he is freer from the prejudices and egotism of his self-confessed middle-classness. But even this essay, like those on Socialism and Communism, is vitiated by his lack of perception of the fact that the control of machinery is necessarily in the hands of those who own it and that therefore his criticisms of Industrialism and of the results of the unrestricted use of machinery are irrelevant and a mere beating of the air in a capitalist society. For if the historical origin of our Industrialism is the capitalist motive of production for profit and if the instruments of production are controlled by those whose chief interest is money-making, then nothing can be done until that control is in other hands. All talk about "Religion and Art and Beauty" is wasted in a capitalist society.

But Penty was a middle-class person and an architect (he tells us so himself) and middle-class prejudice and the point of view of the architect (a person who designs things for other people to

REVIEWS

make) are everywhere present in his writings. Hence his general leaning towards Fascism, hence his ability to say without embarrassment: "mowing with a scythe is fun . . . as I know from experience," hence his scorn of domestic central heating "all to save a little labour and trouble"—someone else's labour and trouble! These are small things but indicative. And what they chiefly indicate is Penty's lack of touch with the fact of our time—the uprising of a revolutionary mind in the workers. No longer is it either intelligent or even decent to argue as though the bourgeois, the middle-class persons would or could put the world to rights. Penty seems to think that the exploitation of man by man against which the workers are rising in rebellion has its origin in the modern unrestricted use of machinery. But no! Machinery has only grossly exaggerated the evil, brought the age-old boil to a head. "It may be true, as is often said, that civilizations in the past were all to some extent based on exploitation and slavery . . ." That is the furthest Mr. Penty will go (p. 125). It may be true! Hence his entirely inadequate criticism of Marx (p. 149) whom he accuses of short-sightedness because he, Marx, unlike Ruskin, did not demand the abolition of machinery but demanded instead the proletarian revolution by means of which the workers would become owners of the means of production, therefore masters of their work, and therefore, at last, in a position to decide *for themselves* whether Ruskin were right or wrong.

ERIC GILL.

BROTHER PETROC'S RETURN. A Story by S.M.C. (Chatto & Windus; 6/-.)

This enthralling book presents us at the outset with two miracles. The first, and the stranger in Catholic eyes, is that it bears on a cover-slip the mystic words "*Daily Mail*" *Book of the Month, May 1937*. It is true that the miraculous nature of this choice was apparent only after our delight in reading the story was fulfilled; but the simple fact is that the story, perfect as it is in interest and in literary form, is merely an open framework for a succinct authoritative and occasionally technical critique of modern spirituality in the light of the broader and saner spirituality of pre-Reformation days, as exemplified in the fundamental principles of Benedictine monasticism. The whole tone of the book is exclusively, though not militantly, Catholic; indeed only a Catholic could appreciate fully the implication of several incidents, and notably of the dramatic and wholly satisfying dénouement. Not only is there no love interest in the accepted sense of that phrase, but there is scarcely any purely secular interest. That, then, is the first miracle; and we accept it, as we