

THE UPANISHADS. By Swami Nikhilananda. (Phoenix House; 16s.)

This volume contains translations of four Upanishads only—*Katha*, *Isha*, *Kena* and *Mundaka*. Of their accuracy a non-Sanskritist is unable to judge, but they may add some further complications for those who take the trouble to compare the numerous translations which have appeared since Max Muller's *Sacred Books of the East*. They lack the literary freedom and grace of the renderings by Shree Purohit Swami and W. B. Yeats, but they have none of the 'sedentary distortions of unnatural English' of which Yeats complained in some earlier translations. Each verse of the Upanishads is followed immediately (and the arrangement badly breaks the flow of the text) with 'Notes and Explanations based on the Commentary of Shri Shankaracharya'. These are sometimes helpful and enlightening, though too often they labour the obvious. It must however be doubted whether the actual quotations from Shankaracharya will do much to enhance his enormous reputation as the Aquinas of India; they sometimes remind us forcibly of Krishna's, 'As a man can drink water from any side of a full tank, so the skilled theologian can wrest from any scripture that which will serve his purpose' (*Gita*, 2, 46). To a Western amateur his effort to force the amazing breadth and depth of the *Isha* Upanishad into the narrow confines of his monistic, anti-ritualistic, ultra-introverted system, may seem a more fantastic specimen of scripture-wresting than anything the West can show, and less than worthy of the penetrating mind of the author of such constructive works as the *Viveka-Chudamani*.

The text and commentary is introduced by two long essays by Swami Nikhilananda; the first is on the Upanishads in general, the second is a 'Discussion of Brahman in the Upanishads'. They are done with admirable clarity and straightforwardness; there is no attempt at that accommodation to ill-digested Western religion, thought and science, nor any of that superciliousness towards them, to which other swamis have accustomed us. But for the Thomist his introduction, no less than the Upanishads themselves, must make fascinating and challenging reading. For here are all the familiar problems of his own metaphysics and natural theology being worked out independently, and in the most concrete fashion of empirical discovery.

The present widespread dissemination of the Upanishads in the West makes their sympathetic study by Christian theologians and philosophers an imperative task, and one which they should find personally rewarding. Perhaps the thought of our own Aquinas will be found to throw more light on the Upanishads than that of the Hindu commentators themselves. His conceptions of the natural desire for God, of eternity, of the divine image and indwelling, but more especially his treatises on the knowableness of God and on the divine

Names, will be found supremely relevant, while the Upanishads give an empirical body to scholastic thought which their skeleton presentation in our textbooks inevitably lack.

The Vedantist realisation in the Upanishads of the Atman as *Sachchidananda* (Being-Knowledge-Bliss)—admirably expounded by the author—takes us to the very ‘appropriations’ of the Trinity. The Vedas themselves perhaps approached still nearer to the affirmation of a distinct Word and Spirit who were yet one:

Germ of the World, the deities’ vital spirit, this god moves ever as
his will inclines him,

His Voice is heard, his shape is ever viewless. Let us adore the
Wind with our oblation.

For Vedanta never succeeds in coming to rest in its Absolute, as witness those ‘strands of thought’ (Non-Dualist, Dualist, and Qualified-Non-Dualist) which jostle together in the Upanishads, and have in India issued in differing schools of interpretation. Our author takes the ‘orthodox Hindu view’ that these are not contradictory, but represent accommodations to ‘different degrees of power of comprehension on the part of various pupils’. Without the revelation of God as Father, Son and Spirit, it seems indeed impossible to transcend the opposites of the Absolute and the Relative, and without the doctrine of the two natures of one Person to affirm the equal validity of the Dualist and Non-Dualist ‘strands’.

But it is not enough to assert that the Christian formulas of the Trinity and Incarnation give the answer to the questions posed by the Upanishads; the questions themselves must be understood and experienced. Swami Nikhilananda’s book should be of great assistance to that end.

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SELECTED WRITINGS OF MAHATMA GANDHI. Edited by Ronald Duncan.
(Faber; 12s. 6d.)

GANDHI’S LETTERS TO A DISCIPLE. (Gollancz; 12s. 6d.)

Already more than a dozen biographies have been published since Gandhi’s death—and more are promised. As extended obituaries they have all stressed his kindness; as a common denominator, that has been a general point of departure. One uses the phrase ‘extended obituaries’, because, historically, it is too soon to judge the full effect of his life and teaching on Indian history. Yet if in obituaries faults are passed over, biographies tend to be more critical: with time, courtesy towards the dead becomes less strict in its observance. However, with Gandhi time has been on his side. To a large extent, his life’s example remains his chief work; in its influence it continues to be radio-active.

This kindness or generosity of spirit is apparent in all his letters to