

BLACKFRIARS

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS. By J. Middleton Murry. (Cape; 10/6.)

This book though entitled an autobiography comprises only half a life, Mr. Murry's chrysalid stage. It ends with the approach of Katherine Mansfield's death and when the writer is in the agony of realization that the only way to active selfhood is through the annihilation of self, through losing one's soul to save it.

Those critics to whom Mr. Murry is personally repulsive will batten on the candid self-revelation here freely given. "On écrit de telles choses pour transmettre aux autres la théorie de l'univers qu'on porte en soi." That is his motto and his defence. We can forgive a man for making a public confession if by means of it he can show that the issues of his own life transcend individual idiosyncrasies and are fundamentally the issues involved in every life in his own age. In spite of a certain lachrymosity and overtenderness Mr. Murry has succeeded in universalizing his own particular problem and has thus brought out the drama latent in contemporary life.

The outward events in this book of 500 pages are not exciting. A boy from a poor lower middle class family wins a scholarship to Christ's Hospital and another to Oxford. The sordidness of home life becomes repellent; holidays are spent away and during them he begins that series of contacts with the persons who came to influence him profoundly—a Cotswold farmer, Marguerite in Paris, Katherine Mansfield and Lawrence. For a brief moment Henri Gaudier-Brzeska explodes and shatters, but his influence was not abiding. Without doubt Lawrence is the decisive figure; he is apocalyptic. Nevertheless Mr. Murry's very real experience, while an undergraduate, of sound English farm life is of great interest. The rootless urban youth met tradition. It gave him a sense of England and of English institutions. It probably accounts for much that is sane in his present version of "communism," and for his instinctive distrust of facile solutions from Moscow.

The war enters into the narrative, but only as a final disintegrating factor in the life of civilians: it was the ultimate futility. Disintegration is indeed the whole theme of the book: disintegration, the spiritual catastrophe of modern man. Mr. Murry's early years present a pitiful spectacle of passivity. It is good to have a receptive mind so long as there is a *person* to co-ordinate and unify what is received. This person is precisely what Mr. Murry could not find: he lacked all centrality. He identifies himself with each influence in turn, and yet the word *himself* is out of place; there is no himself, the only reality seems to be the influence. This is the individual aspect of disintegration: the individual man without a living pattern by which to fashion his

REVIEWS

life. There is the social aspect also: the loss not only of unity within the individual but also (and consequently) of all organic relationship with other individuals. The family which Mr. Murry describes is typical of the dead institution which still drags on a legal existence in our industrial civilisation. What was an organism has become a rationalized and mechanized arrangement. What was a sacrament has become a contract only. The children of such "families" naturally do not believe in the family; they dread its stifling bands. But life brings men and women together willy nilly and they cannot escape the problem of their unity. Mr. Murry and Katherine Mansfield, Lawrence and Frieda: two groups of human beings desperately trying to solve the issues of their deadly heritage, and torturing each other in the process.

It is the opinion of St. Thomas that even philosophy will not keep straight on the path of truth without the steady beacon of revelation to remind it of its ultimate goal; and his opinion is justified by history. Man's natural tendencies are sound and good, but they are in constant danger of terrible deviations. An institution like marriage is natural, is in fact demanded by reason. Nevertheless, in the present condition of humanity, it will not survive unless the natural bond is energized by the life of God. Mr. Murry is glad that he was not taught the Christian religion by his parents. If there is one thing clear in the story he tells it is this; given a Christian society the story would never have needed to be written. We are not offering Mr. Murry a pill; the Christian medicine-man with a panacea. We are not slapping ourselves on the back because we possess what he has not got. Christianity not only taught but lived and lived socially—that is the point. And looking over the dead world which this book reveals we ask how it is that the salt has lost its savour.

AELFRIC MANSON, O.P.

JOSEPH WOLFF, *His Romantic Life and Travels*. By H. P. Palmer, M.A. (Heath Cranton; 7/6.)

There is in these days such a pronounced taste for Biography that those who cater for this proclivity soon find that they have used up as material the great and the famous, and are forced to turn to the merely notorious, to cranks, "characters," and eccentrics. Thus, many long forgotten, and never in the very first rank, now have their lives written up. Among others, Joseph Wolff at last gets his chance, and as the hero of a well-compiled book proves highly entertaining and satisfactory. His biographer justly claims that he is at least utterly unlike anyone who has ever appeared on the clerical horizon before or since his day. He was certainly a most singular person. Born near Bamberg in