

REVIEWS

THE WELL AND THE SHALLOWS. By G. K. Chesterton. (Sheed & Ward; 7/6.)

Some time back in the nineteen-twenties a bold bad man or two must have "gone for" Chesterton on the score of his frivolous alliterations. Perhaps they despaired of curing him of paradox, or maybe they coveted the glory of striking out new grounds for leaving him on one side. He ought to have been left alone with his paradox, for the first of these essays, *An Apology for Buffoons*, is a devastating retort upon those who are too frivolous to have any use for humour. Incidentally he gives us a gem of "special prose" which shows how well he could pose as an essayist did he so choose, or if more valuable work did not lie ready to his hand. Those who have time and can brood on such matters may note with expert delight how he chooses the thinnest of subjects for his self-conscious effort, and chooses the thinnest epithets in the course of his paragraph just because they are stylistically impeccable.

After this, the rest of the book may be described as a manual of up-to-date apologetics. *My Six Conversions* is a series of seven articles showing how many outbreaks of Modern Effort after Thought would have made him a Catholic if he had not already been one. For instance, the geological evidence of the layers of New Religions which begin to die as soon as they are born, or for want of that hard stuff called Theology, pin themselves to a popular impression about the Divine Right of Kings or the Divine Nature of Pure Aryans; in fact go on subsisting not by being themselves but by being perpetually ready to turn into something else. This is a deep logical premiss to the next article which points out that the world does not progress—it only wobbles and alters, just as Scripture broadly asserts and Catholics are encouraged to believe. "Life is not a ladder, it is a see-saw." "The Church never said that wrongs could never be righted or cruelties made scarcer, she did say that we must not count on the assurance that this will come to pass."

The Prayer-Book Problem points out the real Catholic point of view: how we were sorry for the Church of England in her very inmost shrine being at the mercy of a crew, a motley crew, called Parliament just when Parliament represented vested interests and not at all the Church of England. But when the Lambeth decision "or indecision" taught the dogma of the "Immaculate Contraception," it did not seem to matter who interfered in the polity of that forlorn religious body. For its findings were seen to refer not to the revelation of God but to social *Convenience*, whatever that might chance to be.

The Collapse of Materialism is a serious thing—for materialists. How serious, appears under that title; but there is merriment by the wayside, as in "Electrons for the Elect," and "The Priest and the Proton." Indeed one could sit up late inventing slogans for new religions, as: *Your sins will cost you more; What is eternity? Wait and see; Heaven here, no B— Fear.*

The next essay too can be made into a slogan for Spain: Ballot-Box supreme, makes English Liberals scream. *The Well and the Shallows*, which gives the title to the collection, is a highly ingenious contrast between the Church which has debated all things and the Modern Mind which cannot make up its mind, but falls back on forbidding one thing or another. "It will not accept the Catholic doctrine that life is a battle: it only wants to have announced from time to time in the newspapers, that it is a victory." This is much deeper than it looks.

Again, "the thing once called Free Thought has destroyed everything that is free. It denies personal freedom in denying free will and the human power of choice. It began as a drive and ended as a drift. By this philosophy, we all died before we were born. It is Kismet without Allah, it is Calvinism without God."

Forty-one articles at 7/6 is under twopence per column of the daily paper, and less fugitive at that. The writer carries us along at such a rate that we incline to forget one good thing in fresh delight at a better thing still, and he seems so simple that we may miss the deeps, or the Truth which is at the bottom of his well. Thomas Derrick portrays him on the dust-jacket looking rather casually into a well. Exquisitely appropriate and suggestive of a Master of Sentences disguised as a journalist.

JOHN O'CONNOR.

THE DESTRUCTIVE ELEMENT. By Stephen Spender. (Cape, 7/6.)

Criticism, to-day, has not very much depth or significance. Much of it (and there is too much of it) consists in explaining the isolation of artists in society: it sympathizes and praises but serves no constructive purpose. Consequently when another critic comes forward we feel strongly the relevancy of the words of the Apocalypse: "Because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Or we ask with André Gide, "How can one still dare to talk of art to-day?" Gide is referring to the millions of men without art, without spiritual life of any kind and with precious little even of material life: to the dull, machine-like community on whose good estate art depends.

This book, however, coming from a contemporary poet, would seem, at first, more promising. Nor does Spender altogether disappoint us. In the Epilogue he says: "In this book I have