

THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGY. By Victor Bennet and Raymond Winch. (S.P.C.K.; 5s. 0d.)

Some time ago a Mr Victor Bennet, claiming to be a Roman Catholic, published an attack on the definability of the doctrine of the Assumption in an Anglican review. Perhaps because this in itself was an irregular thing for a Catholic layman to do, no reply was forthcoming from a Catholic theologian. Now he has joined forces with Mr Raymond Winch to write a book which purports to refute the doctrine of the Assumption as understood by the Catholic Church. In four chapters they discuss and dismiss the arguments from history, scripture, dogmatic reasoning and tradition that might be, or are, used to support the doctrine.

In spite of an engaging air of fairness and considerable restraint of expression, the book is not impartial. It is the case for the prosecution and the writers make the worst of the evidence and the arguments. They have consulted the usual Catholic books, none of their evidence is unknown to Catholic theologians (though the section—it cannot be dignified with the title 'treatise'—on the Assumption in some popular manuals is jejune and utterly unconvincing), and one wonders if the authors did not stop at some point in their inquiry and ask themselves: if this is really the state of the question, what unspeakably low motives prompt theologians to support the doctrine? Apparently they did not, for they go on to set the theologians' teeth on edge by a multitude of misunderstandings—the nemesis of the amateur who, however talented, ventures into a field of enquiry without equipment. We have no wish to seem superior, but it must be said the authors' knowledge of theology is superficial, and, in detail, they do not understand what we mean by tradition, the development of doctrine and the place of scripture and history in both. Their misunderstanding—vividly revealed in a chapter called 'The Assumption and Devotion to our Lady'—of the dignity of our Lady and her place in the economy of Redemption is the radical fault of the book. Perhaps they will think again and consult someone a little more recent on tradition than Wiseman or even the American Archbishop of 1866.

Mr Bennet and Mr Winch have however done one thing which, if their particular animus had been absent, would have been perfectly legitimate: they have shown up the sometimes pitifully inadequate considerations set forth by a few theologians in popular manuals in support of this doctrine. Of course, like many others, they have too hastily jumped to the conclusion that these are the *only* considerations, and have condemned the doctrine with the argumentation. Perhaps this wrong-headed little book will be at least the occasion of good. The definition of the doctrine of the Assumption now seems certain,

and as the definition of the Immaculate Conception brought forth Ullathorne's little classic on the subject, so, it is to be hoped, an English theologian will write something clear and cogent on our Lady's Assumption.

J.D.C.

WATERS OF SILENCE. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis and Carter; 15s.)
 BURNT OUT INCENSE. By M. Raymond, o.c.s.o. (Clonmore and Reynolds; 15s.)

Waters of Silence is an attractive, rather than a profound, book. It moves on two levels, narrative and reflective, both essential to its aim, since it presents not only a short history of the Cistercian order, more particularly of the Reformed Cistercians in the United States, but an interpretation of that history in the light of the first Cîteaux and the spirituality of St Bernard and William of St Thierry. These Fr Merton re-creates in the first and second chapters, and sums up in the last. Between are a number of chapters of swift narrative, obvious but vivid, sometimes amusing, sometimes effectively moving; there are several faults in them, the same rather facile judgments on political and spiritual matters and persons that marred *Elected Silence*, an occasional lapse into mere chattiness; but they are perhaps only the excess of the honesty and simplicity which do so much to make the book attractive. The reflective passages are better, since they draw much of their matter from St Bernard; they are written for the most part in a dry deliberate style much more effective in conveying the meaning of contemplative life than any attempt at rhetoric would have been.

How unsuccessful rhetoric is, can be seen in Fr Raymond's Foreword. His book is, to use his own borrowed phrase, 'romanced history'; the history is that of Gethsemani from its foundation to the present day, and can also be found in chapters seven to twelve of *Waters of Silence*; the romance has a range of sentiment and depth of character-drawing hardly greater than that of a strip cartoon.

B.W.

ROME. By Edward Hutton. (Hollis & Carter; 16s.)
 ITALY REVISITED. By Charles Graves. (Hutchinson; 16s.)

Horace, who regretted the glittering things that the earth had hidden away and foretold their restoration to the sunlight, strikes the keynote of *Rome*. Mr Hutton's handling is Horatian—dignified, judicious, alive; and this is a forty-year-old book admirably refurbished and brought up-to-date. For the writer, as for the Roman, beauty is part of our moral nature. But Rome's prime art was government, and most of her show-pieces are of the nature of plunder. They are described