

REVIEWS

LOOK BACK IN LOVE. By Beatrice Hawker. (Longmans; 15s.)

LATE DAWN. By Elizabeth Vandon. (Sheed and Ward; 12s. 6d.)

'It is those Methodists, ministers and laity alike, with the "love of God shed abroad in their hearts", whom I remember with love. I regard it as Methodism's tragedy that she ever became a separate denomination. The love of the true Methodist has nothing to do with sects, it is a spirit needed by all Christians.'

Look back in Love is not a conversion story. Written by a woman who was reconciled to the Church as an adult, it is a tribute and an act of homage paid to the Methodist men and women of rural Somerset where she was born and grew up and where she lives today. This is a beautifully written book, a story told with serenity and love about serenity and love, in which all that is good in Methodism shines through very brightly. Mrs Hawker has wisely chosen to make up her book of family portraits, for it is in the interplay of family life, where a careful love and a considerate kindness is the currency, that Methodism is found at its best: 'I have seen with my own eyes that these Christians do indeed love one another'.

In these Methodist families it was plain that Christ was a member and that 'the chapel was an extension of family life'. Contrary to what is most commonly supposed this was precisely not a 'Sunday religion' but a day by day striving for an apostolic simplicity of life and a singleness of vision and love. Certainly the author would not claim that this pattern is found only in Methodism, and yet here there is an emphasis which appears special in a church whose grasp of the body of traditional Christian doctrine is selective. This was the church of the dispossessed in eighteenth and nineteenth century England, where a man who (Mrs Hawker is writing of her father) 'because of a weak heart and the depression never had a regular job, and who, in spite of these things, had built himself a position of respect and trust in his chapel', found himself accepted as an equal in the possession of Christ's redeeming love. Here was abiding security of tenure in the only kingdom which really mattered.

A stranger might feel stifled by so much 'blessed assurance', and yet a way of life which is determined in every detail by the exigencies of grace will always, and wherever it is found, exert a most powerful attraction on those who are searching and able to see. The full depths of the significance of that grace may have been sadly under-estimated by these Methodists, and the Catholic should find it more difficult to

excuse himself on that score; but that the vitality of Christ is here in his members is not to be denied.

'If my parents had not been so devotedly true to the light they had . . . , I would never have come to hold the faith I hold now. If I looked back with any regret I would be untrue to my convictions; but it would be worse treachery to look back without love.'

'I am an artist', begins Miss Vandon. The interplay of *her* family life had involved no kind of security, moral, emotional or intellectual. She only reluctantly admits to herself that she is searching and only after many hard knocks grows able to see. What Miss Vandon discovers in the west of Ireland is, as she tells it, very like what Mrs Hawker remembers of the Somerset of forty years ago, 'the natural unaffected performance' of the acts of religion, above all, the presence of a 'real thing' often glimpsed, avoided, unconsciously longed for, itself pursuing. The account of her search for reality, in spite of a rather too exclamatory style, makes fascinating reading, for it tells graphically of a post-Christian's bewilderment and irritation in the face of the linguistic stocks and stones put up for her veneration by educators and parents whose Christianity was nominal or non-existent. Miss Vandon's struggle with the 'real thing' (for the child, 'the puzzling character called Jesus Christ . . . I could not make out who, or what, he was supposed to be . . . Moses and all his bunch bored me stiff, this Jesus Christ . . . aroused unaccountable feelings of affection in me') involved her in mental breakdown, morphia addiction, the 'good time'. And then she who felt herself 'cut off from reality' and could not bear what passed for reality in her life, through the transparent sincerity and *joy* of an Irish priest and his people 'saw' the truth of what he had been saying to her 'about God, Christ, heaven, hell and eternity—in one tremendous flash'. The love of the Christians had triumphed again.

GUY BRAITHWAITE, O.P.

NINE SERMONS OF ST AUGUSTINE ON THE PSALMS: translated and introduced by Edmund Hill, O.P. (Longmans, 18s.; pocket edition, 9s. 6d.)

Now that the revival in patristic studies is filtering down from the scholars to the general reader, supporting and enlivening the return to the scriptures and the liturgy, it was a good idea to translate some of the sermons in which St Augustine expounded the scriptures in a liturgical setting for the general listener of his day. Fr Hill in his excellent Introduction makes plain the circumstances of the time—there are in fact after this few allusions which are not easily seen as having a parallel today—and explains well the main difficulty of these sermons,