

CONRAD: A REASSESSMENT. By Douglas Hewitt. (Bowes and Bowes; 10s. 6d.)

Conrad's appeal has been attributed to the fact that all the world loves a sailor and it is not only the circulating library assistant who offers us a Conrad novel because it is a 'nice sea story'. Mr Hewitt removes the romantic nautical humbug. Conrad did not write about the sea either because he had any sentimental attachment to it or because it was the limit of his experience. The sea provided him with a satisfactory means of detaching and isolating his characters so that we could study the 'poor, bare, forked animal'. For such reasons Conrad may be classed among the great novelists who are interested in man as such. Mr Hewitt does not worry this thesis to death—and no doubt it is as well—but he does make it perfectly clear that Conrad is not interested merely in behaviour, nor is he simply a chronicler or character painter. He writes the psychological novel in the best sense because he studies not the 'goings on' of a detached human psyche but what it is that makes the thing human. Mr Hewitt however is no wild hero-worshipper: he discusses fully the weaknesses of Conrad's later work. He also makes valuable suggestions about the way in which Conrad may truly be called a tragic writer.

G.M.

## NOTICES

A LIFE OF ONE'S OWN, by 'Joanna Field', had been unobtainable for too long, and it is good that it has now been reprinted as a two-shilling Pelican Book. It is the account of a bold and revealing, but unpretentious, 'voyage to the interior' by a sceptical, agnostic, scientifically-trained mind. Its discovery that 'only by being prepared to accept annihilation can one escape from that spiritual "abiding alone" which is in fact the truly death-like state' is hardly new to those acquainted with the annals of religion. Similarly, 'this discovery of the need for a male-female rhythm in my thought' is ancient wisdom, reformulated in our own day in many a psychological textbook. But 'Joanna Field' truly *discovers* these things afresh, and much else on the way, and shows how a fairly typical—but unusually honest, humble and courageous—modern mind can and did recover them again experimentally. A book to be recommended to those who are sceptical of the documents alike of religion and psychology, and one which has much to instruct and provoke more faithful adepts of both.

There is little in THE BEGINNING AND THE END, by Nicolas Berdyaev (Bles; 25s.), which is not to be found in his previous books, and there was little of importance in them that will not be found at least *en*

*passant* in this. Flashes of profound insight jostle with superficiality, arrogance and dogmatism. As usual, Berdyaev's powerful but one-tracked intuition overrides the requirements of considered judgment, and his contempt for 'objectification' provides an alibi from careful reflection and research. Those who can neither be spellbound by his overweening assurance, nor surrender their critical judgment to one who will assert and reassert but never reason with his reader, may get no further with this than with any of his previous books. Yet much that he has to say deserves more sympathetic consideration than he himself metes to others, and though not all his views on Christian eschatology can win our uncritical assent, they may well serve to introduce us to a subject too long altogether ignored.

THE NEW EVE. By J. H. Newman. (Newman Bookshop, Oxford; 3s.) is the first publishing venture of the Newman Bookshop, Oxford and deserves much success. It is a selection of Cardinal Newman's writings on our Lady; the compiler has resisted the temptation to make an anthology, and so himself to interpret Newman, but has instead taken a large portion of the 'Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey' and two of the 'Discourses to Mixed Congregations': thus he includes the synthesis of the teaching of the Fathers made by Newman himself, and his own further meditations on it: to this he has added an introduction and notes to assist those to whom Newman's circumstances and style are strange. The result is an excellent little book, useful both for the Catholic and for the prospective convert. It is to be followed by other volumes.

SWEET ROMAN HAND, Wilfrid Blunt's guide to 'five hundred years of Italic cursive script' (James Barrie; 15s.), will be an essential book for all who are interested in the current revival of gracious handwriting. Mr Blunt provides much evidence for his defence of the script of the Italian Renaissance as the best inspiration for handwriting today. An elegant book, it is adorned with plentiful illustrations, ranging from sixteenth-century models to admirable examples of present-day writing in schools.

THE LORD MY LIGHT (Burns Oates; 16s.), is a new edition of the conferences given to Catholic undergraduates at Oxford more than fifty years ago by Fr Joseph Rickaby, S.J. While they reflect (as they must) the temper of their time, these clear and authoritatively-argued expositions of such subjects as 'The Treatment of Heretics in the Middle Ages', 'Private Judgment' and 'A Religion without a Creed' are still valuable and reflect a vigorous tradition of which it is good to be reminded.

**SPIRITUAL TEACHING OF FATHER STEUART, S.J.** (Burns Oates; 16s.), is a collection of notes of retreats and conferences arranged by Katharine Kendall. Here Miss Kendall supplements her biography with ample evidence of Father Steuart's spiritual teaching. Notes of informal addresses are not always the best or fairest of records, but fortunately Fr Steuart's own books remain and these notes should find for them many new readers.

**THE BATTLE OF BALTINGLASS**, by Laurence Earl (Harrap; 12s. 6d.), is the expanded version of articles which originally appeared in an English weekly. Those articles were brilliant, crisp, objective; a foretaste of a book that is even more so. The story of the plucky stand of the people of a not very picturesque village in County Wicklow against the political jobbery that had deprived their village sub-postmistress of her legitimate expectations is well known. Mr Earl, in writing this documented account of what he nicely terms 'an adventure in democracy', has, unwittingly perhaps, provided Ireland with one of the best pieces of propaganda, official or unofficial, that the country has had for a long time.

**THE SOUTHERN MARCHES**, by H. J. Massingham (Hale; 21s.), is the first of a series of 'Regional Books' to supplement the excellent 'Country Books' already published by Robert Hale. The region between the Usk and Wye is one well-suited to Mr Massingham's sympathy and gift of topographical writing. He is immensely observant and brings to his task a vigour of conviction about much more than views. There emerges a strong and individually conceived portrait of a region that scorns generalities. The illustrations are less exciting than the text.