

pleasing contribution which should bring us into a more personal and spiritual contact with those whom we venerate. The first book includes three short treatises written by St. John Fisher. The *Spiritual Consolation* and the *Ways to Perfect Religion* were written during his imprisonment for the benefit of his sister Elizabeth, a Dominican nun at Dartford in Kent. At the close is a sermon on the Passion, doubtless a reflection of those frequent meditations which infused into the author the spirit of fortitude which in the day of victory overcame the world.

The Four Last Things is an unfinished treatise written by St. Thomas More in the year 1522. It is almost startling that when at the height of his power he should have chosen to reflect on death, doom, pain and joy. But in the midst of the worldly affairs of Henry's court he was not unmindful of the great realities and throughout life he looked upon death "not as a stranger, but as a nigh neighbour. For as the flame is next the smoke, so is death next an incurable sickness, and such is all our life."

A kindly providence has conserved for us these treasured gleanings which are the key to the inner sanctuary of the souls of our English Saints.

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

AU FIL DE L'ANNEE LITURGIQUE. Méditations et prières. By Abbé Jacques Leclercq. (Bruxelles: Editions de la Cité Chrétienne; 20 Belgian frs.)

It would be an injustice to the Abbé Leclercq if we supposed that he had written this book from motives, even the purest, of spiritual propaganda. These meditations are of an intimate kind: thoughts jotted down at the whim of the moment, over a period of years, and given for publication only with the greatest reluctance. Yet on reading them we are not affected by that feeling of discomfort so often the result of the disclosure of something sacred. Vital spirituality and common sense run through all these thoughts, which themselves are expressed with simplicity and restraint.

The Abbé Leclercq's genius and detachment lend originality to all he writes. This same freshness in presenting his thoughts is all the more apparent in these meditations: "j'ai écrit selon l'attrait du jour, tantôt sur une fête et tantôt sur une autre, et il y a beaucoup de jours où je n'ai rien écrit du tout." Everyone gives of his best when he works under no restraint but at the dictate of his own inclination.

The reader may at first be a little disappointed by the Abbé's point of view. After speaking of the duty and the need of contemplation, he pictures the contemplative looking out on the world. "La terre vue du ciel, c'est comme le ciel ou de la terre pendant la nuit: étendue noir piquée de points qui brillent." Yet

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the Abbé's philosophy is optimistic; he does not deny the goodness and beauty of the Creation; he is speaking of the World and its refusal to accept God and serve Him. He reiterates in similar words the judgment of St. John on the men of his generation. Which only goes to show the formative value of this book.

BRENDAN MAGINTY, O.P.

THE VISION OF PIERS PLOWMAN. Newly rendered into modern English by Prof. H. W. Wells. (Sheed & Ward; 8/6.)

That title is a literary event. A reviewer is in happy case, knows a repayment for much, when the sum of his review should be, as mine is now, "Buy this book: read it: read it again. Behold an enduring masterpiece!" Here, most agreeably presented, the print is a pleasure to look on and the text a pleasure to read, is a masterpiece, made of the very stuff of Christendom and of England, of humanity then and now, first written in the common tongue in the London of the fourteenth century, now given in the common tongue of life and poetry to the England of the twentieth. No book could be more appropriate, more contemporary, more lasting. Prof. Wells has produced a complete version, worthy of the original from which he has transliterated into modern speech—a poetical translation which results in poetry is by no means common!—for which we all owe him a deep debt of gratitude. He has performed lovingly, faithfully, a work of love; and worthy of that love should be his reward. This is a book to rejoice in the handling of, to buy, to "take up and read." It is an effective, changing book, from which the reader will not escape unchanged.

It is a book to read anywhere and everywhere, for all things and the perpetual heart and case of man are its subject. If it is a portrayal of common life in the Middle Ages, it is also intimate to the stuff of our own time. It is shocking, consoling, tragic, humorous, satirical, compassionate, confused, luminous and unique. It is profoundly original and absolutely convinced of eternal things. It is as colloquial and modern as slang and as timeless as the liturgy. It is "all things to all men" and a question to everyman.

But what, you query, is it about? What is it? It is a poem, written in alliterative metre, that kindled, changeable speech which Paul Claudel has created for himself in French, written in the latter fourteenth century by one William, or more likely Robert Langland. It is about you and me and the other fellow, "nunc et in hora mortis nostrae," and the life God wants us to live and the shape of the world as we know it and have made it. No one, not even Mr. Coghill in his excellent but too tidy introduction, can give it a clear plan. It contains, it breeds every