

in China, where experience is supported by a dreadful subtlety and perverted wisdom. Not even Orwell devised anything so frightening as their prison system which makes of prison life a travesty of monastic life and is so effective in achieving its objects.

That it was not effective in the case of these priests is due to their own faith and courage and, as they so freely admit, to the prayers of Catholics inside and outside China. This simple acknowledgment, backed by the modest account of the ordeals that lay behind it, makes the book a most eloquent appeal for prayer for the brave priests and faithful still suffering persecution.

M.T.

PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN. By William Langland: a new translation by J. F. Goodridge. (Penguin Books; 3s. 6d.)

Mr Goodridge set himself the task of making the full meaning of Langland's poem intelligible to the general reader, and he has made a very good shot at accomplishing it. He has used a prose which in spite of (or perhaps because of) retaining a fair sprinkling of the alliteration of the original and even, in places, catching something of its rhythm, reads easily and makes clear sense. A very cursory and random comparison with the original shows the meaning to have been pretty accurately caught and though the version is modern in the structure of its sentences it still has much of the directness and immediacy of imagery that are such a feature of the poem.

The introductions to the individual books together with the notes help considerably in making clear the meaning: possibly many of the latter would be found even more helpful by non-Catholic readers. The weakness of the introduction (and since the remarks are intended to introduce the general reader to the subject it is a grave weakness) lies in the account of allegory and allegorical writing. Mr Goodridge rejects with short shrift the idea of there being 'levels of meaning' in Langland and believes that he 'generally confines himself to saying one thing at a time'. He offers no real alternative interpretation of allegory and at least once in his remarks he appears himself to discern several meanings in a single passage—so perhaps he is jibbing at the phrase rather than at the reality. Had Langland really only been saying one thing at a time then I hardly think that his poem would have remained so absorbing as this latest edition proves it still to be.

M.T.

THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT. By St John Climacus. Translated by the Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, with an Introduction by Dr M. Heppell. (Faber and Faber; 25s.)

St John Climacus became a monk on Mt Sinai. Later he adopted the