

BLACKFRIARS

gentle grace which is the joy of these lives, and through it makes cogent "that part of the Desert teaching most alien and most sovereign in a world that has fallen to the ancient anarchs of cruelty and pride." GERALD VANN, O.P.

MISCELLANEOUS

THOMAS CRANMER OF CANTERBURY. By Charles Williams. (Oxford University Press, London. Milford; 10/-.)

This play is written for production in the Chapter House, Canterbury, and is therefore to be judged as a work of dramatic art provided for an intellectual Anglican and eclectic audience. But when a poet writes a play concerned both with religion and history it has further aspects, each of which demands a separate appreciation. The author as poet may deserve praise forfeited by the author as dramatist, he may accurately represent historical incident but get misled in his deductions therefrom, he may have Latin but lack theology, he may be often right but wholly wrong.

Quotations will help the reader to form an opinion of the poet. The climax of Cranmer's death is a fair sample and others will be given:

The Skeleton: I am equated now to his very soul:
I am his equilibrium; Thomas, speak.

Cranmer (kneeling): Blessed Omnipotence, in whom is heaven, heaven and earth are like offended at me!
I can reach from heaven no succour, nor earth to me.
What shall I then? despair? thou art not despair.
Into thee now do I run, into thy love,
That which is all the cause thou wert man for us,
and we are nothing but that for which thou wert man,
these horrible sins the cause of thy being man,
these sins to thy love the cause of motion in love,
where is stayed no sin nor is merit of ours marked,
nor aught can live but the hallowings of thy Name,
through which thy kingdom comes, in earth and heaven
thy will being done, the bread of which be our food.

The Skeleton: And I lead you all from temptation and
deliver from evil!

If this has not the rhythm of Shakespeare and is difficult to classify as verse it cannot be denied a life which trained elocution will enhance upon the stage. Here is wit and wisdom, good book which is halfway to good theatre.

There is fine craft in achieving the Unities—thirty years with the deaths of two kings and several queens focussed to the manageable problem of two hours.

The Singers (Chorus) are presented as a kind of background to

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the action rather than as an interpretation of it, and they are not always happy in their choice of Psalms:

The King (to Cranmer): Go then, and make me, as I am, irretrievably Anne's. (Cranmer is vested.)

The Singers: O how amiable are thy dwellings, thou Lord of Hosts . . .
my soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord . . .

The technical difficulty of giving life (and death) to stylized and therefore fixed characters is admirably overcome. The Henry is perfectly fitted to appear before a Chapter House audience and has no relations in the public bar. Only the grasping Lords could be understood in both such places.

Cranmer does not come before us as a theologian, he

. . . would let go
A heresy or so for love of lordly style,

but the translation of *Sursum corda* and ancient collects are given without acknowledgment of their glorious origin. The emphasis is upon Cranmer's power and passion for the English tongue.

O but this—that words be as muscles and veins
to Christ's Spirit bringing communion, the shape
of his advent, nor none there to escape
into the unformed shadow of mystery mere,
but find a strong order, a diagram clear,
a ladder runged and tongued; now my hand,
my unworthy hand, shall set itself to that end.
Be for the need of the land the ritual penned.

It would seem that Mr. Williams imagines the Church to have been opposed to the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Neither his master, Cromwell, nor the wife secured in Germany find a place in the cast.

The chief character is not Cranmer but the Skeleton representing the fact behind appearance

the only word no words can quell
the way to heaven and the way to hell.

H. D. C. PEPLER.

GOD AND MAMMON. (Essays in Order, New Series: No. 1.) By François Mauriac. (Sheed & Ward; 2/6.)

This Essay presents the "Apologia" of the Catholic novelist who, in his own words, is trying to "map out his position *vis-à-vis* Catholicism and within Catholicism." The following words taken from a letter to its author from André Gide provided the necessary stimulus: "This reassuring compromise which enables you to love God without losing sight of Mammon." M. Mauriac's reply is of necessity personal and autobiographical, but the prob-