

Blackfriars

It is interesting to read that Belloc wrote his *James II* on the edge of the Sahara in not many consecutive days well away from the reference libraries. 'So God be praised!' he says, 'But in that book there were innumerable slips of the pen and half a dozen good, honest, howlers, the fruit of hermitage and liberty.'

Tastes will differ, but for me 'Laud on the Scaffold' is the pick of the book; and the essay on Jonathan Swift comes a good second. The dictum, 'Prose style is excellent in proportion as it is lucid' will come as a hard saying to the moderns whose aim is not to be understood, but to seem clever. 'There never was a man who could say what he had to say more clearly, nor with a better certitude that every reader of every class would immediately understand him' than Swift. I think the same applies to Mr. Belloc. His easy command of the language, his crystal-clear, effortless style ought to commend him to the readers of to-day, yet they prefer the best seller.

C.N.L.

MIRROR FOR TOBY. By Cecily Hallack. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.; 6/- net.)

In 'Mirror for Toby' Cecily Hallack has found an unusual title for an unusual tale. The story deals with Toby's spiritual development, Virginia being the still, patient and beautiful mirror of his soul, reflecting him with the eyes of love and therefore with something of the regard of God for him, and so stimulating him to become what she would finally have him be. And Virginia too finds her own soul, for Toby teaches her, through his unflagging pursuit of his ideal, that the logical soul must be a Catholic soul.

It is a tribute to Miss Hallack's writing that she makes us feel kindly towards Toby, who is really rather an impossible young man, giving his love, quite arbitrarily, a very bad time of it. She writes vividly, slashing in the scene with swift, incisive—to use a word she is fond of—gesture. She has great wit, not hesitant, where it suits her, of knockabout clowning. But I wish she had not twice described the Poles as 'tired,' and I cannot see the significance of the episode when Juan and Estella find Tony in the pub. Her anxiety to get in the Catholic point of view, too, is responsible for a tendency to overload her pages with propaganda. However, these are mere flaws in an otherwise very good thing and Miss Hallack deserves a vote of thanks from the Catholic public for producing so good a tale, especially one with so beautiful an ending.

A.H.