

## Book Reviews

as these children and their pursuing parents let fall. The whole story is so true, so convincing, that at first reading one believes it as one believes a beautiful legend. The Benedictines of Teignmouth have evidently felt this. They have translated it, one feels, eagerly, reverently. If, having received so much, one were so unkind as to reproach them for anything, it would be for a trifle of scrupulosity in setting to work. Had they been a little more careless, their translation might, here and there, have run more easily. But the colloquial, yet exquisite, French is difficult to render into English, and we owe them a debt in that they have got so far on the road to achievement. The illustrations are pleasant and the book well printed and cheerfully bound . . . very, very much better than the corresponding French edition.

M.C.

CHRIST LEGENDS. By Selma Lagerlöf. Translated from the Swedish by Velma Swanston Howard. With illustrations by Horace T. Knowles. (Elkin Matthews and Marrot, Ltd. ; 8/6 net.)

A Catholic's pleasure in the beauties of this book is necessarily eclipsed by regret that the author's gifts should be used in the service of something less than fiction. In legends that are obviously pure fancy or allegory, such as *Robin Redbreast* or *Our Lord and St. Peter*, imagination may be allowed free play; but legends of Christ written round the historical facts of the Gospel should not contradict those facts. Yet in this book the Holy Innocents are said to be between two and three years old: Our Lady and St. Joseph are pictured as falling into despair at the prospect of dying of thirst during the flight into Egypt, though to both the destiny of her Son had been divinely revealed, and the angel's command, to fly into Egypt, 'and be there until I shall tell thee,' must needs have been also an assurance: and the Child Jesus in the temple is shown with no apparent consciousness of being about His Father's business, and no knowledge of His mission or His Godhead.

I purposely appeal to the witness of the Gospel only, since non-Catholic writers cannot be expected to start from the same theological premisses as Catholics; and the book would not call for remonstrance but for another grievance. The writer says that the first legend was told her by her grandmother on a Christmas Day when 'all the folks had driven to church' and they had been left behind, 'because one of us was too old and

## **Blackfriars**

the other was too young. And we were sad, both of us, because we had not been taken to early Mass,' to a Catholic the conclusion of the sentence betrays the disguise, not 'to hear the singing and to see the Christmas candles' do even the oldest or the youngest of us go to Mass. But non-Catholics will believe the book written by a Catholic and will infer that the Church holds or allows views which in reality are wholly contrary to the truths she teaches.

Possibly the translator is to blame for the word Mass. If so it must be almost her only fault. Even in a borrowed tongue there is a magic fascination about the very simplicity of the style which sometimes rises to dramatic heights. Some of the legends are purely charming, and if, in a second edition, certain passages were cut out of *The Flight into Egypt* and *In the Temple* were omitted, or re-written without ascribing ignorance to the Word made Flesh, the book, as a whole, would no longer be unacceptable to the majority of Christians.

The illustrations, though unequal in merit, are original in composition and generally pleasing. The frontispiece is especially good.

M.B.

**PRAYER FOR ALL TIMES.** Translated by Maud Monahan from *La Prière de toutes les heures* by Pierre Charles, S.J., Professor of Theology in Louvain. Third series. (Sands and Co.; 5/- net.)

This third series of *Prayer for All Times* will be gratefully welcomed by the many who have rejoiced in the two first volumes. Père Charles writes with the rather rare combination of marked originality in thought and expression together with strong practical commonsense. He warns us in the prologue not to expect lyricism, but he often comes very near it, as in his description of children in the meditation *Beati pauperes*.

The force and swing of the original French has been wonderfully preserved, as might be expected from the name of the translator. She has usually found the right word with the instinct of a born writer, and this makes the occasional wrong one the more obvious. Also there are several grammatical slips which suggest hurried proof-reading.

It is a pity the words *Third Series* do not appear on the cover. The book is likely to be passed over by book buyers who already possess the first or second series and who will take this for the same book.

M.B.